



Mount Olive Devotion

First Week of Pentecost (June 1 – June 5, 2020)

Monday

Psalm 37:1-7a

- ¹ Do not fret because of the wicked;
do not be envious of wrongdoers,
² for they will soon fade like the grass,
and wither like the green herb.
³ Trust in the LORD, and do good;
so you will live in the land, and enjoy security.
⁴ Take delight in the LORD,
and he will give you the desires of your heart.
⁵ Commit your way to the LORD;
trust in him, and he will act.
⁶ He will make your vindication shine like the light,
and the justice of your cause like the noonday.
⁷ Be still before the LORD, and wait patiently for him;

Sometimes it seems like foolish people or worse, people with evil intent, are the ones who control all things. We pray for justice, we pray that wisdom and compassion will prevail, we pray that God would frustrate the plans of the wicked, and yet it seems that our prayers go unheard. The psalmist would counsel us to remain steadfast in our resolve: “Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him, and he will act.” Notice that the psalmist doesn’t advise passivity, but rather committing our way to the Lord while we continue to trust that God will act. As a person once said, “We pray like everything depends on God while we work like everything depends on us.” This is true now more than ever as we see the COVID-19 pandemic affecting impoverished and underserved communities far more than affluent communities. As people of God, we are each given “a manifestation of the Spirit for the common good,” and right now the common good could be understood as joining in the call that all people receive the care and compassion they deserve. As the psalmist said, “Trust in the Lord, and do good.”

Prayer

God of justice, how we long for your justice and wisdom to come to this world. We pray for those to whom justice has been denied: the poor, the disenfranchised, and those minority communities long-neglected. Forgive our complicity in their impoverishment. Grant us courage to rise up and do good even while we wait for your kingdom to come. In Jesus’ name. AMEN.

Tuesday

Psalm 104:24-30

- ²⁴ O LORD, how manifold are your works!
In wisdom you have made them all;
the earth is full of your creatures.
- ²⁵ Yonder is the sea, great and wide,
creeping things innumerable are there,
living things both small and great.
- ²⁶ There go the ships,
and Leviathan that you formed to sport in it.
- ²⁷ These all look to you
to give them their food in due season;
- ²⁸ when you give to them, they gather it up;
when you open your hand, they are filled with good things.
- ²⁹ When you hide your face, they are dismayed;
when you take away their breath, they die
and return to their dust.
- ³⁰ When you send forth your spirit, they are created;
and you renew the face of the ground.

In this psalm the writer lays out all the ways the Creator is active in creation from causing grass to grow to enabling whales to play in the oceans. “How manifold are your works,” says the psalmist, “I see your work in everything you have made.” We can be encouraged by these words as we await a vaccine for the corona virus. God is yet creating the world. Through the skilled minds and hands of scientists around the world, God is at work creating a vaccine. We look to God for good things. It is God’s good pleasure to provide these good things to the good creation which God has made. God will not hide God’s face from us.

Prayer

Creating God, we praise you for your wisdom and creativity. There is nothing that you have made that is not marvelous. From the smallest blade of grass to the grandest mountain, the whole creation speaks of your glory. Give us faith to trust in your ongoing creative work as we await a vaccine to the corona virus. Grant success to scientists across the world who work to bring relief and health to millions. We are yours. Hear our prayer. In your strong name we pray. AMEN.

Wednesday

Isaiah 41:8-10

⁸ But you, Israel, my servant,
 Jacob, whom I have chosen,
 the offspring of Abraham, my friend;
⁹ you whom I took from the ends of the earth,
 and called from its farthest corners,
saying to you, “You are my servant,
 I have chosen you and not cast you off”;
¹⁰ do not fear, for I am with you,
 do not be afraid, for I am your God;
I will strengthen you, I will help you,
 I will uphold you with my victorious right hand.

