



Mount Olive Devotions by Pastor Glenn Monson

The Fifth Week after Epiphany (February 7 - 11, 2022)

Monday

I Kings 17:8-16

⁸ Then the word of the LORD came to [Elijah], saying, ⁹ “Go now to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and live there; for I have commanded a widow there to feed you.” ¹⁰ So he set out and went to Zarephath. When he came to the gate of the town, a widow was there gathering sticks; he called to her and said, “Bring me a little water in a vessel, so that I may drink.” ¹¹ As she was going to bring it, he called to her and said, “Bring me a morsel of bread in your hand.” ¹² But she said, “As the LORD your God lives, I have nothing baked, only a handful of meal in a jar, and a little oil in a jug; I am now gathering a couple of sticks, so that I may go home and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it, and die.” ¹³ Elijah said to her, “Do not be afraid; go and do as you have said; but first make me a little cake of it and bring it to me, and afterwards make something for yourself and your son. ¹⁴ For thus says the LORD the God of Israel: The jar of meal will not be emptied and the jug of oil will not fail until the day that the LORD sends rain on the earth.” ¹⁵ She went and did as Elijah said, so that she as well as he and her household ate for many days. ¹⁶ The jar of meal was not emptied, neither did the jug of oil fail, according to the word of the LORD that he spoke by Elijah.

St. Paul famously stated that, as followers of Christ, we “walk by faith, not by sight.” This story from First Kings is an excellent example of this. The widow of Zarephath has a choice to make: will she trust the promise of God that comes to her through the words of Elijah, or will she trust only what her own eyes can see and what she fears most? – that her next meal will be her last. This makes clear what is always true about ‘walking by sight’ – it is based on fear and a feeling of scarcity. We don’t give generously not because we are inherently stingy but because we are *afraid* that we might not have enough. We don’t reach out to a new person not because we are generally unfriendly, but because we are *afraid* we might be rejected or might be thought a fool. It turns out that, when we think about it, walking by faith is simply refusing to allow fear to control us. We choose, as the widow of Zarephath did, to trust God and follow God’s call, even when we are afraid. In that, not only are we blessed, but many others are as well.

Prayer

Grant us faith and courage to follow your call, O God. Forgive us when we fall back in fear. Forgive us when we lack the courage that will lead us to new life. Fill us with your Holy Spirit so that all our days might be lived in joy and hope. In Christ’s name. AMEN.

Tuesday

I Corinthians 2:1-9

When I came to you, brothers and sisters, I did not come proclaiming the mystery of God to you in lofty words or wisdom. ² For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified. ³ And I came to you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. ⁴ My speech and my proclamation were not with plausible words of wisdom, but with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power, ⁵ so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God. ⁶ Yet among the mature we do speak wisdom, though it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to perish. ⁷ But we speak God's wisdom, secret and hidden, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. ⁸ None of the rulers of this age understood this; for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. ⁹ But, as it is written, "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him" —

The Greek word for wisdom is *sophia*. You can easily see, in that word, the basis for the word 'sophistication'. In this first letter to the Corinthians, the Apostle Paul was arguing against those who believed that sophisticated thinking was the pathway to faith, and even more than that, the shortcut to God's favor. Factions had grown up in this early congregation, where some believed that only those with superior knowledge of divine things, and the ability to communicate with divine beings, were favored by God. Paul would have none of this. We who have studied much, and might even have seminary diplomas hanging on our walls, are prone to the thinking that Paul rejected. Indeed, any of us who delight in learning and discovering new things could be prone to this. While learning is to be celebrated and encouraged, we must be careful to remember that God's wisdom is greater than human wisdom, and faithfulness in God's eyes does not include an IQ test. As St. Paul says, "No one can even imagine 'what God has prepared for those who love him.'"

Prayer

Grant us humility of spirit, O God, as we go about our studies. Give us open ears to be taught by others, especially those whose ways of knowing are different than our own. Grant us faith that is based on trust in you and not on our own understanding. In all things give us peace. In your holy name, we pray. AMEN.

Wednesday

II Kings 5:1-5, 9-14

Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Aram, was a great man and in high favor with his master, because by him the LORD had given victory to Aram. The man, though a mighty warrior, suffered from leprosy. ² Now the Arameans on one of their raids had taken a young girl captive from the land of Israel, and she served Naaman's wife. ³ She said to her mistress, "If only my lord were with the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy." ⁴ So Naaman went in and told his lord just what the girl from the land of Israel had said. ⁵ And the king of Aram said, "Go then, and I will send along a letter to the king of Israel."

