



Mount Olive Devotions by Pastor Glenn Monson

The Fifth Week of Easter (May 16 – 20, 2022)

Monday

Psalm 148:1-6

¹ Praise the LORD! Praise the LORD from the heavens; praise him in the heights!

² Praise him, all his angels; praise him, all his host!

³ Praise him, sun and moon; praise him, all you shining stars!

⁴ Praise him, you highest heavens and you waters above the heavens!

⁵ Let them praise the name of the LORD, for he commanded and they were created.

⁶ He established them forever and ever; he fixed their bounds, which cannot be passed

When it comes to praising God, the psalmist has an imagination like no other. Not only does the psalmist call all sentient beings, both on earth and in heaven, to praise God, but the call goes out to the planets, the sun and moon and stars as well! What would that look like if the whole cosmos started praising God? Would there be a grand light show, like the Fourth of July, only infinitely better? Would the moons chase each other around and fly out of orbit in ecstasy? Would the sun of our solar system compete with vast suns in other solar systems to see which one could shine brightest? This summer, on a particularly sunny day, maybe it would be good to look up into the sky and feel the sun on your face and think, “This sun is praising God right now. This sun is giving God the glory.” Who knows, perhaps that will be exactly right.

Prayer

We praise you, Creator of All Things. Your majesty is beyond all understanding, your wisdom is unfathomable, and your beauty is without bounds. Grant us glad and grateful hearts that we, along with all things, might join in declaring your praise, this day and in the all the days you give us. In your holy name we pray. AMEN.

Tuesday

Daniel 7:13-14

¹³ As I watched in the night visions, I saw one like a human being coming with the clouds of heaven. And he came to the Ancient One and was presented before him.

¹⁴ To him was given dominion and glory and kingship, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not pass away, and his kingship is one that shall never be destroyed.

This vision of the prophet Daniel comes right at the end of a series of visions that are noted in chapter 7. They are typically fantastic, nightmarish visions that disturb Daniel very much. What is clear, however, in this final vision, is that this One who looks like a human being is being given particular honors by God. To this one is given “dominion and glory and kingship,” and this dominion shall be eternal. We Christians have for centuries understood this vision to be a vision of Christ. Jesus, himself, declares his identity as a king, saying to Pilate, “My kingdom is not from this world.” (John 18:36). As people of God, this eternal dominion of Christ should give us hope. Since Christ has claimed us as his own in our baptism, and his dominion has no end, we can confidently believe that our future is secure. Even death cannot end Christ’s dominion; Christ’s resurrection showed that. And as members of the Body of Christ, we too will know resurrection. Christ reigns!

Prayer

Lord Christ, we praise you for your eternal dominion. We praise you for your victory over death and the devil. We praise you for your infinite love that has claimed us and will never let us go. Put your Spirit deep within us that all our days might be lived in praise of you. In your strong name we pray. AMEN.

Wednesday

I Samuel 20:18-23

¹⁸ Jonathan said to him, "Tomorrow is the new moon; you will be missed because your place will be empty. ¹⁹ On the day after tomorrow, you shall go a long way down; go to the place where you hid yourself earlier, and remain beside the stone there. ²⁰ I will shoot three arrows to the side of it, as though I shot at a mark. ²¹ Then I will send the boy, saying, 'Go, find the arrows.' If I say to the boy, 'Look, the arrows are on this side of you; collect them,' then you are to come, for, as the LORD lives, it is safe for you and there is no danger. ²² But if I say to the young man, 'Look, the arrows are beyond you,' then go, for the LORD has sent you away. ²³ As for the matter about which you and I have spoken, the LORD be between you and me forever."