These promises came to God’s people centuries ago while Israel was in exile. They wondered if God had abandoned them, and so the prophet assured them that God had not. Notice the words God uses for God’s people: “chosen, offspring of Abraham, my friend.” Those are not terms that God would use to describe someone God would abandon. The last line of the passage is particularly strong. First, God promises to strengthen us whenever we are weakening in faith. This certainly comes to all of us at one time or another, especially during our pandemic exile. Second, if strengthening is not enough, God promises to help us directly. It’s like God saying, “I will make you stronger, but I will also come alongside you and help you.” God knows that sometimes we need a helper. And finally God says, if all fails, I will hold you up myself. Again it is God going the final leg with us. If strengthening isn’t enough, and if God’s help isn’t enough, finally God will just hold us up completely. What a generous and compassionate God we have!

Prayer

Gracious God, we thank you that there is nothing you will not do to give courage and strength to your people. You give us faith, and if that falters, you come alongside and encourage us. And if even the courage you give falters, you promise to hold us up completely. Thank you for being so generous. Fill us with the power of your Holy Spirit, so that we might be given the faith and strength to do all you ask. In Christ’s name, we pray. AMEN.

Thursday

Matthew 13:3-9

³ And Jesus told them many things in parables, saying: "Listen! A sower went out to sow. ⁴ And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up. ⁵ Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil. ⁶ But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away. ⁷ Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. ⁸ Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. ⁹ Let anyone with ears listen!"

Have you ever noticed how many dandelions there are this time of year? They are everywhere. Go on a walk in any neighborhood or along any walking path and you are likely to see a lot of dandelions. It is as though the Creator just took a giant handful of dandelion seeds and strewed them across the whole wide earth. It is that kind of abundance that Jesus speaks about in this parable. God strews the Word of the gospel across the cosmos. It grows everywhere, popping up in the least likely places. While it is true that much of the seed never bears fruit, that is apparently of no concern to God. God just keeps throwing the seed around and delighting in the places where it does grow. Perhaps as we take our walks these days we should notice the dandelions that grow so abundantly and remind us of God's delight in strewing the Gospel of grace to all people. Who knows where it will root and bear fruit and yield thirty, or sixty, or even a hundredfold.

Prayer

Thank you, Creating God, for your marvelous abundance to all creation. Your rain falls on the just and the unjust. Your seeds of mercy blow across the winds of time and faith grows even where it seems unlikely. Your wisdom is inscrutable and your timing beyond understanding. Give us faith in your mercy and grant us grace to extend that mercy to others. In your name, we pray. AMEN.

Friday

I Thessalonians 4:9-12

⁹ Now concerning love of the brothers and sisters, you do not need to have anyone write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another; ¹⁰ and indeed you do love all the brothers and sisters throughout Macedonia. But we urge you, beloved, to do so more and more, ¹¹ to aspire to live quietly, to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we directed you, ¹² so that you may behave properly toward outsiders and be dependent on no one.

There is an old tune coming out of the Civil Rights era of the 1960's whose refrain says, "They will know we are Christians by our love, by our love. They will know that we are Christians by our love." This is exactly what the apostle Paul was saying when he wrote to his beloved church in Thessalonica. To "behave properly" meant much more than to simply keep your lawn cut and your garbage picked up; it meant to live out the love Christ showed us on the Cross. Jesus told his disciples, "By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." In these days of pandemic exile we are often weary of quarantine, weary of not being able to get out, weary of everything that has been required of us these days. It is understandable that we get grumpy and short with our neighbors, and even our friends and family. Perhaps there is no better time to ask God for a generous portion of the Spirit, so that God's love might flow through us, even on those days when we are weary.

Prayer

Loving God, who never grows weary of our complaining, be near us. Forgive us when we are short-tempered, irritable, and unforgiving. Remind us that your Spirit has been given us, and with that Spirit come its fruits: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, and all the rest. Fill us with your love, O God. Fill us with your Spirit, so that the whole world might know that we are your disciples. In Jesus' name we pray. AMEN.