



## Mount Olive Devotion

Seventh Week of Pentecost (July 13 – July 17, 2020)

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#### Monday

Psalm 28:6-9

- <sup>6</sup> Blessed be the LORD,  
for he has heard the sound of my pleadings.
- <sup>7</sup> The LORD is my strength and my shield;  
in him my heart trusts;  
so I am helped, and my heart exults,  
and with my song I give thanks to him.
- <sup>8</sup> The LORD is the strength of his people;  
he is the saving refuge of his anointed.
- <sup>9</sup> O save your people, and bless your heritage;  
be their shepherd, and carry them forever.

In this psalm the psalmist declares that the Lord is both strength and shield. To be strength to someone is to be the power within that gives them the wherewithal to do what needs to be done. It is sometimes translated 'might' and it means to be able to make things happen. A shield is quite different; a shield is a defensive tool. A shield does not usually give someone the ability to do something, but rather the ability to ward off having something done to oneself. So, putting these two terms together, we see that the Lord can be counted on in both defensive and offensive maneuvers. When we need to thwart temptation and sin, the shield of the Lord stands at the ready. When we need to set forth into the holy work to which we are called, the strength of the Lord empowers us. How good it is to know that whatever we need, the Lord will provide.

#### Prayer

Thank you, Lord of hosts, that you grant us the tools to do what needs to be done. Thank you that you, O Lord, are our strength and shield, a very present help in trouble. Continue to stand with us, we pray. Save us from our enemies and bless our heritage as your people forever. In your strong name, we pray. AMEN.

## Tuesday

Mark 10:46-52

<sup>46</sup> They came to Jericho. As [Jesus] and his disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho, Bartimaeus son of Timaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting by the roadside. <sup>47</sup> When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout out and say, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” <sup>48</sup> Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly, “Son of David, have mercy on me!” <sup>49</sup> Jesus stood still and said, “Call him here.” And they called the blind man, saying to him, “Take heart; get up, he is calling you.” <sup>50</sup> So throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. <sup>51</sup> Then Jesus said to him, “What do you want me to do for you?” The blind man said to him, “My teacher, let me see again.” <sup>52</sup> Jesus said to him, “Go; your faith has made you well.” Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way.

This is such a marvelous story. Perhaps the most touching line in the whole account is what the blind man’s friends say to him: “Take heart; get up, he is calling you.” Imagine being this man and hearing these words. Someone is calling *me*? Someone has noticed *me*? We have opportunities regularly to be the voice of these friends of the blind man. To those who are neglected, unheard, unwelcome, and unwell, we can say, “Take heart; Jesus is calling to you.” To those who have been marginalized during this pandemic time, whether they be the incarcerated, the mentally ill, or those institutionalized for other reasons, we can say, “Take heart; Jesus is calling to you.” We know that Jesus is calling to all to come and find rest, receive forgiveness and grace, and gain wisdom and strength to the journey. We can be confident Jesus is calling to all.

## Prayer

Your healing power is without parallel, Gracious God. Your compassion is over all you have made. There are none in need who escape your notice. Help us, your people, also to be attentive to the needs of those around us, and to assure them that yes, you are calling to them as well, to come and be healed. We pray this in Christ’s name. AMEN.

## **Wednesday**

Luke 14:7-11

<sup>7</sup> When Jesus noticed how the guests chose the places of honor, he told them a parable. <sup>8</sup> “When you are invited by someone to a wedding banquet, do not sit down at the place of honor, in case someone more distinguished than you has been invited by your host; <sup>9</sup> and the host who invited both of you may come and say to you, ‘Give this person your place,’ and then in disgrace you would start to take the lowest place. <sup>10</sup> But when you are invited, go and sit down at the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he may say to you, ‘Friend, move up higher’; then you will be honored in the presence of all who sit at the table with you. <sup>11</sup> For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”

We are learning a lot about humility during this pandemic time. People who previously thought themselves indispensable have lost jobs, and those lowest on the cultural ladder (garbage haulers, truck drivers, janitors, hospital aids) have been called ‘essential.’ People who were accustomed to having the seats of honor in public places have now been ordered to ‘shelter-in-place’ - certainly an unusual place for a celebrity used to the limelight. Meanwhile, nurses, ambulance drivers, postal carriers, and delivery personnel are honored with parades, posters, and applause. Jesus turns the world upside down. The humble are exalted, and the exalted are humbled. Perhaps one of the benefits of this pandemic time is all of us noticing who the truly important people are, and who are not.

