



Mount Olive Devotions by Pastor Glenn Monson

The First Week of Easter (April 18 – 22, 2022)

Monday

Acts 10:34-41

³⁴Then Peter began to speak to them: “I truly understand that God shows no partiality, ³⁵ but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. ³⁶ You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ—he is Lord of all.

³⁷That message spread throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John announced: ³⁸ how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. ³⁹ We are witnesses to all that he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; ⁴⁰ but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, ⁴¹ not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead.

The striking thing about this account of the life of Jesus is how matter-of-fact the writer is about Jesus’ resurrection. The writer, Luke, seems to be saying that all that is true about Jesus is right before our eyes: he went about doing good, healing, and enjoying God’s favor, and then, in a swift turn of events, was crucified, raised, and appeared to many. But when we look at that list of events in Jesus’ life, one event stands out, because it’s so unusual – his resurrection. We all can conceive of a person doing good, healing, (at least in some way) and enjoying God’s favor. We also know what dying looks like, even violently and unjustly, but being raised from the dead? What is that about? St. Paul says that what Jesus’ resurrection is about is *hope*. Jesus’ resurrection, which Paul says is the first of many, is about hope because our connection with Jesus assures us that we too are promised resurrection. Our connection with Adam, the first mortal, connects us with death. Our connection with Jesus connects us with life. And so whether we live or whether we die, we are connected with the Living Lord.

Prayer

Risen Lord, we praise you this day for the hope that the resurrection of Christ gives us. We praise you for the promise that we who are one with Christ now, will be one with Christ always. We ask you to give us faith in this promise, and joy in the hope that is ours. We ask this through Christ our Lord. AMEN.

Tuesday

John 20:11-16

¹¹ But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; ¹² and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. ¹³ They said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping?” She said to them, “They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.” ¹⁴ When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. ¹⁵ Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?” Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.” ¹⁶ Jesus said to her, “Mary!” She turned and said to him in Hebrew, “Rabbouni!” (which means Teacher).

I can really identify with Mary. We never expect Jesus to show up when we are grieving. We think that since he is the Lord of Life his place is with the living. And so when we are awash in our grief, the last person we expect to stand with us is Jesus. And yet he does. And when we experience Jesus' presence in our grief it makes all the difference. Sometimes that presence comes through the words, gestures, and kind support of members of the body of Christ – the Church. I remember so well the many, many cards I received from church members and friends during my recovery from a serious car accident. It meant the world to me. Sometimes Christ's presence comes to us as we worship or reflect on God's word, when we are struck by the words of a text or a hymn or a liturgy. Sometimes Christ's presence comes to us through the mystery of the Spirit of God that invades our psyche and quiets our spirit, giving us what St. Paul calls, “the peace that passes understanding.” However he comes, Jesus *does* come to us in our grief. He calls us by name and assures us that we are not alone.

Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, we thank you for coming to us in our days of weakness, whether those days come to us through illness, injury, or death. Thank you for standing with us as we face our own death and come to terms with what that means for us. Thank you for your power over death. We are yours. Keep us always near you, we pray. In your holy name. AMEN.

Wednesday

Revelation 1:12-18

¹² Then I turned to see whose voice it was that spoke to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, ¹³ and in the midst of the lampstands I saw one like the Son of Man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash across his chest. ¹⁴ His head and his hair were white as white wool, white as snow; his eyes were like a flame of fire, ¹⁵ his feet were like burnished bronze, refined as in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of many waters. ¹⁶ In his right hand he held seven stars, and from his mouth came a sharp, two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining with full force. ¹⁷ When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he placed his right hand on me, saying, “Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, ¹⁸ and the living one. I was dead, and see, I am alive forever and ever; and I have the keys of Death and of Hades.”

This picture of the Christ from the Revelation of St. John is a spectacular one, with Jesus pictured in heavenly form and garb. What strikes me is what he says to John in the vision: “Do not be afraid... I have the keys of Death and of Hades.” In the Apostles’ Creed we confess that Jesus “was crucified, died, and was buried.” Then we add, “He descended to the dead.” This statement comes from several mysterious passages in the New Testament that indicate Jesus’ entry, following his own death, into the place of the dead, where he defeated for all time, Death and the Devil. In this passage in Revelation we have a picture of what that trip to the place of the dead resulted in: when he left he took with him the keys of Death and Hades! It’s almost as if we are to picture the ultimate reversal: Jesus breaking the bonds of prison, jailing the jailors, and taking the keys with him on his way out. If all this sounds a bit fantastical, it is. That’s the way of the book of Revelation and its apocalyptic language. Suffice it to say, Christ is alive and Death is defeated! Alleluia!

