



## Mount Olive Devotion

The 16th Week of Pentecost (September 14-18, 2020)

### Monday

Psalm 15

<sup>1</sup> O LORD, who may abide in your tent? Who may dwell on your holy hill?

<sup>2</sup> Those who walk blamelessly, and do what is right, and speak the truth from their heart;

<sup>3</sup> who do not slander with their tongue, and do no evil to their friends, nor take up a reproach against their neighbors; <sup>4</sup> in whose eyes the wicked are despised, but who honor those who fear the LORD; who stand by their oath even to their hurt; <sup>5</sup> who do not lend money at interest, and do not take a bribe against the innocent. Those who do these things shall never be moved.

These days, it seems, integrity is rare. At least that seems to be the case with those who make the news. We hear regularly of government officials who are involved in financial schemes and corruption of all sorts. We hear of small town public servants who have been caught with their hands “in the cookie jar.” We hear of bishops-elect who are forced to resign because of hidden misconduct. And on and on it goes. The psalmist reminds us of some basic tests of integrity: to do what is right, to speak truth, to refrain from slander or doing evil or taunting one’s fellow citizens, to reject the schemes of the wicked and honor those who fear God, to stand by one’s word even when it is not in our own interest, and to refuse to take advantage of the financially vulnerable. This is a list that anyone would be proud to claim as one’s own. Finally the psalmist reminds us of the reward of such a life: “Those who do these things shall never be moved.” To not be moved, means we shall not slip or fall or be overtaken by calamity. This does not mean that all who walk in integrity will live a life of ease. What it does mean is that self-inflicted calamity will not come upon us. It is good to remember that though God is gracious, there are still consequences for one’s actions. In short, integrity pays.

### Prayer

Gracious God, forgive us for our failure to live lives of integrity. We know that there have been times when we have not done what is right, have not spoken truth, have slandered our neighbors, and failed to stand up to wickedness. Forgive us, gracious God. Grant us strength and courage in these days to live lives of integrity, never forgetting that as we do, we shall be blessed and strengthened. In your holy name, we pray. AMEN.

## Tuesday

### Psalm 23

The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want; <sup>2</sup> he makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters <sup>3</sup> he restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. <sup>4</sup> Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil; for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me. <sup>5</sup> Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of my enemies; thou anointest my head with oil, my cup overflows. <sup>6</sup> Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.

It is probably no exaggeration to say that Psalm 23 is the most beloved psalm in all of scripture. Many know it by heart. One writer has called it the "Psalm of 10 Joys," because it lays out ten blessings that God promises in this psalm. Perhaps you want to count them. In this pandemic time which of these blessings is most meaningful to you? That fact that God promises to restore your soul when it is weary might be a favorite. Perhaps the promise that God is leading you in right paths during this election season with all of the important decisions each of us need to make is most important to you right now. Maybe with this virus still at-large, sickening many people, the promise that God walks with you through the valley of the shadow of death is the most important. Or maybe you take comfort in the fact that God's goodness and mercy are everlasting even if our goodness and mercy seem some days to be in short supply. If you have a favorite blessing, why not share that with someone else today, by giving them a call or writing them a note and sharing with them which of the 10 Joys are most important to you. It might bring someone else the joy they are lacking.

### Prayer

God of All Life, how we praise you for your abundant mercy and grace. You fill our cup to overflowing. You anoint our head oil. You honor us again and again with your presence. How can we ever thank you? Grant us the faith to live in the light of your promises, to take joy in all that you give, and to share our joy generously with others. In Jesus' name we pray. AMEN.

## **Wednesday**

Psalm 71:1-3, 17-18

<sup>1</sup>In you, O LORD, I take refuge; let me never be put to shame. <sup>2</sup>In your righteousness deliver me and rescue me; incline your ear to me and save me. <sup>3</sup>Be to me a rock of refuge, a strong fortress, to save me, for you are my rock and my fortress. O God, from my youth you have taught me, and I still proclaim your wondrous deeds. <sup>18</sup>So even to old age and gray hairs, O God, do not forsake me, until I proclaim your might to all the generations to come.

