



Mount Olive Devotion

First Week of Pentecost (June 8 – June 12, 2020)

Monday

Psalm 32:1-5

- ¹ Happy are those whose transgression is forgiven,
whose sin is covered.
- ² Happy are those to whom the LORD imputes no iniquity,
and in whose spirit there is no deceit.
- ³ While I kept silence, my body wasted away
through my groaning all day long.
- ⁴ For day and night your hand was heavy upon me;
my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer.
- ⁵ Then I acknowledged my sin to you,
and I did not hide my iniquity;
I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD,"
and you forgave the guilt of my sin.

No truer words have been written than those written in the first verse of Psalm 32. In other translations the word "happy" is translated as "blessed", and indeed we are blessed whenever we experience forgiveness. The hard thing about receiving forgiveness is that it cannot be demanded from another. If we have wronged someone it is their right to hang onto that injustice for as long as they see fit. We can apologize, and we need to, but it is not the place of the guilty to say, "I have said I'm sorry; now you must forgive me." No, forgiveness is a gift from the one who has been wronged. These days we are all facing a systemic sin which needs forgiveness; this is the sin of racism. In America we have come face-to-face with this in the killing of an innocent black man at the hands of police. If this was an isolated, rare incident it would be horrible enough on its own. The fact that it is part of an ongoing pattern is beyond horrible. Those of us who have sat by and let this system be perpetuated need to apologize, and then we need to be silent and let those who we have wronged impart forgiveness in their own time.

Prayer

Forgive us, merciful God for failing to confront racism in ourselves and in the society around us. Forgive us for standing by as people of color are victimized again and again. Forgive us for doing nothing when we could have done something. Grant us courage to address our sin and seek forgiveness, and grant us the faith to believe that in your time healing and reconciliation can come to our land. In your strong name we pray. AMEN.

Tuesday

Psalm 51:10-17

- ¹⁰ Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me.
- ¹¹ Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your holy spirit from me.
- ¹² Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and sustain in me a willing spirit.
- ¹³ Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you.
- ¹⁴ Deliver me from bloodshed, O God, O God of my salvation,
and my tongue will sing aloud of your deliverance.
- ¹⁵ O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise.
- ¹⁶ For you have no delight in sacrifice;
if I were to give a burnt offering, you would not be pleased.
- ¹⁷ The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit;
a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

This psalm is often associated with King David's grave sin in the murder of Uriah (II Sam. 11-12). In that story the king is confronted with his sin by the prophet Nathan, and he grieves greatly for what he has done. This psalm is thought to have been a song of David's outpoured soul as he sought God's forgiveness. This psalm is sometimes sung in worship as a preparation for communion. It is a prayer of contrition, remembering that in the Holy Communion forgiveness of sin is offered. What is not often remembered is that once the sinner has been forgiven, the one who has been forgiven promises to "teach transgressors" God's ways. We need to remember this. When we have been given the gift of forgiveness, our obligation going forward is to also point others toward the way of life. We who have received forgiveness, then, become those who tell others of the deliverance we have experienced, thus encouraging them to seek forgiveness as well.

Prayer

Create in us clean hearts, O God. Do not cast us aside, but restore us, we pray. When we hurt others through our actions or inactions, forgive us. When we hurt others through our speech or our failure to speak, forgive us. When we harbor resentment or bitterness against those who have wronged us, forgive us, Lord. Restore to us, your Joy, O God, for we are your children. AMEN.

Wednesday

Psalm 130

¹ Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD.

² Lord, hear my voice!

Let your ears be attentive

to the voice of my supplications!

³ If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities,
Lord, who could stand?

⁴ But there is forgiveness with you,
so that you may be revered.

⁵ I wait for the LORD, my soul waits,
and in his word I hope;

⁶ my soul waits for the Lord
more than those who watch for the morning,
more than those who watch for the morning.

⁷ O Israel, hope in the LORD!

For with the LORD there is steadfast love,
and with him is great power to redeem.

