



Mount Olive Devotions by Pastor Glenn Monson

The 18th Week After Pentecost (October 10 – 14, 2022)

Monday

Psalm 82

¹ God has taken his place in the divine council; in the midst of the gods he holds judgment:

² “How long will you judge unjustly and show partiality to the wicked?”

³ Give justice to the weak and the orphan; maintain the right of the lowly and the destitute.

⁴ Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked.”

⁵ They have neither knowledge nor understanding; they walk around in darkness;
all the foundations of the earth are shaken.

⁶ I say, “You are gods, children of the Most High, all of you;

⁷ nevertheless, you shall die like mortals and fall like any prince.”

⁸ Rise up, O God, judge the earth, for all the nations belong to you!

It may not be immediately obvious in this psalm, but God is talking to heavenly beings here, presumably angels. Notice what is in quotes. God is calling the angels to account for showing partiality to the wicked and for failing to provide justice to the vulnerable. This is interesting because we often assume that angels are beyond sin; apparently not. Notice also that God pronounces judgment upon them in verse 6: “You are gods [but, because of your sins]... you shall die like mortals.” This scene reminds me of Jesus’ response to the rich young ruler in Matthew 19 where Jesus says, “Why do you ask about what is good? There is only one who is good.” Clearly the only one who is good is the Triune God. All others, both earthly and heavenly beings stand in need of God’s grace. This certainly expands our view of what Jesus meant when he said he died for *all*.

Prayer

Merciful God, how thankful we are for your ever-expanding grace which comes to all creatures. We thank you for your desire that none be lost, but that all come to know the truth of the Gospel, and hear the word of forgiveness. Give us open hearts to receive your forgiveness, and tongues to confess you as Lord and Savior of all. In your holy name we pray. AMEN.

Tuesday

I Samuel 5:1-5

When the Philistines captured the ark of God, they brought it from Ebenezer to Ashdod; ² then the Philistines took the ark of God and brought it into the house of Dagon and placed it beside Dagon. ³ When the people of Ashdod rose early the next day, there was Dagon, fallen on his face to the ground before the ark of the LORD. So they took Dagon and put him back in his place. ⁴ But when they rose early on the next morning, Dagon had fallen on his face to the ground before the ark of the LORD, and the head of Dagon and both his hands were lying cut off upon the threshold; only the

trunk of Dagon was left to him. ⁵This is why the priests of Dagon and all who enter the house of Dagon do not step on the threshold of Dagon in Ashdod to this day.

The ark of God was the visible sign of God's covenant with Israel. In the days of the wilderness wanderings it was housed in the tabernacle, a tent-like sanctuary serving this nomadic people. In later years such as the days of Samuel, it was housed in Shiloh, in a modest temple. In a superstitious attempt to win a battle against the Philistines, the army of Israel took the ark with them into battle, as though by its very presence, they were assured of victory. This was not to be, and, along with being routed, Israel lost control of this sacred object. What happened next was a testimony to God's jealous rage. God would not abide having the ark in the temple of Dagon, the god of the Philistines. On two subsequent days, the idol was found fallen on its face before the ark, as if to say, "I know who is the One True God. It is the Lord." In an ironic twist it was the idol who bore witness to God's power. Martin Luther, in the *Large Catechism*, said that "Whatever your heart clings to and confides in, that is really your God." It is good to remember that our Lord will not abide other gods. Indeed all bow to this Lord.

Prayer

Keep us from false gods, O Lord. Open our hearts to cling only to you and to confide only in you. Forgive us when we fail to worship you as Lord of All. We are your people. We wish to be found faithful. In your holy name we pray. AMEN.

Wednesday

I John 4:1-6

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world. ²By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, ³and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. And this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world. ⁴Little children, you are from God and have conquered them, for the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world. ⁵They are from the world; therefore what they say is from the world, and the world listens to them. ⁶We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us, and whoever is not from God does not listen to us. From this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

The error that John was writing about in this letter was the heresy of *Gnosticism*. This word comes from the Greek word for knowledge. This heresy taught that our flesh, and by logical extension, our earthly life, was of no concern to God; the only thing God cared about was right *knowledge*. Christians were thought to be those who possessed the right knowledge, and this knowledge was of the spiritual sort, available only to the chosen. John insisted that this was an error. God did very much care about our earthly life and especially how we treated one another. He said that *love*, not knowledge was the true test of a follower of Jesus. He also insisted that Jesus had indeed come in

the flesh and had died in the flesh, for to say otherwise was to undermine the whole notion of Jesus' sacrifice. Finally, John reminded his readers that the spirit of the antichrist, the final opponent of God, was not to be feared, for the Spirit that lives within us, is "greater than the one who is in the world." All of this is tremendous good news. We are called to a life of love, we are assured that Christ died for us, and the Spirit within us is stronger than any spirit in the world.

