



## Mount Olive Devotion

The 13th Week of Pentecost (August 24-28, 2020)

### Monday

Psalm 113

- <sup>1</sup> Praise the LORD! Praise, O servants of the LORD; praise the name of the LORD.  
<sup>2</sup> Blessed be the name of the LORD from this time on and forevermore.  
<sup>3</sup> From the rising of the sun to its setting the name of the LORD is to be praised.  
<sup>4</sup> The LORD is high above all nations, and his glory above the heavens.  
<sup>5</sup> Who is like the LORD our God, who is seated on high,  
<sup>6</sup> who looks far down on the heavens and the earth?  
<sup>7</sup> He raises the poor from the dust, and lifts the needy from the ash heap,  
<sup>8</sup> to make them sit with princes, with the princes of his people.  
<sup>9</sup> He gives the barren woman a home, making her the joyous mother of children.  
Praise the LORD!

This psalm is sometimes entitled “God the Helper of the Needy.” The first two thirds of the psalm are praise and wonder at God’s work, but then, notice what it is that the psalmist is praising God for. The psalmist is giving praise to God for raising up the poor from their place begging alongside the road, and giving them a place with the nobility. In other words, what God is being praised for is God’s overturning of traditions and conditions and systems that cause one person to sit in the dust and another to lounge in luxury. God is saying, “Enough of this! *All* are invited to experience God’s abundance. *All* are invited to sit at the banquet table and enjoy God’s presence. *All* are called Children of the Most High.” Ever since that fateful Memorial Day when George Floyd was killed in south Minneapolis at the hands of then-police officer, Derek Chauvin, the world has been calling for an end to systems that count some as worthy of honor and others worthy only of dishonor. The fact is, God has been calling for an end to such systems since civilizations came into being and began practicing them. The disparity between rich and poor that is so evident in our world has never been God’s will. It is well past time we catch up with God in this regard.

### Prayer

Forgive us, Lord, for ignoring the cries of the poor. Forgive us for allowing systems to continue that grant immense power to some and powerlessness to others. Grant us wisdom and courage to confront these systems now, so that all may live. In Jesus’ name we pray. AMEN.

## **Tuesday**

Hosea 11:1-4

When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son.

<sup>2</sup> The more I called them, the more they went from me; they kept sacrificing to the Baals, and offering incense to idols.

<sup>3</sup> Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk, I took them up in my arms; but they did not know that I healed them.

<sup>4</sup> I led them with cords of human kindness, with bands of love. I was to them like those who lift infants to their cheeks. I bent down to them and fed them.

In this short passage God sounds like the parent of a teenager. Perhaps if you have parented a teenager or are presently doing so, you can relate. God says, "I taught you to walk. I took you up in my arms. I kissed your cuts and bruises. I taught you with love and kindness. All this I did, and what have you done? The more I have called out to you, the more you run from me." This has been God's experience with us from the dawn of time. When we read the Hebrew Scriptures we see this played out again and again by the people of Israel. And when Jesus calls his disciples, they too fall into this pattern, as do the people in the Apostle Paul's first churches. And we continue this pattern today. We experience God's love over and over again, and yet somehow, we continue to think we know better than God, and we are continually insisting on going our own way. Indeed it is as St. John says, "We are in bondage to sin and cannot free ourselves."

## **Prayer**

Ever gracious and forgiving God, we are sorry for our willful disobedience. Like Adam and Eve in the Garden, and every person who has lived, we continue to insist that we know better than you. Open our eyes, Lord. Break our bondage. Give us hearts that grieve at our sins, and lead us in the way of life everlasting. We pray all this in the name of our Savior, Jesus the Christ. AMEN.

## **Wednesday**

Proverbs 3;13-18

<sup>13</sup> Happy are those who find wisdom, and those who get understanding,

<sup>14</sup> for her income is better than silver, and her revenue better than gold.

<sup>15</sup> She is more precious than jewels, and nothing you desire can compare with her.

<sup>16</sup> Long life is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honor.

<sup>17</sup> Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.

<sup>18</sup> She is a tree of life to those who lay hold of her; those who hold her fast are called happy.

