



## Mount Olive Devotions by Pastor Glenn Monson

The Sixth Week after Epiphany (February 14 – 18, 2022)

### Monday

Numbers 20:22-29

<sup>22</sup>They set out from Kadesh, and the Israelites, the whole congregation, came to Mount Hor. <sup>23</sup>Then the LORD said to Moses and Aaron at Mount Hor, on the border of the land of Edom, <sup>24</sup>“Let Aaron be gathered to his people. For he shall not enter the land that I have given to the Israelites, because you rebelled against my command at the waters of Meribah. <sup>25</sup>Take Aaron and his son Eleazar, and bring them up Mount Hor; <sup>26</sup>strip Aaron of his vestments, and put them on his son Eleazar. But Aaron shall be gathered to his people, and shall die there.” <sup>27</sup>Moses did as the LORD had commanded; they went up Mount Hor in the sight of the whole congregation. <sup>28</sup>Moses stripped Aaron of his vestments, and put them on his son Eleazar; and Aaron died there on the top of the mountain. Moses and Eleazar came down from the mountain. <sup>29</sup>When all the congregation saw that Aaron had died, all the house of Israel mourned for Aaron thirty days.

In our culture we have many ways of speaking about death, some silly, some profound: he kicked the bucket; she passed away; he bought the farm; she went to heaven; he met his Savior; she went to her eternal reward; he cashed in his chips, etc. Somehow, saying that someone *died* seems harder to say than that someone *passed*. In the story of Aaron’s death we hear another way of speaking about death: he was “gathered to his people.” I like that. It speaks of death as a reuniting with loved ones. I remember so well one day as I observed the scene at the casket at the close of a funeral. The fellow who had died was well into his nineties as was his wife. As his wife of 65+ years said her last goodbyes before we walked out, she said, “Mike, I’ll see you soon. Don’t worry, I won’t be long.” She clearly believed that Mike was being “gathered to his people” as would she someday. Our Lord indicated such a gathering while he was dying. His words to the man dying next to him speak of a gathering as well: “Truly, I tell you, today you shall be with me in paradise.”

### Prayer

We praise you, Lord Christ, for your power over death. We praise you that death does not have the last word, nor does it have the power to keep us from being gathered with you and all God’s people. Grant us faith to live in the sure knowledge of your gathering, and give us joy as we await your coming. In your powerful name, we pray. AMEN.

## **Tuesday**

Acts 9:19b-25

For several days [Saul, who would become Paul] was with the disciples in Damascus, <sup>20</sup> and immediately he began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, "He is the Son of God." <sup>21</sup> All who heard him were amazed and said, "Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem among those who invoked this name? And has he not come here for the purpose of bringing them bound before the chief priests?" <sup>22</sup> Saul became increasingly more powerful and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Messiah. <sup>23</sup> After some time had passed, the Jews plotted to kill him, <sup>24</sup> but their plot became known to Saul. They were watching the gates day and night so that they might kill him; <sup>25</sup> but his disciples took him by night and let him down through an opening in the wall, lowering him in a basket.

Have you ever switched teams? Have you ever taken one side on an issue, only to decide later that you needed to be on the other side? This was the experience of St. Paul. If you have never read the entire 9<sup>th</sup> chapter of Acts where Paul's conversion on the Road to Damascus is recorded, that you should do. Paul was on the way to Damascus to arrest people who were following Jesus. On the way he ran straight into Jesus in the form of a voice from heaven, who blinded him and caused him to rethink his whole purpose in life. In not so many days, he began to exhibit a complete reversal of his loyalties: instead of persecuting Christians who were proclaiming Christ as Messiah, he himself began proclaiming Christ as Messiah. Instead of using his education, status, and eloquence to convict Christians of breaking the law, he used his considerable gifts to convict people of sin and invite them to the forgiveness Christ offers. All who heard Paul were astonished at his transformation. Christians were at first skeptical, but soon were protecting him and embracing him. Those whom he had led in his zeal against Christians were furious, so much so that they sought his life. St. Paul is an example of the utter transformation that can come to one whom God touches.

## **Prayer**

We know people, Lord, who fight against your Church. We know people whose hatred for the gospel fuels their anger and violence. Protect your Church from such enemies, O God and transform those who rage in this way. Grant them the miracle of St. Paul, to see you as you really are, Giver of Life, and grant them repentance and life evermore. In your holy name, we pray. AMEN.

## Wednesday

Luke 4:38-44

<sup>38</sup> After leaving the synagogue [Jesus] entered Simon's house. Now Simon's mother-in-law was suffering from a high fever, and they asked him about her. <sup>39</sup> Then he stood over her and rebuked the fever, and it left her. Immediately she got up and began to serve them. <sup>40</sup> As the sun was setting, all those who had any who were sick with various kinds of diseases brought them to him; and he laid his hands on each of them and cured them. <sup>41</sup> Demons also came out of many, shouting, "You are the Son of God!" But he rebuked them and would not allow them to speak, because they knew that he was the Messiah. <sup>42</sup> At daybreak he departed and went into a deserted place. And the crowds were looking for him; and when they reached him, they wanted to prevent him from leaving them. <sup>43</sup> But he said to them, "I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to the other cities also; for I was sent for this purpose." <sup>44</sup> So he continued proclaiming the message in the synagogues of Judea.

