



Mount Olive Devotion

Fourth Week of Pentecost (June 22 – June 26, 2020)

Monday

Romans 5:1-5

Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ² through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. ³ And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, ⁴ and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, ⁵ and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

Boasting is something everyone is familiar with. We boast about our grandchildren, or the good deal we just got at Costco, or how the new recipe turned out, or how the garden looks this year. We find lots of things to boast about, and often it's done in good fun without the least sense of one-upsmanship. But the Apostle Paul encourages us to boast about something else – our sufferings. Now there's something we often don't think about boasting about, although in this pandemic time perhaps we are more inclined to do that than usual. "I haven't gotten out of my apartment building in over 100 days!" "I haven't gotten a haircut since February!" And so on. But Paul says we should boast about suffering because it leads to good things like endurance and character and finally hope, because in the end God's love will be shown to us. So perhaps the lesson here is that in our suffering we should continually be watching for signs of God's love. That love will not disappoint us, no matter how long we must endure. Now there is something worth boasting about!

Prayer

These are long days, O God. We are often weary with the same four walls, the same routine, the same restrictions on our movement and activity since this pandemic time began. Grant us glimpses of your love, through the kindness of others, through the sights and smells of creation, through the mystery of your life-giving Spirit. Grant us peace and joy, we pray. In the name of Christ. AMEN.

Tuesday

Ephesians 3:14-19

¹⁴ For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, ¹⁵ from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name. ¹⁶ I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, ¹⁷ and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. ¹⁸ I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, ¹⁹ and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

This wonderful prayer is what the writer to the Ephesians, perhaps St. Paul himself, prayed for this congregation. He prayed first that these people might be strengthened in their inner being. The word means that they might literally be made “mighty” spiritually. He also prayed that Christ himself would dwell within them. This means that the life of Christ would become their life. He also prayed that they would be rooted and grounded in love. This means that the foundation of everything they are would be love. Finally, he prayed that they might be able to understand the love of Christ in all of its dimensions, even though that love “surpasses knowledge.” In short, he prays that they might be given the grace to know the unknowable. And for what reason is he praying all this? So that finally they may be filled with all the fullness of God. It is as though this writer is praying that God’s entire being might be poured into these people. Oh that it would be so for us all!

Prayer

The fullness of God is something we can only imagine in the slightest, Gracious One. We who are but a tiny part of your creation, wish to know more of your fullness, but we know it is well beyond us. Grant us glimpses, we pray. Grant us also glimpses of your love, so that grounded and rooted in that love, we might live in joy and service all our days. Through Christ our Lord. AMEN.

Wednesday

Ephesians 4:1-7

I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, ² with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, ³ making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. ⁴ There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all. ⁷ But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift.

Unity is something that is often hard to maintain. Families often struggle with it. Neighborhoods do too. Churches are notorious for having fights. It goes without saying that communities large and small struggle with unity as the needs and desires of different groups collide with one another. We are in a particular struggle these days in our country as we try to seek the common good in relation to racial strife. Notice what the writer of Ephesians says is essential in seeking unity: "humility, gentleness, patience, bearing with one another in love." Now there is a recipe for

unity. Rather than insisting that *others* be more humble, more gentle, more patient, and more loving, this writer says that it is *our* job to do those things. We also need to remember that finally there is "one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God and Father of all." If we all remembered this, that would go a long ways to settling our quarrels. As many people have said, "We are all in this together."

Prayer

Remind us, Loving Lord, that we are all in this together. Whether it is racial strife, or pandemic anxiety, or economic stress, we are all in this together. We need one another. We need you. Grant us the wisdom to come together to solve our problems. Grant us the grace to be humble, patient, gentle, and loving with one another. Grant us your presence in all things, so that finally what is good for one is good for all. We ask this in Christ's name. AMEN.

Thursday

I Peter 4:12-16, 19

¹² Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that is taking place among you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. ¹³ But rejoice insofar as you are sharing Christ's sufferings, so that you may also be glad and shout for joy when his glory is revealed. ¹⁴ If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the spirit of glory, which is the Spirit of God, is resting on you. ¹⁵ But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, a criminal, or even as a mischief maker. ¹⁶ Yet if any of you suffers as a Christian, do not consider it a disgrace, but glorify God because you bear this name. ¹⁹ Therefore, let those suffering in accordance with God's will entrust themselves to a faithful Creator, while continuing to do good.

The writer of First Peter was very explicit in telling his readers, "If you suffer, make sure it is for the right reasons!" Over and over again in this letter, the readers are instructed to avoid behavior which would cause problems but would *not* further the cause of the gospel. On the other hand, readers are instructed to be diligent in doing the work of the gospel, even if it leads to unrest and uproar around them. This is instructive for us these days. Behavior which only causes problems but does not further the gospel – behavior like the looting and burning we have seen around the country following George Floyd's death, is not commended. Behavior, on the other hand, that furthers the work of justice – the work of the gospel – even though it is disruptive, is commended. This could well include peaceful protest, marches, solidarity with those who seek justice, and other potentially fruitful endeavors. We need discernment these days to know the difference.

Prayer

God of all wisdom, there is much unrest in our country these days. We wish to be on the side of those who further the work of the gospel. Help us to discern the right way to go, the right causes to support, the right ways to speak and act. We believe that your Spirit is at work in the call to justice. Bring us good success, we pray. In the Name of Jesus, the Prince of Peace. AMEN.

Friday

Revelation 21:1-5

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. ² And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; ⁴ he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away." ⁵ And the one who was seated on the throne said, "See, I am making all things new."

St. John's glorious vision of a new heaven and a new earth is often thought of only in regards to the heavenly realm where all of God's beloved will dwell together with God eternally. But why not understand it as well as the new world God is creating today? What if all this tumult and unrest that is going on in our nation these days is what St. Paul once referred to as "labor pains"? What if something new is being born? A nation without racism. Wouldn't that be a new and glorious world! Tears wiped from all eyes, no more people dying in our streets and cities, no more mourning and crying and pain – there is a vision of a world that we all would love to see. Perhaps God is creating a new heaven and earth right now, in addition to the one God is preparing for the end of time. If that is so, then perhaps it is our role to join in its construction.

Prayer

We thank you, Creating God, that you aren't done with us yet. We thank you that you are continually stirring us by your Spirit to live the life that you have called us to. Help us to heed your call, to go out with courage and resolve, to join the crew that is building a new world, a blessed world for all. We ask this in your Holy Name. AMEN.