



Mount Olive Devotion

The Fifth Week in Lent (March 30 – April 3, 2020)

Monday

Isaiah 43:1-3a

But now thus says the LORD,

he who created you, O Jacob,

he who formed you, O Israel:

Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;

I have called you by name, you are mine.

² When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;

and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you;

when you walk through fire you shall not be burned,

and the flame shall not consume you.

³ For I am the LORD your God,

the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.

If we think about the great stories of God's people in the Old Testament we see many examples of difficult days. Just in the book of Exodus we hear of the days of slavery in Egypt (Ch. 1), the harrowing rescue at the Red Sea (Ch. 14), and the long days of hunger and thirst in the wilderness (Ch. 15-17). In the passage above, we hear a word spoken to the people of God who are in exile – another difficult time. The thing that has sustained the people of God has always been the promise that we are *God's* people. Yes, we may be a people living in uncertain times, but we are certain we belong to God, and God will not forget us. "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you," says our God. "The rivers shall not overwhelm you." This is God's way of saying, "Though the days might be exhausting, like trudging through a flooding river, and the nights might be scary, like walking through a forest set ablaze, yet I am with you, for I am the Lord your God, the Holy One, your Savior."

Prayer

Thank you, loving God, that you are with us wherever we go. Thank you that we are yours, and come what may, that will not change. Thank you for calling us by name in our baptism, and reminding of that this day. Grant us faith and courage in these days, and let us be bearers of hope and courage to others. In Christ's name, we pray. AMEN.

Tuesday

Lamentations 3:55-58

- ⁵⁵ I called on your name, O LORD,
from the depths of the pit;
- ⁵⁶ you heard my plea, "Do not close your ear
to my cry for help, but give me relief!"
- ⁵⁷ You came near when I called on you;
you said, "Do not fear!"
- ⁵⁸ You have taken up my cause, O Lord,
you have redeemed my life.

In this brief passage we have a complete lament and song of praise in just four verses. First we hear the speaker's situation – this one is calling from "the depths of the pit." This is the writer's way of saying, "Lord, I am in a very dark place, and I don't know how much longer I can hold on." Next we hear the writer's prayer, "Give me relief!" How many times each day might this be *our* prayer these days? Once a day? Twice? Three times? Every hour or more? Then in verse three is the report of God's reply. God comes near, that is to say, there is some sign of God's presence, followed by a voice that says, "Do not fear!" This is a constant message in the Bible; to Mary when she is told of the conception of Jesus within her; to Joseph who is told that the child in Mary's womb is of God; to the shepherds in the field who came to Bethlehem to see the baby Jesus at his birth. "Do not be afraid. Do not fear!" It is God's constant message to us. Finally, in the last verse the writer testifies to God's faithfulness: "You have redeemed my life. You have rescued me from my despair." All this God says to us these days. God does not close an ear to our cries.

Prayer

Ever-present God, we praise you for your constant love and faithfulness. We thank you that you hear our cries and come near when we call. Give each of us, and all your people around the globe a sign of your presence today, and help us to hear the voice that says, "Do not fear". We ask this through Christ our Lord. AMEN.

Wednesday

Matthew 6:25-34

²⁵ “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? ²⁶ Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? ²⁷ And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? ²⁸ And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, ²⁹ yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. ³⁰ But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? ³¹ Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear?’ ³² For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. ³³ But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. ³⁴ “So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today’s trouble is enough for today.

This last line is the clincher: “Today’s trouble is enough for today.” What worry does it pile yesterday’s regrets, and tomorrow’s fears onto a full plate of today’s troubles. Jesus says, “Your plate is already full enough; don’t even think about dishing up more.” When I was a kid and I would attend one of the many potluck dinners at church or at family reunions I would regularly take more than I could eat as I went through the serving line. You know how it is – everything looks so good, so you take some of everything and before long you have way more than you can ever eat. It’s like that with worry. Somehow we just have a hard time not dishing up a bit of this worry and that anxiety onto our plates as we go through the day. Jesus says, “You can only eat so much. Only take what you can handle right now.” Let today’s trouble be enough for today.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, forgive us for piling all the world’s worries onto our own plate. Give us the ability to trust you for tomorrow, and believe that we are forgiven for whatever didn’t go so well yesterday. Grant us the faith to let today’s troubles be enough for the day. In your name, we pray. AMEN.

Thursday

John 10:11-18

¹¹ “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ¹² The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away—and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. ¹³ The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep. ¹⁴ I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, ¹⁵ just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. ¹⁶ I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. ¹⁷ For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. ¹⁸ No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father.”

Jesus is being modest; he is more than a good shepherd. Jesus is a shepherd who goes far beyond the call of being a shepherd. Think of it: a shepherd makes sure the flock has good pasture, plenty of water, protection from predators, and a sheepfold to snuggle up in each night. I doubt that the average shepherd job description said, “Willing to lay down your life for the sheep.” And yet, Jesus assures us over and over again that he has done this for us. Furthermore, he says that God the Father has commanded him to do this. God apparently knew that this was coming. Perhaps God could see the extent to which God’s love would have to be made known. All we can do is stand in awe of this love and let this love radiate through our lives to others.

Prayer

God of Infinite Love, how can we ever thank you enough for sending your Son into this difficult and dangerous world. Thank you for sending us a good shepherd who promises not only to provide for our every need, but who will even lay down his life for us. Help us to live each day in gratefulness for this love, and in some measure to extend this to others. In your strong name, we pray. AMEN.

Friday

John 14:1-3

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. ²In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? ³And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also.

There are many old jokes about the dwelling places of the Most High. The old King James Bible called these dwelling places mansions, and so many of the jokes have to do with mansions. One such joke has to do with a taxi driver and a preacher who arrive at heaven on the same day and so together are shown to their heavenly mansions by St. Peter. When the preacher realizes that his eternal dwelling is considerably smaller than the one just given to the taxi driver, he asks why. St. Peter says, “Well, it’s like this: when he drove, people prayed, and when you preached, people slept.” I love that joke. The fact is, we don’t know what God has in store for us in eternity, but the promise from Jesus is clear: “Where I am, there you will be also.” That’s enough. We will be with Jesus. Jesus is the embodiment of God’s love and we will be with him. And that’s no joke.

Prayer

God of Eternity, we cannot even fathom your eternal love for us. We cannot really even conceive of eternity. Whatever that means, we trust that with you we shall always be. Give us peace and faith in this promise as we live through these days. In Jesus’ name, we pray. AMEN.