



## Mount Olive Devotion

Tenth Week of Pentecost (August 3-7, 2020)

### Monday

Genesis 3:3-13

<sup>8</sup>They heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. <sup>9</sup>But the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, “Where are you?” <sup>10</sup>He said, “I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself”. <sup>11</sup>He said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?” <sup>12</sup>The man said, “The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit from the tree, and I ate.” <sup>13</sup>Then the LORD God said to the woman, “What is this that you have done?” The woman said, “The serpent tricked me, and I ate.”

This ancient story is perhaps one of the oldest pass-the-buck stories in existence. The characters in the story are none other than Adam, Eve, and Satan. If you know the story you know that God gave to Adam and Eve everything they needed for an abundant life – a glorious garden in which to live, nourishing food and drink, and a beautiful, trusting relationship with their Creator. God asked of them but one thing: that they should not eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil that was in the midst of the Garden. When the trickster came and called into question the motives of the Most High in declaring the special tree off-limits, they fell for this ploy, hook-line-and-sinker. As a result their relationship with God changed remarkably. They were no longer comfortable in God’s presence, but sought to hide themselves. This story reminds us of the folly of trying to hide our sins from God or declare ourselves guiltless. There is no point. God knows us better than we ourselves. God knows even the intentions of our hearts. God’s promise is sure: “When we confess our sins, God is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (I John 1:9)

### Prayer

Thank you for your abundant forgiveness, Gracious Lord. Thank you that we do not have to hide from you in our sinfulness. You know us through and through. Help us always to come clean before you, taking responsibility for our errant ways, trusting that your forgiveness is sure and you will continue to walk with us in newness of life. In your holy name we pray. AMEN.

## **Tuesday**

Psalm 61:1-5

<sup>1</sup> Hear my cry, O God; listen to my prayer. <sup>2</sup> From the end of the earth I call to you, when my heart is faint. Lead me to the rock that is higher than I; <sup>3</sup> for you are my refuge, a strong tower against the enemy. <sup>4</sup> Let me abide in your tent forever, find refuge under the shelter of your wings. <sup>5</sup> For you, O God, have heard my vows; you have given me the heritage of those who fear your name.

This psalm comes from a person pursued by enemies. We get the picture of a person who is barely outrunning his or her enemies, whose strength is nearly spent. “Lead me to a rock that is higher than I,” this one cries. In other words, “I need to get to higher ground, to a place where I can see my enemies coming, where I can be safe when they arrive.” Then the psalmist declares a faith that comes from previous experience with the Lord of Hosts. “You are my refuge, a strong tower against the enemy.” This writer has known God’s protection before and now recalls it. We are sometimes like this psalmist – in need of higher ground. We need a place of safety from our enemies. Our enemies can be internal or external. They can be physical or spiritual. We need firm ground on which to stand. In all times we are assured that God is our strong tower, our refuge, a shelter in times of trouble. What a gracious God we have!

## **Prayer**

From days of old you have been our Refuge, our strong Tower, O Lord of Hosts. When we are besieged by enemies protect us. When temptations assail us, strengthen us. When we are in despair and our hope is failing, lift us up. Remind us always that you are our strength and our song, a very present help in trouble. In your Name, we pray. AMEN.

## **Wednesday**

Deuteronomy 6:1-5

Now this is the commandment—the statutes and the ordinances—that the LORD your God charged me to teach you to observe in the land that you are about to cross into and occupy, <sup>2</sup> so that you and your children and your children’s children may fear the LORD your God all the days of your life, and keep all his decrees and his commandments that I am commanding you, so that your days may be long. <sup>3</sup> Hear therefore, O Israel, and observe them diligently, so that it may go well with you, and so that you may multiply greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, as the LORD, the God of your ancestors, has promised you.

<sup>4</sup> Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone. <sup>5</sup> You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.