This psalm is sometimes called “A Prayer for Lifelong Protection and Help.” It’s hard to know what stage of life the writer is in, but since it sounds as if youth is in the past, and old age is yet to come, we can surmise that the writer was middle-aged. The whole psalm is worthy of reading because in it are prayers for protection from enemies and help when one is accused wrongly, as well as praises to God for God’s faithfulness even in a time calamity. Twice in the psalm the writer asks that God not forsake us when our strength is gone, when old age has come upon us. It seems curious for someone to be afraid that God would abandon a person when they are old, but perhaps that is not an unheard of temptation. Perhaps when we see our bodies losing their capacity, when we feel our memories slipping, and when we realize that, as someone has quipped, “Our get-up-and-go done got up and went,” we might wonder if God still stands with us. The portion of this psalm quiets our fears: “In you, O Lord, I take refuge (vs.1)... for you are my rock and my fortress.” (vs. 3).

## **Prayer**

You are indeed our Rock and our Fortress, Almighty God. You are the One who holds us fast. You are the One whose faithfulness is everlasting, whose presence is assured from our first day until our last and even beyond. You, O God, are the One who has known us before our birth and has promised to keep us even in death. Deliver us from fear, O God. Deliver us and give us joy. In your blessed name we pray. AMEN.

## Thursday

Psalm 92:12-15

<sup>2</sup>The righteous flourish like the palm tree, and grow like a cedar in Lebanon.

<sup>13</sup>They are planted in the house of the LORD; they flourish in the courts of our God.

<sup>14</sup>In old age they still produce fruit; they are always green and full of sap,

<sup>15</sup>showing that the LORD is upright; he is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him.

During this time of the year in the Upper Midwest we think of apple picking season. Perhaps you are one of those who has had the pleasure of going out on a hayrack into an orchard at one of those pick-your-own apple orchards. What is always hard is deciding when to quit picking. There are often so many apples, so many varieties, and all are so delicious that one finds it hard to decide what to pick and what not to pick. And then, of course, we also must decide what we will *do* with all these apples we take home. Make pie? Make sauce? Make crisps? Have them fresh, cooked, on a salad? The options are limitless. The psalmist was apparently looking at an orchard when this psalm was written. It wasn't an apple orchard, of course, but rather a grove of palms. He said that the righteous – those blessed by God – are like trees that are still green and full of sap even in old age. They continue to bear fruit. They continue to bless those who gather to enjoy their fruit. This is often something we see in the Church. People who are really on in years continue to be a blessing to many. Their faith, their cheerfulness, their general demeanor is such that even though they can't do what they used to do in terms of activity, they still "bear much fruit." How blessed we are to have them amongst us.

## Prayer

Gracious God, bless those senior saints amongst us. Bless them with strength, faith, and joy. Bless them with healthy relationships, with fruitful tasks, and with the joy of your presence. Assure them that because you are the giver of all life, as long as they live and have breath, they are bearing fruit and are a blessing to many. In the Name of Christ, we pray. AMEN.

## Friday

Psalm 119:1-8

- <sup>1</sup> Happy are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the LORD.
- <sup>2</sup> Happy are those who keep his decrees, who seek him with their whole heart,
- <sup>3</sup> who also do no wrong, but walk in his ways.
- <sup>4</sup> You have commanded your precepts to be kept diligently.
- <sup>5</sup> O that my ways may be steadfast in keeping your statutes!
- <sup>6</sup> Then I shall not be put to shame, having my eyes fixed on all your commandments.
- <sup>7</sup> I will praise you with an upright heart, when I learn your righteous ordinances.
- <sup>8</sup> I will observe your statutes; do not utterly forsake me.

At the beginning of Psalm 119 we hear these words, “Happy are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the Lord.” The law of the Lord is then given different names as we continue through the psalm: “his decrees, his ways, your precepts, your statutes, your commandments, your righteous ordinances.” It turns out that these verses are only a taste of the feast to come, for the entire of Psalm 119 is in praise of God’s law, all 176 verses of it! How did the psalmist come up with that number? It’s simply the result of writing 8 verses in praise of God’s law for every letter of the Hebrew alphabet, which has 22 letters. It’s a little like writing a prayer in praise of Jesus for every one of the ABC’s. Now there’s an idea! The first principle still stands. Blessed are those who walk in the Lord’s ways. Blessed are you whenever you study, learn, meditate on, and live out the words and ways of Jesus. Happy are you whenever you follow the ways of life and grace, and whenever you share them with others.

## Prayer

God of All Wisdom, we praise you for your Word of truth. We praise you for the wisdom come down to us through the ages. We praise you especially for the Word made Flesh in Christ. Let us always follow in this way, that we too may know the joy promised to all God’s people. In Christ’s name, we pray. AMEN.