



Mount Olive Devotions by Pastor Glenn Monson

The Seventh Week after Epiphany (February 21 – 25, 2022)

Monday

Psalm 1

¹ Happy are those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, or take the path that sinners tread, or sit in the seat of scoffers; ² but their delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law they meditate day and night. ³ They are like trees planted by streams of water, which yield their fruit in its season, and their leaves do not wither. In all that they do, they prosper. ⁴ The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away. ⁵ Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous; ⁶ for the LORD watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.

When I was a teenager I used to work at our local golf course, driving a small Ford tractor, pulling a gang of mowers, mowing the fairways. I would sit out on that tractor for hours in the baking sun, in nothing but a pair of cutoff jeans; no hat, no shirt, no shoes. When I'd come in after an afternoon of mowing my sweaty back would be covered with chaff from the grass I'd been mowing. All that dry grass just clung to my skin until it looked as though I had grown a winter coat. As I recall, one of the best ways to get rid of that chaff was to jump into the cool water of the lake below our house and just let the swirling water wash me clean. The psalmist compares chaff to the ways of the wicked. He says that the way of the wicked, just like chaff, will perish. Thankfully, we know of One who came to deal with the chaff in our life, Jesus our Savior. He said that whoever is born anew of water and the Spirit is freed from all sin. Or as St. John said, "Whenever we confess our sins, God is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." The chaff in our lives does not need to continue to cling to us; we can wash it off each day by returning to the promises of our baptism, and feeling the cool waters cleanse us again and again.

Prayer

Grant us forgiveness, Gracious Lord, whenever we come to you in confession. Grant us peace whenever we come to you needing reconciliation. Grant us faith in your promises, so that we may live in hope and joy all our days. In Christ's name we pray. AMEN.

Tuesday

I Peter 1:18

¹⁸You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your ancestors, not with perishable things like silver or gold, ¹⁹but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without defect or blemish. ²⁰He was destined before the foundation of the world, but was revealed at the end of the ages for your sake. ²¹Through him you have come to trust in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are set on God.

²²Now that you have purified your souls by your obedience to the truth so that you have genuine mutual love, love one another deeply from the heart. ²³You have been born anew, not of perishable but of imperishable seed, through the living and enduring word of God.

The writer here says that through Christ “we have come to trust in God.” This means that Jesus is the *means* whereby we have faith in God; he is the *avenue* through which faith is created. This speaks to the fact that, though we cannot see God, we can see in Scripture pictures of Jesus. We can see Jesus healing and helping those who are sick, casting out demons from those in bondage to them, and even raising the dead. We can also see him embracing children, refusing to condemn sinners, while at the same time rebuking the self-righteous and any who are oppressing others. In all these ways we can see Jesus, and seeing him, we see God, for as our Lord said, “Whoever has seen me, has seen the Father.” Knowing then, that what is true of Jesus is true of God, we know we can trust God. God is a healing and helping God. God is one who has power over those things that hold us in bondage, and even over death itself. God is one who embraces children, forgives sinners, and rebukes oppressors and any who believe in their own righteousness. In this way Christ is the means through which we have come to trust in God.

Prayer

Grant us faith, O God, in your goodness and love. Help us to see that as Jesus is, so are you. As the poor soul cried out to Jesus in Scripture, so we cry out to you, “I believe, Lord. Help my unbelief.” In Jesus’ name. AMEN.

Wednesday

I Corinthians 15:20-26

²⁰ But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died. ²¹ For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead has also come through a human being; ²² for as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ. ²³ But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. ²⁴ Then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, after he has destroyed every ruler and every authority and power. ²⁵ For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. ²⁶ The last enemy to be destroyed is death.

This last line is packed with power. First of all, it recognizes that Death is the enemy of Christ. Christ says that he has come so that we might have life and have it to the full. He has called himself the Living Water, the Bread of Life, the Resurrection and the Life, all descriptors of One who is the enemy of Death. We also know that with Christ comes faith, but with Death comes fear. Fear and faith are mutually opposed. When Death sends fear our way we falter in our faith, wondering if Christ really does have the power to defeat Death. But the writer here makes it clear that not only does Christ have power over Death, he has the power to *destroy, to utterly annihilate* Death. As St. John says in his revelation, "Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away." How good it is to know that our Lord has power over the Last Enemy. Because we know this, we live in faith and hope, and even joy.