These words come from the mouth of Joshua, Israel's leader after the death of Moses. Joshua was the one chosen to lead the people out of the wilderness into the new land that God had prepared for them. You can hear that their well-being depended on them being faithful to God. "Keep all the Lord's decrees," says Joshua, "So that your days may be long." "Hear... and observe them diligently, so that it may go well with you." This is always the way it is with God. God gives us laws and decrees so that our life might be long and blessed. God gives us boundaries to protect us. God gives us guidelines so that communities and nations might live in harmony and peace. Sometimes we are misled to believe that laws, decrees, and ordinances are only given to spoil our fun, or rob us of our rights. Even today, during a global pandemic, there continue to be voices that insist that guidelines regarding masks, physical distancing, and restrictions on business are inappropriate. This argument fails to see that a communal response to the pandemic is the only one that is truly effective. Piecemeal adoption of these policies simply insures their ineffectiveness. Long ago, God shared with Israel this same principle.

### **Prayer**

Forgive us, God, when we forget that we are part of a community, and not simply individuals with no responsibility for the well-being of others. Remind us that we are all truly the keepers of one another. Grant us joy in caring for one another. Strengthen our nation in our resolve to keep all people safe. We pray this in Christ's name. AMEN.

### **Thursday**

Proverbs 3:27-35

<sup>27</sup> Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due when it is in your power to do it.

<sup>28</sup> Do not say to your neighbor, "Go, and come again, tomorrow I will give it" —when you have it with you. <sup>29</sup> Do not plan harm against your neighbor who lives trustingly beside you.

<sup>30</sup> Do not quarrel with anyone without cause, when no harm has been done to you.

<sup>31</sup> Do not envy the violent and do not choose any of their ways; <sup>32</sup> for the perverse are an abomination to the LORD, but the upright are in his confidence. <sup>33</sup> The LORD's curse is on the house of the wicked, but he blesses the abode of the righteous. <sup>34</sup> Toward the scorners he is scornful, but to the humble he shows favor. <sup>35</sup> The wise will inherit honor, but stubborn fools, disgrace.

The Book of Proverbs is filled with wonderful words of wisdom. These words in the third chapter come from a section entitled, "The True Security." It's interesting that true security, according to these verses, is found in seeking good for our neighbor. This is borne out today through many examples. A neighborhood becomes a place of safety and security for all when each household, old and young, longtime residents or not, seek the well-being of one another and protect one another. When neighbors share recipes, bring sympathy cards, borrow and return needed items, relationships grow and are sustained. Conversely when neighbors quarrel or are suspicious of

one another; when people take no care of neighbors who are frail or elderly; when it's just everyone for themselves, then relationships sour and the entire neighborhood is at risk. During this pandemic time, when people are home more than ever, and perhaps isolated, it behooves everyone to seek to be that good neighbor that we all want to be. Bake a loaf of zucchini bread and bring it over to your neighbor. Pick a few tomatoes and share them with the person who has no garden. Offer to run an errand for an ailing neighbor. It will make all the difference.

### Prayer

Good neighbors are a treasure, O God. We know this. We know also that we are called to be good neighbors. Forgive us when we fail in this regard. Remind us how much we need others and how much we are needed by them. You have made us for community, Lord. Grant that we might be a blessing to others, near and far. In your name, we pray. AMEN.

### Friday

Romans 12:1-2

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. <sup>2</sup> Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.

The most important word in the opening line of this passage is the word 'therefore'. This word refers to all that the Apostle Paul has written previously. It means "in view of the fact that". What did Paul share earlier in this letter? He shared that God's grace was sufficient to cover all of our sins, and that there is nothing that can ever separate us from God's love, to mention but two things. So now, says Paul, in view of the fact that your sins are forgiven and God's love for you is secure, do this: "Present your bodies as a living sacrifice." That means to make yourself completely available to God for God's own purposes. Needless to say, this is no easy task. As someone once joked, "The trouble with living sacrifices is, they keep crawling off the altar!" Yes, we know we are called to be available for God's purposes, but we have so many other plans of our own that seem so much more fun and profitable and easy. But God reminds us that the will of God is good, acceptable, and perfect. That means that when we do make ourselves available to God, good things will result. Indeed blessings will come to us that we could not even have imagined, and blessings will come to others as well.

### Prayer

Thank you for your great gifts to us in Christ, dear God. Thank you for the abundance of your grace. Help us to respond in faith and boldness to your call to be living sacrifices. Help us to trust that your will is good and will lead to life. Quiet our fears and lead us in your way. We pray all this in Jesus' name. AMEN.