



## Mount Olive Devotion

The Third Week After Epiphany (January 25-29, 2021)

### Monday

Jeremiah 19:1-4, 10-11a

Thus said the LORD: Go and buy a potter's earthenware jug. Take with you some of the elders of the people and some of the senior priests, <sup>2</sup> and go out to the valley of the son of Hinnom at the entry of the Potsherd Gate, and proclaim there the words that I tell you. <sup>3</sup> You shall say: Hear the word of the LORD, O kings of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem. Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: I am going to bring such disaster upon this place that the ears of everyone who hears of it will tingle. <sup>4</sup> Because the people have forsaken me, and have profaned this place by making offerings in it to other gods whom neither they nor their ancestors nor the kings of Judah have known, and because they have filled this place with the blood of the innocent.

<sup>10</sup> Then you shall break the jug in the sight of those who go with you, <sup>11</sup> and shall say to them: Thus says the LORD of hosts: So will I break this people and this city, as one breaks a potter's vessel, so that it can never be mended.

This fierce judgment comes upon God's people for both their idolatry and their immoral ways. Earlier in the book the prophet compares God's people to a clay pot that God is molding. It is clear that God wishes to mold this pot into a useful vessel, something which will bring blessing to others. Now we see that God's patience has run out. The people of God have chosen to live in opposition to God's commands, and they are now about to be broken into pieces. This story is a call to repentance. It is like the call to Nineveh in the book of Jonah, "Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" In that case, the people of Nineveh, the king, and even the beasts of burden, put on sack cloth and ashes, confessing their sins. As a result, God changed his mind about what he had planned. When we are called to repentance, it is very important for us to listen. The call to repentance is God pleading with us, "Choose the way of life, not the way of death." We do well to heed it.

### Prayer

When the call to repentance comes to us, O God, help us to hear it. Even when the message to us is painful, help us to be open to it. We trust that your steadfast love never ceases and your mercies never come to an end. Guide us into life and truth. We pray, in your Holy Name. AMEN.

## **Tuesday**

### **II Peter 3:1-7**

This is now, beloved, the second letter I am writing to you; in them I am trying to arouse your sincere intention by reminding you <sup>2</sup> that you should remember the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets, and the commandment of the Lord and Savior spoken through your apostles. <sup>3</sup> First of all you must understand this, that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and indulging their own lusts <sup>4</sup> and saying, “Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since our ancestors died, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation!” <sup>5</sup> They deliberately ignore this fact, that by the word of God heavens existed long ago and an earth was formed out of water and by means of water, <sup>6</sup> through which the world of that time was deluged with water and perished. <sup>7</sup> But by the same word the present heavens and earth have been reserved for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the godless.

The days of scoffing and indulging lusts have a long history. Perhaps since the dawn of time, certainly since the days of Noah, according to this writer, people have scoffed at people of faith who insist that the words of the holy prophets and the commandments of God be taken seriously. The scoffers say, “Where is this promised One? Where is this Day of Reckoning you proclaim? We have heard you say this in every generation, and yet the world continues on as it has, without change.” Yet, we as people of faith persist in our belief. We know, not only that Christ will eventually return to judge the earth, but that his ways now bring us life and peace. The ways of Christ are good and right not just because they lead to life everlasting, but because they are the way of abundant life now. The ways of Christ are the ways of love, peace, joy, and all the gifts of the Spirit. Scoffers will also be around, calling into question the ways of faith. We persevere, knowing that our God is faithful.

### **Prayer**

Grant us courage, patience and faith, O God, in the face of scoffers. Draw us near to you each day so that our faith in you remains strong in spite of whatever opposition we might face. Help us to be clear witnesses to your grace in good times and in challenging ones. In Christ’s name, we pray.

AMEN.

## **Wednesday**

Genesis 12:1-5, 7

Now the LORD said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. <sup>2</sup> I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. <sup>3</sup> I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

<sup>4</sup> So Abram went, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. <sup>5</sup> Abram took his wife Sarai and his brother’s son Lot, and all the possessions that they had gathered, and the persons whom they had acquired in Haran; and they set forth to go to the land of Canaan. <sup>7</sup> Then the LORD appeared to Abram, and said, “To your offspring I will give this land.” So he built there an altar to the LORD, who had appeared to him.

The call of Abram (later called Abraham) is one of the most remarkable stories of faith in the Bible. The Lord said, “Go to a land that I will show you.” That’s all. The Lord asked Abram to trust that whatever was in store for him was good. “I will bless you... so that you will be a blessing,” was the next thing the Lord said. In other words, this blessing and this call was not for Abram’s blessing alone. Oh no, this blessing was to extend to “all the families of the earth.” God often has much

greater plans than we can ever imagine. The story is told of a church that heard the call to invite its immigrant neighbors to worship with them. They heeded this call, imagining that a small group of Mexican families might someday join the church. As it turned out the Mexican families never came. One day, however, much to their surprise, a group of African immigrants asked if they could become a part of their church. “Yes,” was the reply. Within a couple of years, scores of African families had joined the church. The people who heard the call thought God was calling them to a small act of hospitality; instead through them families across the globe were blessed.

