



## Mount Olive Devotion

The 22nd Week after Pentecost (October 26-30, 2020)

### Monday

Ephesians 5:15-20

<sup>15</sup> Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, <sup>16</sup> making the most of the time, because the days are evil. <sup>17</sup> So do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. <sup>18</sup> Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit, <sup>19</sup> as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts, <sup>20</sup> giving thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The fifth chapter of Ephesians is filled with warnings. Clearly the writer, St. Paul or one of his associates, was convinced that “the days [were] evil.” The first command is to be careful. The phrase literally means to “pay close attention” to how we live. Needless to say, this is always good advice. The next command is to avoid being foolish. Again, the word literally means to avoid being mindless. Once again, this is always good advice. Finally, the writer exhorts us to be filled with the Spirit and not wine, spending our time singing praises to God rather than drinking songs. In this COVID time before the election, these words sound like good advice for us. Paying close attention to our thoughts, words, and actions has never been more important. The need to be mindful and not mindless is also essential. Our democracy depends on every citizen making good choices, being mindful of the common good, and acting accordingly. Finally, while it may be tempting at times to open a bottle of wine and let the effects of that soothing drink numb us to the troubles of the world, this writer would have us instead fill our souls with the Spirit. Perhaps a glass of wine *and* a song or prayer in praise of God is just what is needed.

### Prayer

God of all Wisdom, give us courage these days. Give us courage to face our problems with resolve and good will, seeking to further the common good. Help us to pay close attention to how we live, how we speak, and how we think. Fill us with your Spirit, that all that we do might be pleasing to you and a blessing to others. In Jesus’ name, we pray. AMEN.

## **Tuesday**

Psalm 19:7-11

<sup>7</sup> The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the decrees of the LORD are sure, making wise the simple; <sup>8</sup> the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is clear, enlightening the eyes; <sup>9</sup> the fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever; the ordinances of the LORD are true and righteous altogether. <sup>10</sup> More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey, and drippings of the honeycomb. <sup>11</sup> Moreover by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.

This well-known passage from Psalm 19 is a marvel in its construction. You can see that the wisdom of God is named in six different ways: law, decrees, precepts, commandments, fear (i.e. pious way), and ordinances. There are six synonyms for the wisdom of God, one for each letter of the Hebrew name for God, Yahweh. One can easily imagine young synagogue students memorizing this psalm as a way of putting to memory the importance of God's word. This psalm reminds us also of the benefits of meditating on God's word. God's word revives our flagging souls, makes us wise, gives us joy, enlightens our thinking, and shows us what is pure and enduring, what is true and righteous. These are great rewards. As the psalmist says in the last line, there is great reward in keeping God's ordinances. Which of the benefits of God's word is most important to you these days? Does your soul need reviving? Are you in need of wisdom? Is it hard to be joyful these days? Do you need help discerning what is true, righteous, and enduring? All of these things are promised to you in God's word.

## **Prayer**

Thank you, Loving Creator of all, for providing your Word to your children. Our souls are often in need of reviving, and wisdom is always in short supply. Give us a keen desire to spend time in your Word that we might be built up into your wise, joyful and faithful people. We pray this in your holy name. AMEN.

## Wednesday

Psalm 62:5-10

<sup>5</sup> For God alone my soul waits in silence, for my hope is from him. <sup>6</sup> He alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall not be shaken. <sup>7</sup> On God rests my deliverance and my honor; my mighty rock, my refuge is in God. <sup>8</sup> Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your heart before him; God is a refuge for us. <sup>9</sup> Those of low estate are but a breath, those of high estate are a delusion; in the balances they go up; they are together lighter than a breath. <sup>10</sup> Put no confidence in extortion, and set no vain hopes on robbery; if riches increase, do not set your heart on them.

The psalmist here declares the steadfast nature of God and declares that this God is a fortress and refuge. In the 9<sup>th</sup> verse there are hints that both the rich and the poor are tempted to look elsewhere for a firm place to stand. “Those of low estate” (i.e. the poor) might be tempted to look to robbery for refuge. “Those of high estate” (i.e. the rich) might use their power to extort others. The psalmist says that both notions are foolish. “They are together lighter than a breath,” the writer says. If one put all these persons on a scale, they would weigh less than a breath. God alone is worthy of trust. God alone is able to be a mighty rock, a refuge, an unshakable fortress. God is the One who is substantial and will not blow away like a breath. Where do we put our confidence? That is the question the psalmist leaves us with. The exhortation is clear: Trust in God. Pour out your heart to God. God is a refuge for us.