The title given to the 20th chapter of First Samuel is "The Friendship of David and Jonathan." If you have never read this, it is well worth the read. Jonathan is the son of King Saul, the very king who has grown increasingly jealous and obsessed with the upstart, David. King Saul is clearly threatened by David's popularity and sure that David's only aim is to dethrone him and make himself king of Israel. Nothing David can say or do will convince Saul otherwise. Nevertheless, Jonathan and David remain friends, and as you hear in this passage, make a pact that will warn David if his life is in danger. Faithful friends are such a gift. If you have had one you know this to be true. We may have had our differences with these friends, but we have stuck it out and we are going to be friends our lifelong, and we know it. Friendship is how Jesus sometimes describes his relationship with us. In John's gospel Jesus says, "I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father." (Jn. 15:15) What a gift to know that Jesus calls us friends.

Prayer

We are so thankful, Lord Jesus, for your faithful friendship with us. Though we certainly disappoint you and even betray you time and time again, you stand with us. Though we are unsteady and wavering in our friendship with you, you are steadfast in your friendship with us. How can we ever thank you. Strengthen us each day, Lord, that we may be your faithful friend. In your precious name we pray. AMEN.

Thursday

Acts 11:19-26

Now those who were scattered because of the persecution that took place over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, and they spoke the word to no one except Jews. ²⁰ But among them were some men of Cyprus and Cyrene who, on coming to Antioch, spoke to the Hellenists also, proclaiming the Lord Jesus. ²¹ The hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number became believers and turned to the Lord. ²² News of this came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. ²³ When he came and saw the grace of God, he rejoiced, and he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast devotion, ²⁴ for he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were brought to the Lord. ²⁵ Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, ²⁶ and when he had found him he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for an entire year they met with the church and taught a great many people, and it was in Antioch that the disciples were first called “Christians.”

It's curious to think that there was a time when Christians were not called Christians. We know from the Book of Acts that one of the early titles given to Jesus' followers was “followers of the Way.” It seems probable that many names could have arisen, like “disciples of Christ” or “Jesus followers.” I remember a friend of mine who did ministry in the jails around Chicago, specifically Cook County Jail, who told me that he never called himself a Christian when he entered the jail. When I asked why, he told me that for many of the inmates the title “Christian” brought with it all sorts of baggage, because many people of ill will had “played the Jesus card” (as he said) and after gaining the trust of the people had shown themselves to be abusive and untrustworthy. “What do you call yourself then?” I asked. He said, “A Jesus guy.” There continue to be those who use the title “Christian” to manipulate people and gain power. Martin Luther was known to say that the ones who most often broke the Second Commandment were clergy and politicians who invoked the Lord's name in vain, only for their own gain. We are wise to consider how closely our words and actions mirror those of Jesus whenever we claim the title “Christian.”

Prayer

Forgive us, Lord, whenever we have called ourselves Christians and not lived up to that name. Forgive us for not bearing the name of Christ in truth and integrity. Give us a deep resolve to follow you faithfully, to live compassionately, and to believe fervently, that all we do and say might be to your glory. In your holy name we pray. AMEN.

Friday

Luke 10:25-28

An expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he said, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?”²⁶ He said to him, “What is written in the law? What do you read there?”²⁷ He answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind and your neighbor as yourself.”²⁸ And he said to him, “You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.”

I love the way the Hebrew people understood the human psyche. They thought of it like concentric circles, starting with the heart, then the soul, then the strength, and then the mind. If you picture an archery target with the heart as the bullseye, and then the soul, strength, and mind as outer circles, you will have the right idea. The Hebrews thought that God called us to love God from the very center of our being to its outermost parts. We might say from our head to our feet, or the top of our head to the tips of our toes, but however you say it, we are called to love God with everything we are. Notice also that Jesus doesn't stop there in calling us to love God. He says that we should love God with everything we are and our neighbor as ourselves. This suggests that those around us are really just an additional concentric circle. They are part of God's plan for us. So we are called to love God from the innermost parts of ourselves all the way to those around us and even beyond that. What a grand call we have from God!

Prayer

You have given us a grand call, O God. You have called us to love you with everything we are and even beyond. We praise and thank you for this grand call. Fill us with your Spirit so that we might be great lovers, filled with your love as we live our lives in you. In your name we pray. AMEN.