Prayer

We praise you, Sovereign Lord, for your mighty Spirit that resides in each of us. We praise you that your power is greater than any antichrist, and your victory over death and the devil is already won. Give us faith in the redemption given to us in Christ, and lead us in the way of love. We ask this through Christ our Lord. AMEN.

Thursday

Luke 19:41-48

⁴¹ As [Jesus] came near and saw the city, he wept over it, ⁴² saying, "If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. ⁴³ Indeed, the days will come upon you when your enemies will set up ramparts around you and surround you and hem you in on every side. ⁴⁴ They will crush you to the ground, you and your children within you, and they will not leave within you one stone upon another, because you did not recognize the time of your visitation from God."

⁴⁵ Then he entered the temple and began to drive out those who were selling things there, ⁴⁶ and he said, "It is written, 'My house shall be a house of prayer,' but you have made it a den of robbers."

⁴⁷ Every day he was teaching in the temple. The chief priests, the scribes, and the leaders of the people kept looking for a way to kill him, ⁴⁸ but they did not find anything they could do, for all the people were spellbound by what they heard.

Years ago I knew a pastor who served at a church where fund-raising was a constant presence. They had bake sales and rummage sales, car washes and dinners, service auctions and raffles; you name it, they had it. Their whole life together seemed to be about raising money for the church. This disturbed my friend for a number of reasons, but primarily because it seemed that selling stuff was what the church was known for. One day he told me, "I am going to tell the Church Board, 'If you don't call a halt to all this fund-raising and get back to the business of ministry, I'm leaving.'" He didn't really know what they would say. As it turned out, this passage from Luke was critical in their decision. They decided that they had indeed made the house of God into a house of commerce, and they changed their ways. What a joy for my friend. The Word of God had convicted them, they had cleaned house, ended their practice of selling things, and had gotten back to the reason for their existence: proclaiming and living out God's love. We do well to remember that as disciples of Christ we are called always to ministry. Yes, fund-raising has its place, but only to the extent that it furthers the mission of Christ. We must keep the number one thing, number one.

Prayer

Let your house of prayer be forever a house of prayer, O Lord. Keep us from falling into patterns that do not honor you. Keep us from being distracted by money and all of its allure, and lead us in the way aright. We ask this in Jesus' name. AMEN.

Friday

Acts 17:16-21

¹⁶ While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was deeply distressed to see that the city was full of idols. ¹⁷ So he argued in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons and also in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there. ¹⁸ Also some Epicurean and Stoic philosophers debated with him. Some said, "What does this pretentious babbler want to say?" Others said, "He seems to be a proclaimer of foreign divinities." (This was because he was telling the good news about Jesus and the resurrection.) ¹⁹ So they took him and brought him to the Areopagus and asked him, "May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? ²⁰ It sounds rather strange to us, so we would like to know what it means." ²¹ Now all the Athenians and the foreigners living there would spend their time in nothing but telling or hearing something new.

The description of the folks living in Athens, that they spent their time "in nothing but telling or hearing something new," sounds like a very modern situation. Today we find people pursuing all kinds of exotic spiritual practices in hopes of connecting with God, but somehow overlooking the fact that classic spiritual practices like prayer, meditation, journaling, Bible reading, prayer, and acts of devotion have sustained people for centuries. It's almost as if, if the practice is not "new" it's not relevant. And predictably, when this newest thing doesn't work out, then they have to move on to the next "new" thing. Finding new ways of connecting with God is, of course, laudable; however, it seems wise to continue to practice the ancient practices as well since they are tried and true. As the writer to the Hebrews said, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever."

Prayer

Thank you, Almighty and Ever-living God, that you are the same from one age to another. Thank you also for your continual invitation to come into your embrace. Grant us your presence each day that we might be filled with joy, knowing that you are our God, today and tomorrow and forever. In your holy name we pray. AMEN.