## **Prayer**

We confess, Loving God, that we often aspire to the limelight. We may not say it, but we long to be noticed and celebrated, even at the expense of others. Forgive us. Show us the hollowness of celebrity praise. Grant us true humility, and an unawareness of self, that we might serve you wholeheartedly, with our eyes set only on you. Grant this in Christ’s name, we pray. AMEN.

## Thursday

### II Corinthians 12:7b-10

Therefore, to keep me from being too elated, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me, to keep me from being too elated. <sup>8</sup>Three times I appealed to the Lord about this, that it would leave me, <sup>9</sup>but he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.” So, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. <sup>10</sup>Therefore I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities for the sake of Christ; for whenever I am weak, then I am strong.

The identity of the apostle Paul’s “thorn in the flesh” has long been debated. Some scholars believe it was a growing blindness, like macular degeneration, because in one epistle Paul tells of how big his letters have become. Others believe it is epilepsy, and still others think it must have been a speech impediment. Whatever Paul endured, he assures us that he repeatedly asked God to take it from him, sure that his ministry would be enhanced if he were rid of this disability. Instead the Lord gives Paul a word: “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.” Here is a central paradox of the Christian life: our place of weakness is exactly the place where Christ’s strength can be shown most profoundly. If we suffer from emotional, physical, mental, or spiritual “thorns in the flesh” Jesus invites us to come to him and give those burdens to him. He will not necessarily take them from us, but he will transform them and us, so that Christ’s great power might be known. When we are weak, Christ is strong. It is the way of the Christian life.

## Prayer

How often we are seduced by power and strength, O God. How often we cry to be relieved of all those things that burden us. Help us to trust that in our weaknesses you are at work, bringing your power to bear in our lives. Help us trust in your power and not in our own. We pray this in your strong Name. AMEN.

## Friday

Philippians 3:12-16

<sup>12</sup> Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal [of knowing Christ fully]; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.

<sup>13</sup> Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, <sup>14</sup> I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus. <sup>15</sup> Let those of us then who are mature be of the same mind; and if you think differently about anything, this too God will reveal to you. <sup>16</sup> Only let us hold fast to what we have attained.

The apostle Paul is using an athletic metaphor here. He is comparing the life of a Christian to a marathon. He says that he 'presses on' in much the same way that a marathoner does. The race is long; the pace is steady; the wear and tear on the body is relentless. Nevertheless, a participant must forget what lies behind and strain forward to what lies ahead – the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus. There is no question that the Christian life can be exhausting, especially in a pandemic time. We are weary of being patient with others; we get grumpy and begin grumbling at every little thing; we threaten to just launch into a tirade at the next question that comes our way. But Paul says, "Stay the course. Trust God. Do not grow weary in well-doing, for in due season you shall reap." It is good to remember that keepin' on, keeping on will finally pay off. Someday COVID-19 will be history. Someday a vaccine will be available. Someday we will be able to worship together again in one place. Meanwhile, we press forward in prayer and study and service, confident that God will reveal to us what is most important.

## Prayer

We get tired, Lord. We are wearied by quarantines and face masks and distancing from those we love. We are tempted to quit the call to discipleship and simply live life as though we did not know Christ. Strengthen us, Lord. Grant us patience and peace. And bring to those who seek a cure for COVID 19, good success. We pray this in Christ's holy name. AMEN.