Do you ever get the sense that Jesus was tired? I do. Just think about the day that is being described here. He healed Simon's mother-in-law and, it seems, had a bit of down time – maybe an afternoon nap. But then as darkness was approaching, suddenly the word got out that miracles of healing were happening at his hands and people showed up in droves. Some came with sicknesses and others needing exorcism. To all he showed compassion. He must have gone to bed exhausted. And then, in the early morning, just when he thought he could get away for a little time by himself, he is found out, and once again, the crowds are pressing in on him. I know young mothers like this. Their work schedule is brutal and when they get home it doesn't stop. Dinner needs to be made, clothes need to be washed, the kids need to have their homework checked, and who knows what else. Finally, everyone is in bed and the house is quiet, and the bath is running, and she thinks, "Oh, do I need this." Perhaps this story shows us that Jesus also knows what it is to be stretched thin. We read in Hebrews that he was tempted in every way we are, and maybe, just maybe that can mean that when we are running on empty, Jesus understands.

## Prayer

Lord Jesus, we come to you in our exhaustion. This pandemic has left us "running on fumes" on many days, and even on those days when we are not as taxed as others all we want to do is sleep. Help us to be good to ourselves, dear Lord. Help us to be OK with being tired and know that it is no sin to be exhausted. Grant us rest. Grant us peace. Grant us your strength for these days. In your loving name, we pray. AMEN.

## Thursday

Judges 3:7-11

<sup>7</sup> The Israelites did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, forgetting the LORD their God, and worshipping the Baals and the Asherahs. <sup>8</sup> Therefore the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and he sold them into the hand of King Cushan-rishathaim of Aram-naharaim; and the Israelites served Cushan-rishathaim eight years. <sup>9</sup> But when the Israelites cried out to the LORD, the LORD raised up a deliverer for the Israelites, who delivered them, Othniel son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother. <sup>10</sup> The spirit of the LORD came upon him, and he judged Israel; he went out to war, and the LORD gave King Cushan-rishathaim of Aram into his hand; and his hand prevailed over Cushan-rishathaim. <sup>11</sup> So the land had rest forty years. Then Othniel son of Kenaz died.

In the history of Israel, following the death of Moses, and then Joshua, there is a veritable revolving door of leaders. Some are wicked, some are faithful. Some are remembered, some forgotten. Othniel, the brother of Caleb, one of the heroes in Israel's history, was apparently one who was faithful. We aren't told much about his reign, only that he defeated in war the people that had oppressed Israel. What is telling is how his reign is described: "So the land had rest forty years." This is always the case when faithful leadership is in place. Rest comes to a people. Their anxiety is lessened. Their tendency towards violence is stifled. Their compassion is multiplied. Conversely, unfaithful leadership which is bent on furthering its own ends and not the common good, is concerned with gathering power instead of empowering others, and hears every strong voice as a threat, provides the people no rest. Fear is heightened. Greed is applauded. Power-grabbing is encouraged. All this leads to more and more strife and less and less rest for all. How we need to pray for and elect leaders like Othniel who will give the land rest. How we need to remember that with faithfulness comes peace.

## Prayer

Raise up faithful leaders in our land, Lord God. Thwart the plans of those who would gather all power, all wealth, and all honor only to themselves. Grant wisdom to all who govern, all who serve the common good, and all who are called to seats of authority. Grant that your Church would also be a source of wisdom for this world. In the name of Jesus, we pray. AMEN.

## Friday

I Timothy 3:1-7

The saying is sure: whoever aspires to the office of bishop desires a noble task. <sup>2</sup> Now a bishop must be above reproach, married only once, temperate, sensible, respectable, hospitable, an apt teacher, <sup>3</sup> not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, and not a lover of money. <sup>4</sup> He must manage his own household well, keeping his children submissive and respectful in every way—<sup>5</sup> for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how can he take care of God's church? <sup>6</sup> He must not be a recent convert, or he may be puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. <sup>7</sup> Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace and the snare of the devil.

In the so-called pastoral letters we often have St. Paul giving instructions to his younger pastors, Timothy and Titus, who were apparently his mentees. He often gives them advice on how to organize and manage the church. You will notice in this passage that he speaks of bishops. That word simply means “overseers.” It is unlikely that the early Church had bishops in any sense the way we do today, but as the Church grew, it undoubtedly needed oversight and so the ones to whom this responsibility fell are those whom Paul addresses. What is demanded of an overseer could well be used as qualifications for any Christian leader. All of the characteristics called for are essential for anyone who would be in authority in Christ's Church, especially those who are called to represent the Church in the wider world. We all know the terrible price the Church has paid when its leaders have been involved in misconduct. Not only is the mission and ministry of the Church stopped in its tracks, but the witness the world sees is tarnished horribly and many amends need to be made. It is not surprising that the last advice Paul has regarding overseers is that they “be well thought of by outsiders.” Paul knows that the witness of the gospel is at stake. For Christian leaders, even more than lay people, “walking the walk” and not just “talking the talk” is essential.

## Prayer

Give your Church faithful leaders, dear Lord. Give her women and men who will serve with humility and honor, who will guide with wisdom and compassion, and who will live their lives in ways that bring honor to you and blessing to your people. Protect them from the snares of the devil, from temptations that would destroy them and scandalize your Church. In all ways guide and strengthen them to be faithful to their call. In Christ's name, we pray. AMEN.