



Mount Olive Devotion

The 20th Week of Pentecost (October 12-16, 2020)

Monday

Psalm 44:20-26

²⁰ If we had forgotten the name of our God, or spread out our hands to a strange god, ²¹ would not God discover this? For he knows the secrets of the heart. ²² Because of you we are being killed all day long, and accounted as sheep for the slaughter. ²³ Rouse yourself! Why do you sleep, O Lord? Awake, do not cast us off forever! ²⁴ Why do you hide your face? Why do you forget our affliction and oppression? ²⁵ For we sink down to the dust; our bodies cling to the ground. ²⁶ Rise up, come to our help. Redeem us for the sake of your steadfast love.

Psalm 44 is a psalm of national lament. These final verses have within them the national prayer, that God would once again do what God had done so many times before – rescue them from their affliction and oppression. The Hebrew people remembered every year at Passover how God delivered them from the Egyptians at the Red Sea, and they remembered at Purim, how God had rescued them once again through the wisdom and courage of Queen Esther. They were well-versed in God’s ability to save. So here they are, once again, pleading with God for help, calling upon God’s steadfast love. We too can call upon God’s steadfast love during these trying times in our nation’s history. The life, death and resurrection of Christ – *that* story – reminds us of God’s steadfast love for us. “Call upon me, and I will answer,” says our God. “Cast all your worries upon me, for I care about you,” says our God. “Come to me all you who are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest,” says our Lord. So let us do this. Let us look to the Lord, whose steadfast love endures forever.

Prayer

Gracious and Saving God, look with mercy upon us. Do not abandon us in our time of need. Our nation is in turmoil and in need of leaders with wisdom and courage. Grant that they might emerge. Give all your people resolve to speak truth in love, serve with humility, and grant grace to all. We pray this through Christ our Lord. AMEN.

Tuesday

Psalm 80:7-15

⁷ Restore us, O God of hosts; let your face shine, that we may be saved. ⁸ You brought a vine out of Egypt; you drove out the nations and planted it. ⁹ You cleared the ground for it; it took deep root and filled the land. ¹⁰ The mountains were covered with its shade, the mighty cedars with its branches; ¹¹ it sent out its branches to the sea, and its shoots to the River. ¹² Why then have you broken down its walls, so that all who pass along the way pluck its fruit? ¹³ The boar from the forest ravages it, and all that move in the field feed on it. ¹⁴ Turn again, O God of hosts; look down from heaven, and see; have regard for this vine, ¹⁵ the stock that your right hand planted.

In this psalm of national prayer, the psalmist compares the nation of Israel to a vine, and God to a vinedresser. This vine came out of Egypt, which is a reference to Israel's rescue from Egypt at the Red Sea. This vine was then planted in a land where there had been other people, referring to Israel's entrance into the Promised Land. The next verses speak of the blossoming of this vine and how it grew, referring to Israel's days of prosperity. But now, the psalmist says, the vine has been neglected by the vinedresser and a boar from the forest ravages it, possibly referring to the Assyrian army which had invaded Israel. So the plea goes out to God, "Turn again, O God of hosts... have regard for this vine, the stock that your right hand planted." This psalm could be the story of our nation, which God has blessed abundantly. We too have been planted in this abundant land which was not our own, and have grown to be a powerful nation. We now are experiencing a time of testing, when it seems that there are boars in the vineyard, creating confusion and destruction. We too pray, as did the Hebrew people, "Turn again, O God of Hosts; look down from heaven, and see; have regard for this vine, the stock that your right hand planted."

Prayer

We come before you, God of Steadfast Love, asking for your mercy. We are in need of your help in these days of turmoil in our land. We are in need of wisdom and courage. Grant that people of faith might come together to heal our nation. Bless us with your presence and with the assurance of your steadfast love. We ask this through Christ our Lord. AMEN.

Wednesday

Psalm 85:8-13

⁸ Let me hear what God the LORD will speak, for he will speak peace to his people, to his faithful, to those who turn to him in their hearts. ⁹ Surely his salvation is at hand for those who fear him, that his glory may dwell in our land. ¹⁰ Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet; righteousness and peace will kiss each other. ¹¹ Faithfulness will spring up from the ground, and righteousness will look down from the sky. ¹² The LORD will give what is good, and our land will yield its increase. ¹³ Righteousness will go before him, and will make a path for his steps.

