



## Mount Olive Devotion

Ninth Week of Pentecost (July 27 – 31, 2020)

### Monday

Isaiah 66:5a,7-9, 13

<sup>5</sup> Hear the word of the LORD, you who tremble at his word:

<sup>7</sup> Before she was in labor she gave birth; before her pain came upon her she delivered a son.

<sup>8</sup> Who has heard of such a thing? Who has seen such things?

Shall a land be born in one day? Shall a nation be delivered in one moment?

Yet as soon as Zion was in labor she delivered her children.

<sup>9</sup> Shall I open the womb and not deliver? says the LORD; shall I, the one who delivers, shut the womb? says your God.

<sup>13</sup> As a mother comforts her child, so I will comfort you; you shall be comforted in Jerusalem.

The last chapter of Isaiah uses the image of birth in order to give hope to Israel. Not only is Israel compared to a woman in birth, whose womb is opened as soon as labor commences, but finally God is compared to a mother who nurtures and comforts her child. These images of birth reminds us that oftentimes new life being born entails pain. Anyone who has ever given birth, or ever been present at the birth of a child can testify to this. This is good to remember as we go through the social unrest and pain of these days in our society. Yes, there is pain with the protests around racial justice. Yes, there is pain around the political divisions in our country and the federal response to the pandemic. And yes, there is pain and suffering not only because of the corona virus itself, but because of the inequalities it has revealed in our country. But a hopeful sign may be that through it all, new life is beginning. Perhaps because of the struggle, new life will come, and it will be a better life for all concerned.

### Prayer

Gracious God, give us faith to see you at work these days. We are often discouraged by the events which are unfolding around us. Grant us courage to continue to seek justice and reconciliation, and also grant us patience and faith for new life to emerge. You are a God who brings new life. We trust in you. AMEN.

## Tuesday

Psalm 37:1-7

<sup>1</sup> Do not fret because of the wicked; do not be envious of wrongdoers,  
<sup>2</sup> for they will soon fade like the grass, and wither like the green herb.  
<sup>3</sup> Trust in the LORD, and do good; so you will live in the land, and enjoy security.  
<sup>4</sup> Take delight in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart. <sup>5</sup> Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him, and he will act. <sup>6</sup> He will make your vindication shine like the light, and the justice of your cause like the noonday. <sup>7</sup> Be still before the LORD, and wait patiently for him; do not fret over those who prosper in their way, over those who carry out evil devices.

There was an item in the paper recently about a number of powerful officials in Ohio being arrested for allegedly masterminding a huge bribery scheme with several nuclear power plant owners that resulted in a higher utility bill for every person in Ohio. That item and others like it remind us of the truth of Psalm 37:1-2 “Do not fret because of the wicked...for they will soon fade like the grass.” We sometimes wonder if the wicked will ever receive their due. God assures us that they will. We do not need to worry about that. Our job, says the psalmist, is to “trust in the Lord, and do good.” Those are pretty simple marching orders. “Trust God. Do Good.” Four simple words. We could put that on a refrigerator magnet.

## Prayer

Help us to be still before you, O Lord. Give us patience. We often fret over those who prosper in wickedness. We wonder if their riches and fame will ever be taken from them and justice rain down. We see the righteous struggle while the wicked are at ease and we wonder, “Where are you, O God.” Forgive us for our little faith. Grant us peace and rest, knowing that in your own time, vindication will come and your righteousness will prevail. In your name, we pray. AMEN.

## Wednesday

Psalm 57:1-2, 7-11

<sup>1</sup> Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me, for in you my soul takes refuge;  
in the shadow of your wings I will take refuge, until the destroying storms pass by.

<sup>2</sup> I cry to God Most High, to God who fulfills his purpose for me.

<sup>7</sup> My heart is steadfast, O God, my heart is steadfast. I will sing and make melody.

<sup>8</sup> Awake, my soul! Awake, O harp and lyre! I will awake the dawn. <sup>9</sup> I will give thanks to you, O Lord, among the peoples; I will sing praises to you among the nations.

