



Mount Olive Devotions by Pastor Glenn Monson

The Eleventh Week After Pentecost (August 22 – 26, 2022)

Monday

Psalm 119:73-80

⁷³Your hands have made and fashioned me; give me understanding that

I may learn your commandments.

⁷⁴Those who fear you shall see me and rejoice, because I have hoped in your word.

⁷⁵I know, O LORD, that your judgments are right and that in faithfulness you have humbled me.

⁷⁶Let your steadfast love become my comfort according to your promise to your servant.

⁷⁷Let your mercy come to me, that I may live, for your law is my delight.

⁷⁸Let the arrogant be put to shame, for they have subverted me with guile;

as for me, I will meditate on your precepts.

⁷⁹Let those who fear you turn to me, so that they may know your decrees.

⁸⁰May my heart be blameless in your statutes, so that I may not be put to shame.

Psalm 119 has 22 stanzas of 8 verses each. There is a stanza for each letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Clearly this is a memory device for students of the Hebrew Bible. The entire psalm is in praise of God's wisdom. Note the many names that are given to God's wisdom here: your commandments, word, judgments, promise, law, precepts, decrees, statutes – eight different names for God's wisdom. A person could meditate profitably on each of these verses, but several strike me: (vs. 73) "Your hands have made and fashioned me; give me understanding..." Here the psalmist is remembering that God, as Creator, is the best source for wisdom on how to live. This makes sense. The Creator of life knows what best gives health and strength to that life. (vs. 75) "In your faithfulness you have humbled me." In this verse the psalmist is thanking God for humbling him with God's judgments. In other words, he is thanking God for correcting him. I wonder how often we do this. If you have never done it, I encourage you to spend some time with Psalm 119, meditating on each of these precepts. God's wisdom is there.

Prayer

We praise you for your wisdom, Holy One. We thank you for the gift of your Word, and your people who have preserved this wisdom for us down through the generations. Help us to be good stewards of your Word, and to live in its wisdom each day. In your holy name we pray. AMEN.

Tuesday

Joshua 23:1-3, 6-8

A long time afterward, when the LORD had given rest to Israel from all their enemies all around and Joshua was old and well advanced in years, ² Joshua summoned all Israel, their elders and heads, their judges and officers, and said to them, "I am now old and well advanced in years, ³ and you

have seen all that the LORD your God has done to all these nations for your sake, for it is the LORD your God who has fought for you. ⁶Therefore be very steadfast to observe and do all that is written in the book of the law of Moses, turning aside from it neither to the right nor to the left, ⁷so that you may not be mixed with these nations left here among you, or make mention of the names of their gods, or swear by them, or serve them, or bow yourselves down to them, ⁸but hold fast to the LORD your God, as you have done to this day.

Joshua is an old man now. He has led the people of Israel through the time of conquest as they have entered the land and settled there. In his final speech to them, he reminds the people that God has fought for them and made this new home possible. As he is preparing to die he exhorts them to steadfastly observe the precepts which his predecessor, Moses, taught them, and not get mixed up in the practices of the pagans with whom they live. “Hold fast to the Lord your God,” he says. “Hold fast.” This is a good word for us today, as well. We might be tempted to think that any success we have had in our lives is all our own doing. This is never the case. Even if we have worked hard, we are all indebted to parents, teachers, mentors, even strangers who have done for us what needed to be done so that we could find success. God is a part of all of this too. The God who has made us is also the God who protects and sustains, encourages and supports us our whole life long. Given this, let us all heed the word of Joshua and “hold fast to the Lord our God.”

Prayer

Thank you for your abundant blessings, O God. Thank you for health and strength, for minds and bodies that work, for colleagues that inspire, for mentors that teach, and for all those who have blessed us so that we might thrive. Grant us humility and gratitude each day, and the willingness to be used by you so that others may thrive as well. In your holy name we pray. AMEN.

Wednesday

James 2:14-23

What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but does not have works? Surely that faith cannot save, can it? ¹⁵If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food ¹⁶and one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill,” and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? ¹⁷So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.