Psalm 85 is another of the communal psalms, written for the nation. In this psalm we have a picture of hope. "Surely his salvation is at hand for those who fear him," says the psalmist. The day of deliverance is dawning. God's favor is returning. All of this is felt by the psalmist and is pictured as though the attributes of God are creatures who are meeting one another, or springing from the ground, or looking down from the sky. We too know that God is good. We trust that what we need God will provide. We believe that God's promises to God's people are sure and to be trusted. We remember the words of the prophet Isaiah: "Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior." (Isa 43:1-3).

Prayer

Ever Loving and Faithful God, we thank and praise you this day for your faithfulness to your people. Down through the ages you have come to our aid. When your people cried out from the bonds of slavery in Egypt, you answered. When they suffered at the hands of corrupt kings and leaders, you came to their aid. Whenever your people have called out to you, you have answered. Be with us now, we pray. Grant us your blessing that we may rise and praise you all the day long. We ask this in your Holy Name. AMEN.

Thursday

John 16:25-33

²⁵ “I have said these things to you in figures of speech. The hour is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figures, but will tell you plainly of the Father. ²⁶ On that day you will ask in my name. I do not say to you that I will ask the Father on your behalf; ²⁷ for the Father himself loves you, because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God. ²⁸ I came from the Father and have come into the world; again, I am leaving the world and am going to the Father.”

²⁹ His disciples said, “Yes, now you are speaking plainly, not in any figure of speech! ³⁰ Now we know that you know all things, and do not need to have anyone question you; by this we believe that you came from God.” ³¹ Jesus answered them, “Do you now believe? ³² The hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you will be scattered, each one to his home, and you will leave me alone. Yet I am not alone because the Father is with me. ³³ I have said this to you, so that in me you may have peace. In the world you face persecution. But take courage; I have conquered the world!”

This passage is part of the Farewell Discourse in John’s gospel, where Jesus speaks to his disciples before he faces the Cross. Jesus assures his disciples that God loves them, and he also assures them that even though *they* will abandon him, God the Father will be with him. Finally he assures them that when they face persecution, they can take courage, because Christ has conquered the world. This is an important promise for us as well. “The world” in John’s gospel, is the collective identity of the forces that oppose God. Jesus says he has conquered them, that is to say, they no longer have any authority or power. These powers may claim to be in charge, but they are not. Indeed, in other places, St. John tells us that Jesus has had victory over them, “making a public example of them,” by humiliating them on the Cross and in the Empty Tomb. Since even death no longer has the last word, we can be assured that anything we face in this life has no power over us. *Jesus* has the final word.

Prayer

Thank you, Lord of Hosts, that you have conquered the world. Thank you that the powers that threaten us are not a threat to you. Thank you that we can call upon you in any situation to come to our aid, and give us strength in our time of need. Be near us these days, Lord. Be near us and give us faith, hope, and strength. In your precious name, we pray. AMEN.

Friday

Revelation 7:13-17

¹³ Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, "Who are these, robed in white, and where have they come from?" ¹⁴ I said to him, "Sir, you are the one that knows." Then he said to me, "These are they who have come out of the great ordeal; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." ¹⁵ For this reason they are before the throne of God, and worship him day and night within his temple, and the one who is seated on the throne will shelter them.

¹⁶ They will hunger no more, and thirst no more; the sun will not strike them, nor any scorching heat; ¹⁷ for the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

This scene from St. John's revelation is one of the most glorious in all of Scripture. In this vision, the writer sees "a great multitude that no one could count" from every tribe and nation, all standing before the throne of Christ. This great multitude is singing God's praises, and while they are doing this, the visionary asks this elder, "Who are these, robed in white, and where have they come from?" The answer is, "These are they who have come out of the great ordeal" and have made their robes white by washing them in the blood of Christ. And then the elder tells the visionary what will become of this praising multitude: no hunger, no thirst, no scorching heat. Instead, he says, Christ will shepherd them and lead them to springs of water, and God, yes *God*, will wipe away every tear from their eyes. What a glorious picture this is! People who have suffered, who have experienced 'the great ordeal' all standing before the throne of Christ, praising God and receiving God's abundant blessing! This is a scene that we are invited to ponder. It is a picture of the future for God's people. It is a scene worth celebrating.

Prayer

We praise you, Gracious God, as did the people in St. John's vision. We praise you for your abundant power, grace, and love. We praise you that your power is beyond anything we can imagine, and you not only reign, but you care for us, even to wiping the tears from our eyes. How can we ever thank you? May it be that our whole lives are lived in praise of you. In the Name of Christ, we pray. AMEN.