## Prayer

We often are tempted to trust in untrustworthy things, O God. We are tempted to trust in riches, in our own cleverness, or in our ability to manipulate others. Forgive us, Lord. Help us to turn to you each day, trusting that you are the one who will care for us and bring us safely home. In your precious name, we pray. AMEN.

## Thursday

Psalm 90:1-6, 10, 12

<sup>1</sup> Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations. <sup>2</sup> Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God. <sup>3</sup> You turn us back to dust, and say, "Turn back, you mortals." <sup>4</sup> For a thousand years in your sight are like yesterday when it is past, or like a watch in the night. <sup>5</sup> You sweep them away; they are like a dream, like grass that is renewed in the morning; <sup>6</sup> in the morning it flourishes and is renewed; in the evening it fades and withers. <sup>10</sup> The days of our life are seventy years, or perhaps eighty, if we are strong; even then their span is only toil and trouble; they are soon gone, and we fly away. <sup>12</sup> So teach us to count our days that we may gain a wise heart.

The title of this psalm is "God's Eternity and Human Frailty." In the opening verses we hear about the everlasting nature of God. God has been our dwelling place generation after generation. This means that God has been our home. Robert Frost once wrote that "Home is the place where, when you have to go there, they have to take you in." That is true of God, except that God not only has to take us in when we come to God, we are warmly welcomed. And this home, says the psalmist is from "everlasting to everlasting." Nothing is longer than that. We mortals, however, are a different story. We are dust. We are swept away like a dream. We are like grass that lives for a day. Even if we live to old age, our days are soon gone, and "we fly away." So we ask God to teach us to count our days. In other words, we ask God to help us live mindfully, cognizant that every day is a gift from God, and every day is one step closer to our last day. We need not fear though, for when our days on this earth are completed, the One who is "from everlasting to everlasting" will welcome us home.

## Prayer

Teach us to count our days, O God. Teach us to live each day in your grace, mindful of your blessings. Teach us to live joyfully, knowing that you are the everlasting God and your love for us is everlasting. Teach us, Gracious God, to dwell in you, both now and forever. AMEN.

## Friday

James 3:13-18

<sup>13</sup> Who is wise and understanding among you? Show by your good life that your works are done with gentleness born of wisdom. <sup>14</sup> But if you have bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not be boastful and false to the truth. <sup>15</sup> Such wisdom does not come down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, devilish. <sup>16</sup> For where there is envy and selfish ambition, there will also be disorder and wickedness of every kind. <sup>17</sup> But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy. <sup>18</sup> And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace for those who make peace.

The book of James is a New Testament version of the Book of Proverbs. There is much good advice for living here. In this passage, two types of wisdom are contrasted. One kind of wisdom is characterized by a good life and gentleness. Another kind of wisdom is characterized by envy and selfish ambition. The latter type is not from God, says the writer. It is, in fact, “earthly, unspiritual and devilish,” leading only to disorder and wickedness. We certainly see this in our world today. We see brilliant individuals who have been caught up in the proverbial game of “survival of the fittest.” Their ambition leads them to regard others as dispensable, leading to disorder and wickedness at every turn. Others, however, equally brilliant, have a wisdom that does not cause disorder. In fact, their wisdom is “gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits.” In that description you can hear the presence of a profound humility. Such humility produces peace, for this wisdom is not based on envy or ambition, but on serving others. Perhaps James gives us some advice here that we could use in the upcoming election. Who is it that exhibits the wisdom of gentleness? And who is it that possesses a wisdom based on envy, only leading to disorder and wickedness? As Jesus said, “By their fruits you will know them.”

## Prayer

Gracious God, thank you for granting wisdom to your people. Help us to discern for ourselves who amongst us exhibits gentle wisdom and help us to listen to them. Guide us by your Word. Give us courage. We are your people. In your Holy Name, we pray. AMEN.