⁹ So Naaman came with his horses and chariots, and halted at the entrance of Elisha's house. ¹⁰ Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, "Go, wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored and you shall be clean." ¹¹ But Naaman became angry and went away, saying, "I thought that for me he would surely come out, and stand and call on the name of the LORD his God, and would wave his hand over the spot, and cure the leprosy! ¹² Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them, and be clean?" He turned and went away in a rage. ¹³ But his servants approached and said to him, "Father, if the prophet had commanded you to do something difficult, would you not have done it? How much more, when all he said to you was, 'Wash, and be clean?'" ¹⁴ So he went down and immersed himself seven times in the Jordan, according to the word of the man of God; his flesh was restored like the flesh of a young boy, and he was clean.

This ancient tale of Naaman, the Syrian general, and Elisha the prophet, illustrates a tendency we all have to believe that God's ways are always difficult, if not heroic. Perhaps, in a manner like Naaman, we might think, "Missionaries who travel to distant lands are what God requires; my pot of stew for the neighbor doesn't amount to much." Or "Pastors who spend years studying the Bible are certainly more blessed in God's eyes than those of us who humbly come to Bible study, week after week." In thinking these things we miss the point that Jesus came to teach us: common folks, doing common acts of compassion, using common means are what the kingdom of God consists in. Yes, there are those who are called to difficult journeys or difficult settings, but even *they* must learn to minister through common means. Holy Communion and Baptism both teach us this as they, through common stuff, bring blessing to many.

Prayer

Thank you for using common folks like us, Lord, to do uncommon things. Thank you for promising that even when we give a cup of cool water to a small child, that act will not be without its reward. Grant us faith each day to see you at work in our world. In Jesus' name. AMEN.

Thursday

Luke 19:41-44

As [Jesus] came near and saw the city [of Jerusalem], he wept over it, ⁴² saying, “If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. ⁴³ Indeed, the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up ramparts around you and surround you, and hem you in on every side. ⁴⁴ They will crush you to the ground, you and your children within you, and they will not leave within you one stone upon another; because you did not recognize the time of your visitation from God.”

In this passage, Jesus is coming toward Jerusalem, approaching the path down from the Mount of Olives, mounted on a donkey, listening as the crowds surrounding him call out, “Hosanna. Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!” As he gets nearer and nearer to the city he does something unexpected: he begins to weep. That is not usually something you do when you are being lauded as the next king of Israel. But Jesus knows how quickly these cries of Hosanna will turn to “Crucify him.” He knows that their desire for a king comes only from the hunger in their bellies, and their desire to humble their oppressors; they do not want a king such as he is, who will call them to follow him to the Cross. We too are apt to want Jesus only on our terms. We want what he can provide us, not what he calls us to. We might well ask ourselves how *we* are able to recognize “the things that make for peace”? How are *we* to be sure to recognize “the time of *our* visitation from God”?

Prayer

We are prone, Lord Jesus, to fail to see you as you are: suffering servant, crucified and condemned, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. We would rather see you as glorious king, triumphant ruler, Lord of all. Give us clarity to see you as you are, dear Lord. Help us to recognize you as Savior, and give us faith to follow you, even to the Cross. In your precious name, we pray. AMEN.

Friday

Psalm 138:1-6

¹ I give you thanks, O LORD, with my whole heart; before the gods I sing your praise;

² I bow down toward your holy temple and give thanks to your name for your steadfast love and your faithfulness; for you have exalted your name and your word above everything.

³ On the day I called, you answered me, you increased my strength of soul.

⁴ All the kings of the earth shall praise you, O LORD, for they have heard the words of your mouth.

⁵ They shall sing of the ways of the LORD, for great is the glory of the LORD.

⁶ For though the LORD is high, he regards the lowly; but the haughty he perceives from far away.

This 6th verse from Psalm 138 is one I memorized years ago. It is a verse that contains both a warning and a promise. The promise is that God pays attention to those the world often does not even notice. If you have ever walked along a busy sidewalk in a large city like Chicago or New York, you know that it is not uncommon to come upon someone begging. They are usually ill-clad, dirty, and disheveled. They are also usually invisible to those who walk past them. It is as if they don't exist. But for God, they do. God sees them, for God regards the lowly. God has a different view of the 'high and mighty'. God *perceives* them, says the psalmist. That is to say, God knows that they are there, but they are seen as far away, distant, located in a far country. As such they are not close to God, but have only a fleeting relationship with the Most High. Those then, who view themselves as people of consequence, are, paradoxically, of little consequence in God's eyes. What a reversal this is! This reminds of Jesus' words in the Beatitudes: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth."

Prayer

Help us to see those you see, O God. Help us to notice those you notice. Help us to have a heart for those for whom your heart bleeds, O God. And give us a measured view of the world's values. Lead us in the way of life each and every day. In the Name of Jesus, Lover of the lowly. AMEN.