<sup>10</sup> For your steadfast love is as high as the heavens; your faithfulness extends to the clouds.

<sup>11</sup> Be exalted, O God, above the heavens. Let your glory be over all the earth.

This psalm is believed to have been written by King David when he was a fugitive from King Saul. As often is the case with threatened kings, King Saul was threatened by the talented David, and finally put a price on his head lest he take the throne. We can hear in the first verses that David is afraid. "I cry to God Most High." And yet even in David's fear he expresses faith in the "God who fulfills his purpose for me." This juxtaposition of fear and faith is a good reminder to us. Fear and faith are not mutually exclusive. We can be afraid of real dangers and yet believe that God is with us. It is evidence of what Luther called our dual state: we are both sinners and saints. We are those whose faith falters, and yet we those who are upheld by the faith God gives. In these pandemic days there will be days when fear is strong and faith seems weak. Yet on other days fear will take the back seat and our faith will seem strong. This is a wave we will need to ride, trusting that through it all, God's steadfast love is secure, and God will fulfill God's purposes for us.

### **Prayer**

Almighty God, we want our faith to be strong all the time, yet it is not. There are days when fear just overtakes us. On those days remind us of your love. Remind us that no matter how dark the storm clouds are, beyond them is a God who knows us and loves us and will carry us through the storm. We are in your hands, O God. Keep us near. In your strong name, we pray. AMEN.

### **Thursday**

Romans 8:26-27

<sup>26</sup> Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. <sup>27</sup> And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

There is perhaps no more comforting verse in the letters of St. Paul than this verse in Romans 8 that says that even when we don't know how to pray as we ought, the "Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words." What a concept this is. Think of a time when you couldn't even pray at all. Perhaps you lost a child, or you lost your marriage, or you lost your home or your job, or perhaps some calamity befell you that just left you devastated. In those times, when you didn't have the strength or the faith, or maybe even the desire to pray, God says that the Spirit comes and prays for us, and the sighs that come from our heart, are those prayers going up to God. What a gracious God we have! God does not judge us when our faith falters, but carries us. God does not abandon us because we cannot pray, but sends the Spirit to pray for us. God does not wait for us to be able once again to send our prayers to the Most High, but has the Spirit intercede for us according to the will of God. So when days are hard, and all that comes forth from our mouth is a sigh, we remember that that sigh is the Spirit praying on our behalf.

## Prayer

Thank you, Gracious God, for your steadfast love. Thank you for your amazing grace, shown in Christ. Thank you for your Spirit that intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words. We are ever in your debt, O God. You have saved us and blessed us and kept us all our days. Grant us joy. We pray all this in your holy name. AMEN.

## Friday

Romans 8:28-30

<sup>28</sup>We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. <sup>29</sup>For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family. <sup>30</sup>And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified.

The first verse in this short passage is sometimes misquoted to say that all things *are* good for those who love God. Nothing could be further from the truth. No, even for those who love God, not all things *are* good. As has been noted by many writers, and indeed is the subject of the entire book of Job, bad things do happen to good people. What the verse *does* say is that “all things work together *for* good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.” This is to say, God can make lemonade out of any amount of lemons. We already see this in this pandemic time. Huge cities suddenly have so much less pollution and noise that they can actually see the landscape around them and hear the birds singing. People like nurses’ aids and custodians are now called “essential” when previously they were taken for granted and given little credit for the service they provide. Children who were rarely with their parents found themselves home every day and bonds were formed that previously had not existed. And so it has gone. God is indeed capable of working *all things* together for good.

## Prayer

How thankful we are, Almighty God, that you can work all things for good. We thank you that you are continually creating life from death and good from evil, shown most profoundly in the death of Christ on the Cross. In that dreadful act of injustice, redemption came to the world. Can there be anything that you cannot redeem? Give us faith to believe in your love and your power which together transform all things. We pray this in Christ’s name. AMEN.