Prayer

We praise you, Lord Christ, for your majesty and power. There is none that is your equal. You are the Lord of hosts, the Victor over all your enemies, the One who defeats even Death itself. Grant us faith to believe in your power and love, and to live our days in courageous love. In your strong name we pray. AMEN.

Thursday

Psalm 120

¹ In my distress I cry to the LORD, that he may answer me: ² “Deliver me, O LORD, from lying lips, from a deceitful tongue.” ³ What shall be given to you? And what more shall be done to you, you deceitful tongue? ⁴ A warrior’s sharp arrows, with glowing coals of the broom tree! ⁵ Woe is me, that I am an alien in Meshech, that I must live among the tents of Kedar. ⁶ Too long have I had my dwelling among those who hate peace. ⁷ I am for peace; but when I speak, they are for war.

The prayer of the psalmist could well be the prayer of us all these days: “Deliver me, O Lord, from lying lips, from a deceitful tongue.” I saw recently that added to the scourges of humanity (e.g. hunger, disease, war, poverty, etc.) is *disinformation*. Disinformation is distinguished from misinformation by the fact that disinformation is false information that is distributed with *the intention* of deceiving others, while misinformation is simply false or inaccurate information. As we know, the internet, with all of its benefits, has proven to be a literal Pandora’s Box, from which disinformation is constantly flowing in overwhelming volume. These lies, some spread by single individuals and some spread by whole networks of people seeking wealth and power, confuse and weaken us, causing us to be pitted one against another. More than ever, we need discerning hearts and minds these days to hear the truth and recognize it when we see it. The Church, as the mouth-piece of God, is more essential than ever as we seek to be a people who “speak the truth in love” and follow in the way of Christ. The Living Word, even Jesus our Lord, is more precious than ever.

Prayer

Deliver us from lying lips, O Lord, and from those who practice deceit. Thwart the ways of the wicked, and bring to nothing the plans of those who seek only to kill and destroy. Grant that your Church might be a place where truth is told, where compassion is practiced, and where all God’s people are honored and loved. In the Name of Christ we pray. AMEN.

Friday

Ezra 1:1-4

In the first year of King Cyrus of Persia, in order that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be accomplished, the LORD stirred up the spirit of King Cyrus of Persia so that he sent a herald throughout all his kingdom, and also in a written edict declared:

² “Thus says King Cyrus of Persia: The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem in Judah. ³ Any of those among you who are of his people—may their God be with them!—are now permitted to go up to Jerusalem in Judah, and rebuild the house of the LORD, the God of Israel—he is the God who is in Jerusalem; ⁴ and let all survivors, in whatever place they reside, be assisted by the people of their place with silver and gold, with goods and with animals, besides freewill offerings for the house of God in Jerusalem.”

What a day this must have been when it was announced to the people of Israel that they were free to go home to rebuild Jerusalem. It was undoubtedly Emancipation Day in every sense of the word. What is interesting is how the priest, Ezra, tells us of this event. He says that “the Lord stirred up the spirit of King Cyrus,” and God did this “in order that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be accomplished.” In other words, even though powerful King Cyrus might have thought *he* was deciding all of these things on his own, it was *God’s* decision to stir up Cyrus, and this was done so that the Scripture might be fulfilled, not so that Cyrus could accomplish some great project. I don’t know about you, but I like the idea that God could be at work in just about anyone and anything. We might look at a certain person and think, “God could certainly never use him or her!” Or we might observe the chaos in our Congress and say, “God could never be at work there!” Ezra reminds us that God can be at work in anyone and in any event. As St. Paul boldly claims, “All things work together for good, for those who love God and are called according to God’s purposes.”

Prayer

Remind us of your creative power, O God, whenever we despair. Remind us that you can take the most chaotic situation and use it for your glory and for the blessing of the world. Keep us from despair. Help us walk in faith, trusting that you are at work and your will will be done. In Jesus’ name we pray. AMEN.