



Mount Olive Devotion

The 21st Week of Pentecost (October 19-23, 2020)

Monday

Genesis 41:38-45

³⁸ Pharaoh said to his servants, “Can we find anyone else like this—one in whom is the spirit of God?” ³⁹ So Pharaoh said to Joseph, “Since God has shown you all this, there is no one so discerning and wise as you. ⁴⁰ You shall be over my house, and all my people shall order themselves as you command; only with regard to the throne will I be greater than you.” ⁴¹ And Pharaoh said to Joseph, “See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt.” ⁴⁴ Moreover Pharaoh said to Joseph, “I am Pharaoh, and without your consent no one shall lift up hand or foot in all the land of Egypt.” ⁴⁵ Pharaoh gave Joseph the name Zaphenath-paneah; and he gave him Asenath daughter of Potiphera, priest of On, as his wife. Thus Joseph gained authority over the land of Egypt.

A trivia game about Biblical names would certainly have a stumper if you asked, “Who is Zaphenath-paneah in the Bible?” According to the above story, that was the honorary Egyptian name given to Joseph (of many-colored cloak fame) by the Pharaoh. This account follows immediately after Joseph has interpreted Pharaoh’s dream concerning seven years of plenty and seven years of drought. Joseph has counseled Pharaoh to appoint an overseer to store up one fifth of the harvest each year during the seven plenteous years so that the people might not starve during the seven years of drought which would follow them. Most interesting is that Pharaoh identifies Joseph as having the spirit of God. Pharaoh says that God must have shown Joseph the meaning of the dream, for he recognized that there was “no one so discerning and wise” as Joseph. In reading this story one cannot help but think of the discernment that will be required of us as we approach the November election. Can we discern who it is that possess God’s spirit? Can we sort through all the advertisements and noise and discern who it is who is truly discerning and wise? Jesus tells us there is a way. He says, “By their fruits you will know them.” This means that we can discern what a person values and how they think by observing the results of their life. Do they care for the vulnerable and those in need? Do they cause turmoil or bring peace? Do they bring blessing to all or only to those who benefit them? These are questions which can guide us.

Prayer

Thank you, Almighty God, for discerning and wise leaders. Thank you for your Spirit that inspires them. Help us, as your people, to discern who it is that will lead with justice and compassion, and give us the courage to support them. In your name we pray. AMEN.

Tuesday

Isaiah 11:1-5

A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots.

²The spirit of the LORD shall rest on him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.

³His delight shall be in the fear of the LORD. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide by what his ears hear; ⁴but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked. ⁵Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist, and faithfulness the belt around his loins.

This passage in Isaiah's prophecy traditionally has been read in Christian worship during Advent, as we look to the birth of the Christ Child. We understand that this "shoot" refers to Jesus. Another place this passage is heard is in the service of Holy Baptism. Following the administering of the water, we pray, "Sustain [this person] with the gift of your Holy Spirit: the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord, the spirit of joy in your presence, both now and forever. Amen." What a wonderful prayer to pray for a child as life is just beginning. We might also pray this prayer for ourselves, especially as we prepare to vote in the November election. Wisdom, understanding, good counsel, strength, knowledge, a healthy sense of God's power, and a spirit of joy, will all be needed as we discern whom to vote for in the days ahead. We can also pray that our friends and neighbors would be blessed with this spirit. And certainly we need to pray that our elected leaders would receive this spirit. With tumult all around us, God's spirit is needed now more than ever.

Prayer

All-Wise and Loving God, we pray for wisdom. We pray for clear understanding, and for voices which give good counsel. We pray also that those who are elected will be persons of wisdom and humility. Grant them a healthy regard for your work in the world, and a willingness to listen to your voice and act for the good of all. In Christ's name, we pray. AMEN.