Prayer

Praise and glory to you, Lord Christ, on your resurrection and your victory over Death and the Devil. Because of your victory, we can indeed do as you command: we can live without fear. Death has no power over us. We are yours. Grant that each day we might live in the joy and hope of your resurrection. In your glorious name we pray. AMEN.

Thursday

I Samuel 17:41-50

⁴¹The Philistine came on and drew near to David, with his shield-bearer in front of him. ⁴²When the Philistine looked and saw David, he despised him, for he was only a youth, ruddy and handsome in appearance. ⁴³The Philistine said to David, "Am I a dog, that you come to me with sticks?" And the Philistine cursed David by his gods. ⁴⁴The Philistine said to David, "Come to me, and I will give your flesh to the birds of the air and to the wild animals of the field." ⁴⁵But David said to the Philistine, "You come to me with sword and spear and javelin; but I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. ⁴⁶This very day the LORD will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you down and cut off your head; and I will give the dead bodies of the Philistine army this very day to the birds of the air and to the wild animals of the earth, so that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, ⁴⁷and that all this assembly may know that the LORD does not save by sword and spear; for the battle is the LORD's and he will give you into our hand." ⁴⁸When the Philistine drew nearer to meet David, David ran quickly toward the battle line to meet the Philistine. ⁴⁹David put his hand in his bag, took out a stone, slung it, and struck the Philistine on his forehead; the stone sank into his forehead, and he fell face down on the ground. ⁵⁰So David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and a stone, striking down the Philistine and killing him; there was no sword in David's hand.

This well-known account of David's defeat of the Philistine giant, Goliath, has quite a bit of back story; if you haven't read it all, I'd highly recommend it. The back story highlights the fear that this giant warrior caused in the Israelite camp, and the hopelessness that had set in prior to David's arrival. What's also often overlooked is the fact that David does not presume that *he* will defeat Goliath; no, it is *God* who will do this. David says, "This very day *the Lord* will deliver you into my hand...so that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel." *David* did the deed, but *God* is the one who is given credit for the victory. When in our culture we say that a certain battle, like the war raging between Russian and Ukraine today, is a "David and Goliath" event we usually mean it is the battle between two very unequal foes. What this story reminds us is that the inequality in this story is actually the opposite of what we assume, for David is the one with the advantage, not Goliath. As Martin Luther's famous hymn tells us, "No strength of ours can match his might! We would be lost, rejected. But now a champion comes to fight, whom God himself elected. You ask who this may be? The Lord of hosts is he! Christ Jesus, mighty Lord, God's only Son, adored. *He* holds the field victorious."

Prayer

When we are afraid, Lord God, remind us of your power and love. When we are weak and frail, remind us of your strength. When we are feeling alone and lost, remind us that you are always near. You are our champion. You are the One who will prevail over all our adversaries. Grant us faith in you, dear Lord. In your name we pray. AMEN.

Friday

Psalm 150

¹ Praise the LORD! Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty firmament! ² Praise him for his mighty deeds; praise him according to his surpassing greatness! ³ Praise him with trumpet sound; praise him with lute and harp! ⁴ Praise him with tambourine and dance; praise him with strings and pipe! ⁵ Praise him with clanging cymbals; praise him with loud clashing cymbals!

⁶ Let everything that breathes praise the LORD! Praise the LORD!

There is a composer of grand orchestral music, long dead, whose music continues to inspire me. His name is Gustav Mahler. In the late 19th century and early 20th century he composed some of the most magnificent music conceived of by the human mind. His grandest composition, Symphony No. 8, is known as “Symphony of a Thousand” because of the vast resources needed to perform it: a very large orchestra with strings, woodwinds, brass, percussion, and keyboard; and an adult chorus, a children’s chorus, and vocal soloists. If you ever hear it, you will, no doubt, be amazed. I think this is what the writer of Psalm 150 was trying to convey: utter amazement. The psalmist was pulling out all the stops. He was calling on every instrument available, and every voice in all creation – “everything that breathes” – to join in praising God. Just imagine this: every person, every plant, every critter, every sea creature, every atom of every cell, all joining in praising God. Now there is a concert I want to see!

Prayer

We praise you, Almighty and Triune God, for your majesty and power shown in the death and resurrection of Christ. We praise you for your wisdom in creating all that is, and for your Holy Spirit that sustains all life. We praise you chiefly for your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who has shown us the way to eternal life. Grant that by your grace we might found ever praising you. In your victorious name we pray. AMEN.