¹⁸But someone will say, “You have faith, and I have works.” Show me your faith apart from works, and I by my works will show you faith. ¹⁹You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder. ²⁰Do you want to be shown, you senseless person, that faith apart from works is worthless? ²¹Was not our ancestor Abraham justified by works when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? ²²You see that faith was active along with his works, and by works faith was brought to completion. ²³Thus the scripture was fulfilled that says, “Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness,” and he was called the friend of God.

It is well-known that Martin Luther called the Book of James “an epistle of straw.” He called it such because it contained no gospel word, but simply exhortations to do good works. One could conclude by this that Luther saw no value in good works. Quite the contrary, Luther saw *great* value in good works and, in fact, insisted that true faith *always* produces good works. He insisted that faith always shows itself in love. Perhaps the way we can reconcile Luther’s words and this passage from James is to say that faith that does not have works is not faith; it is something else. It is not merely a dead faith, but not faith at all. I like how the psalmist said it: “Trust God and do good.” That is the whole package.

Prayer

Grant us true faith, Generous Lord. Grant us hearts that are open to your leading and responsive to your call. Forgive us whenever we do not live in love. Help us trust you and do good all our days. In the name of Jesus we pray. AMEN.

Thursday

Leviticus 19:1-4, 32-37

The LORD spoke to Moses, saying:

² “Speak to all the congregation of the Israelites and say to them: You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy. ³ You shall each revere your mother and father, and you shall keep my Sabbaths: I am the LORD your God. ⁴ Do not turn to idols or make cast images for yourselves: I am the LORD your God.

³² “You shall rise before the aged and defer to the old, and you shall fear your God: I am the LORD.

³³ “When an alien resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the alien. ³⁴ The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the native-born among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.

³⁵ “You shall not cheat in measuring length, weight, or quantity. ³⁶ You shall have honest balances, honest weights, an honest ephah, and an honest hin: I am the LORD your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt. ³⁷ You shall keep all my statutes and all my ordinances and observe them: I am the LORD.”

Leviticus is a book of laws. Chapter 19 is an example. There are dozens of laws here. What is noticeable is the phrase following each law: “I am the Lord your God.” It is as though God is saying, “You must obey this law because of who I am. This law reveals my character to the nations. When you obey this law you tell the world what God is like.” So according to these laws what do we learn about God? We learn that God holds parenting in high esteem. We learn that Sabbath-keeping is important to God. We learn that things that we make must not be our gods. We learn that God lifts up the aged, and protects the alien in our midst. We learn that honesty and integrity in business practice is something that God values highly. In this day and age when politicians and profiteers regularly “play the god card” it is important to be discerning as to who exactly is following in the way of Christ and who is not. Perhaps the ancient book of Leviticus can be of some help.

Prayer

Thank you for your ancient wisdom, Holy One. Thank you for commandments which guide us and precepts that keep us from foolish living. Help us to heed your wisdom always, and to lead our children in the way of life. In your holy name we pray. AMEN.

Friday

John 3:16-21

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

¹⁷ “Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world but in order that the world might be saved through him. ¹⁸ Those who believe in him are not condemned, but those who do not believe are condemned already because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. ¹⁹ And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. ²⁰ For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. ²¹ But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God.”

In the gospel of John judgment is not something in the future, but rather it is the state in which one lives apart from Christ. In various places John calls it darkness or blindness or lostness. This is both terrifying and hopeful. It is terrifying because we realize that to live in total darkness or blindness or lostness is a terrible place to be, and none of us would wish to be there. It is hopeful in that we can be rescued from this place through the presence of Christ. We can discover places of light and hope and welcome as we experience the presence of Christ. Someone has said that evangelism is simply one beggar telling another beggar where to go for food. Perhaps in John’s parlance we might say that evangelism is simply one formerly lost soul shining the light into the darkness and showing others the way home.

Prayer

Lord Christ, embrace us, we pray. Keep us close to you lest we stray and find ourselves lost in the darkness. Use us to shine your light in the world, and bring all home to you. We pray this in your loving name. AMEN.