Wednesday

John 1:1-9

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being ⁴ in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. ⁶ There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷ He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. ⁸ He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. ⁹ The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

There is perhaps nothing so familiar and yet so mysterious as light. When we wake in the middle of the night, we are thankful for a night light that might comfort us or show us the way in the darkness. When we drive along a rural highway, it is only the headlights shining into the darkness that make it possible for us to go forward without incident. When we search for something in a dark closet, or need to find something in a dark attic or storage area, it could be a single bulb hanging from the ceiling that makes our search fruitful. Without light at our disposal, we would be lost. God also gives us light in the form of understanding and discernment. When we wonder if we are going the right direction, God says, "Look toward the light, toward Jesus, the One who is the light, and you will know which way to go." When we are on a journey and we are afraid that we might not arrive safely at our destination, again God says, "Look toward the True Light, Jesus, and you will be kept from harm." When we must enter a time of deep darkness, pain, or grief, again God says, "Do not be afraid. Look to the Light. Look to Jesus, the One who enlightens all."

Prayer

We praise you, Gracious God, for sending us the True Light, even Jesus Christ our Lord. We are so in need of enlightening. We are so in need of clear thinking. Grant us these things. Grant that we might have wisdom to see the Light and faith to follow. In Jesus' name we pray. AMEN.

Thursday

Romans 8:12-17

¹² So then, brothers and sisters, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh—
¹³ for if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. ¹⁴ For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. ¹⁵ For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, “Abba! Father!” ¹⁶ it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷ and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

It must be a glorious thing to receive the gift of adoption. Orphanages aren't known to be places of great joy, but what joy must erupt the day a child is told that someone has adopted them. And that joy must be doubled if siblings are adopted together. This is the scenario St. Paul suggests in his letter to the Romans. We receive a word from the Holy Spirit which bears witness with our spirit that *we are children of God*. By grace, we have become members of God's family. As such we are no longer outside the grace of God, but are now full members of the family, even heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ. It is no wonder that Paul can say that with this announcement we no longer live in fear, for what does one have to fear if one is declared a member of God's household? We are secure. We are provided for. We are loved with a love that shall never go away. What boldness this love gives us.

Prayer

God of Abundant Grace, how can we thank you for the miracle of our adoption? You have chosen us in great mystery, not because we deserve it, but out of your great love for all you have made. You have given us all things and promised us that you shall stand with us forever. Grant us hearts overflowing with gratitude, filled with your Holy Spirit, willing to share all that you have given. In Christ's name we pray. AMEN.

Friday

II Thessalonians 2:13-17

¹³ But we must always give thanks to God for you, brothers and sisters beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the first fruit for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and through belief in the truth. ¹⁴ For this purpose he called you through our proclamation of the good news, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. ¹⁵ So then, brothers and sisters, stand firm and hold fast to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by our letter.

¹⁶ Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and through grace gave us eternal comfort and good hope, ¹⁷ comfort your hearts and strengthen them in every good work and word.

In this second letter to the Christians in Thessalonica, Paul tells the people to “hold fast to the traditions that you were taught...” Earlier in this letter he warns them about “a lawless one” who exalts himself above every so-called god and object of worship, and even declares himself to be God. Paul confidently declares that this one will be destroyed by Christ, but he also warns the people about “a powerful delusion” that can come upon them, “leading them to believe what is false.” (2:11) In our day, especially through the tools of social media and cable television, we too live in a time when powerful delusions are a menace to society. Persons whose only goal is to acquire power and wealth for themselves can people into believing that they somehow are a leader that can be trusted. Even people of faith are susceptible to such falsehoods. St. Paul would advise us to “hold fast to the traditions” we have been taught: to continue to trust the voice of Christ who leads us to do acts of compassion and mercy; to listen to the voices of those we know are producing the fruits of righteousness; to follow leaders who live righteously and walk humbly with God.

Prayer

We are in need of your Truth, Righteous One. We are in need of your Wisdom. Grant us help when we are confronted with delusions. Give us courage to say no to voices that lead us away from you. Bless your people with your presence. In the strong name of Christ our Lord, we pray. AMEN.