⁸ It is he who will redeem Israel
from all its iniquities.

This psalm is part of a collection called “Songs of Ascents.” These psalms were sung by the people of Israel as they ascended toward Jerusalem in pilgrimage to the temple. In this psalm we hear the speaker cry out to God, asking to be heard. The speaker asserts faith in the Lord’s faithfulness to not “mark iniquities” (i.e. remember sins) and to provide the forgiveness that is needed. Finally the speaker turns to the people (in vs. 7) and says, “O Israel, hope in the Lord!” “It is he who will redeem Israel from all its iniquities.” We too can be such a voice. We can remind one another to simply wait for the Lord’s redemption to come, “for with the Lord there is steadfast love, and with him is great power to redeem.”

Prayer

We often falter in faith, dear Lord. We often fail to simply wait and trust in your promised redemption. Thank you for your steadfast love, O God. Thank you for your power to redeem. We trust that your redemption will come. We trust that you are the God of our salvation. For you we wait all the day long. AMEN.

Thursday

Luke 5:18-24

¹⁸ Just then some men came, carrying a paralyzed man on a bed. They were trying to bring him in and lay him before Jesus; ¹⁹ but finding no way to bring him in because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and let him down with his bed through the tiles into the middle of the crowd in front of Jesus. ²⁰ When he saw their faith, he said, “Friend, your sins are forgiven you.” ²¹ Then the scribes and the Pharisees began to question, “Who is this who is speaking blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?” ²² When Jesus perceived their questionings, he answered them, “Why do you raise such questions in your hearts? ²³ Which is easier, to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven you,’ or to say, ‘Stand up and walk’? ²⁴ But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins”—he said to the one who was paralyzed—“I say to you, stand up and take your bed and go to your home.”

This dramatic encounter between Jesus and the scribes and Pharisees reminds us of the miraculous nature of forgiveness. We often think of forgiveness as a simple act of saying, “I’m sorry,” or “Forgive me,” and then the person wronged quickly makes amends. While it is true that forgiveness can come that easily and painlessly, that is not always the case. Sometimes, when deep wrongs have been committed, forgiveness is nothing short of miraculous. Think of the story of the Amish community that forgave a man who murdered one of their own. Think of people who enter prisons and forgive those who have murdered or raped their loved ones. Think of any time when you have been forgiven something very serious, and you will know what a miracle forgiveness is. While it is unlikely that any of us will join Jesus in saying to a paralyzed man, “Stand up and walk,” we can all join Jesus in offering the miracle of forgiveness to one another.

Prayer

Thank you for the miracle of forgiveness, Gracious Lord. Thank you for coming to us in the person of Jesus and showing us what forgiveness looks like. Help us to be attentive to the wrongs we have committed, and also to be attentive to the opportunities you give us to forgive others. Lead us, by your Spirit, we pray. In Jesus’ name. AMEN.

Friday

I John 1:5-2:2

⁵This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him there is no darkness at all. ⁶If we say that we have fellowship with him while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true; ⁷but if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. ⁸If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ⁹If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

2 My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; ²and he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

Some of the words in this passage will be very familiar to Lutherans. Lutheran worship often begins with corporate confession and forgiveness, and these words are often heard: “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” These words speak to the heart of our problem: we want so badly to believe that while we aren’t perfect, the sins we have committed are certainly no big deal. This notion begs the question, “If our sins are no big deal, why did Christ have to die for them?” No, the necessity for Christ to be the “atoning sacrifice for our sins,” assures us that our sins are a big deal. They separate us from God and one another, and cause havoc with God’s creation and the blessed community God calls us to be. Thanks be to God that we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.

Prayer

Grant us clear vision, O God, to see how our sins affect us and all those around us. Give us courage to confront those things that only lead us away from the life of abundance you want for us. You are faithful. You are just. We know you will cleanse us from all unrighteousness whenever we confess our sins to you. Grant us your truth and grace. We pray this in the strong name of Jesus Christ our Lord. AMEN.