The Hebrew Scriptures always portrayed Wisdom as a woman. She was the One who called out to all the people, imploring them to follow her advice rather than the advice of fools. The book of Proverbs is filled with her sayings, and here in the third chapter of Proverbs we hear her make the case for following in her ways. First, she says that wisdom is even better than silver, gold, or jewels. “More precious” than all these things is wisdom, she declares. Long life is also a reward of wisdom, as well as “ways of pleasantness” and “paths of peace,” she says. In summary, wisdom is “the tree of life.” Where do we get such wisdom? we might ask. We get it from all the sources that God makes available to us. In Lutheran tradition, we get wisdom from three sources: reason, tradition, and Scripture. Each of these sources is an important contributor to our search for wisdom. As we confront the issues of our present age, whether it be climate change, racism, pandemic, economic inequality, or any other issue, we need wisdom. We need to call upon all of God’s gifts to discern the best way forward. It is our job to listen very closely.

### **Prayer**

Grant us wisdom, Creator of all. Grant us courage. Help us, especially as we elect leaders in the coming election, to choose well, to choose leaders who exhibit a willingness to listen, to discern, and to gain wisdom. Bless our world with leaders in all nations, so that all may enjoy the fruits of the tree of life. We ask this in your most precious Name. AMEN.

### **Thursday**

John 6:35-40

<sup>35</sup> Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. <sup>36</sup> But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe. <sup>37</sup> Everything that the Father gives me will come to me, and anyone who comes to me I will never drive away; <sup>38</sup> for I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me. <sup>39</sup> And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. <sup>40</sup> This is indeed the will of my Father, that all who see the Son and believe in him may have eternal life; and I will raise them up on the last day.”

Jesus’ statement that he is the bread of life is one of the richest statements in all of scriptures. Luther taught us that our daily bread includes *everything* we need from day to day. This helps us understand that Jesus is saying that he is the source of everything we need to live. He is the source of our physical life. As One who was in the Beginning with God the Creator, Jesus is the source of everything that exists. Jesus is also the source of our spiritual life. We can have all things in abundance and yet be desperately hungry if we do not have the gifts of the Spirit that Jesus offers. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control

– these are the gifts of the Spirit, says St. Paul. Jesus is also the source of our identity as the Body of Christ, and so is the source of our life together. Without Jesus drawing us into a spiritual community, we are impoverished indeed, hungry for companionship that feeds us. Jesus is the One who gives us all things for life.

### **Prayer**

We praise you, Loving Lord, for your never-ending abundance. We praise you that your generosity extends to your whole creation. Grant us thankful hearts as we enjoy the gifts of your creation, your Spirit, and your people. And help us to be generous givers of all these gifts to others. In your holy name we pray, AMEN.

### **Friday**

Philippians 4:8-9

<sup>8</sup> Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. <sup>9</sup> Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.

Whenever we read these words of the Apostle Paul to the Christians in Philippi, it is good to remember that Paul wrote these words *while in prison*. That's right; he says right in this letter (1:7, 14) that he is in prison, and yet scholars agree that this is Paul's most joyful letter. The advice Paul gives here is particularly apt for us as we continue to live in this pandemic time. He urges us to spend our time thinking about things that are true, honorable, just, pure, pleasing, commendable, excellent and worthy of praise. The obvious alternative to this is things that are false, dishonorable, unjust, impure, displeasing, uncommendable, flawed and worthy of disdain. This is not to say that we shouldn't notice what is wrong in our world. Quite the contrary. But rather than staying there, wallowing in all that is wrong, we are called to look to things that give us hope, and to spend the bulk of our time there. The result of this kind of focus will be a peace that God will give, says St. Paul. And again, the result of spending all our time thinking only about those things that are wrong in the world, will be anxiety and despair. God's peace, that is what we are promised, if we concentrate on joy. We have Paul's word from prison to remind us that this is so.

### **Prayer**

Thank you, Lord of All, for leading us in the way of joy. You know how easy it is for us to spend all our time in worry and lonely despair. Pull us out of this, Lord. Give us the strength to turn our hearts and minds to those things that give us hope. Grant us eyes to see what is true, honorable, just, pure, pleasing, commendable, and excellent. And let us sing your praises as we do so. In your glorious name we pray. AMEN.