### **Prayer**

Gracious God, give us faith to follow when you call. Give us open hearts and minds as well, so that when that day comes when suddenly we are confronted with your bold plans, we might say, “Yes, Lord, we are ready.” Keep us from fear and timidity. Bless us, and through us, we pray, bless the world. In the name of Christ, our Savior. AMEN.

## Thursday

Acts 5:33-39

<sup>33</sup> When [the high priest and those with him] heard this, they were enraged and wanted to kill [the apostles]. <sup>34</sup> But a Pharisee in the council named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law, respected by all the people, stood up and ordered the men to be put outside for a short time. <sup>35</sup> Then he said to them, “Fellow Israelites, consider carefully what you propose to do to these men. <sup>36</sup> For some time ago Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody, and a number of men, about four hundred, joined him; but he was killed, and all who followed him were dispersed and disappeared. <sup>37</sup> After him Judas the Galilean rose up at the time of the census and got people to follow him; he also perished, and all who followed him were scattered. <sup>38</sup> So in the present case, I tell you, keep away from these men and let them alone; because if this plan or this undertaking is of human origin, it will fail; <sup>39</sup> but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them—in that case you may even be found fighting against God!

This dramatic story is set in the chambers of the council of the Sadducees in Jerusalem. Peter and the apostles have just testified to the resurrection of Christ and have refused to quit preaching the message of the resurrection. In their reply, Peter famously says, “We must obey God rather than any human authority.” For this bold refusal, the authorities are enraged to the point of having them killed. The aged teacher, Gamaliel, then takes his stand. It is not known if he was a follower of Christ or not, but his words reminded his colleagues what was at stake: Were they willing to do something that might put them in a place where they were opposing the Most High? That was the question. From the wise Gamaliel we learn the lesson of humility. We best not hold on too tightly to our conceptions of God’s workings in the world. Faith might just be the willingness to admit that we don’t know much for certain. We know the love of God. We know the sacrifice of Christ. We know the work of the Spirit. So much else is mystery. We do best to remember that.

### Prayer

God of all Mysteries, you have created the world and redeemed it in Christ. You have given your Holy Spirit to your people to guide us and lead us. Help us to listen. Help us to have minds that are open and humble. Grant us your peace. In the Name of Christ, we pray. AMEN.

## Friday

Proverbs 8:12-21

<sup>12</sup> I, wisdom, live with prudence, and I attain knowledge and discretion.

<sup>13</sup> The fear of the LORD is hatred of evil. Pride and arrogance and the way of evil and perverted speech I hate. <sup>14</sup> I have good advice and sound wisdom; I have insight, I have strength.

<sup>15</sup> By me kings reign, and rulers decree what is just; <sup>16</sup> by me rulers rule, and nobles, all who govern rightly. <sup>17</sup> I love those who love me, and those who seek me diligently find me.

<sup>18</sup> Riches and honor are with me, enduring wealth and prosperity.

<sup>19</sup> My fruit is better than gold, even fine gold, and my yield than choice silver.

<sup>20</sup> I walk in the way of righteousness, along the paths of justice,

<sup>21</sup> endowing with wealth those who love me, and filling their treasuries.

In this proverb, wisdom speaks. She tells us that pride, arrogance, and hatred are not the way of wisdom. She tells us that insight and strength, and just decisions come through wisdom. She tells us that riches and honor, wealth and prosperity, come to those who seek wisdom with all their heart. In a word, abundance comes to us through wisdom. It is clear here that Wisdom is calling us to the abundant life in the same way Christ does. "I have come that you may have life and have it to the full," says Jesus. Also he says, "Ask and it will be given; Seek and you will find; Knock and the door shall be opened unto you." When we seek the wisdom of Christ, we shall be blessed. This is what he is saying. Does this mean all of us are meant to be wealthy? Probably not. Yet, riches come in many forms: richness of friendships, richness of community, richness of experiences, and on and on we could go. There is no doubt – to live in Wisdom, to walk in the way of Jesus – leads to blessing.

## Prayer

God of all abundance, bless us, we pray. We need your wisdom. We need your Spirit near us.

Thank you for the gift of your Word which guides us every day. Thank you for the wisdom it gives.

Bless us with abundance so that we may, in turn, bless others with abundance as well. In the Name of Jesus, we pray. AMEN.