



Mount Olive Devotions by Pastor Glenn Monson

The 15th Week After Pentecost (September 19 – 23, 2022)

Monday

Esther 6:1-7, 10-11

On that night the king could not sleep, and he gave orders to bring the book of records, the annals, and they were read to the king. ² It was found written how Mordecai had told about Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king's eunuchs who guarded the threshold and who had conspired to kill King Ahasuerus. ³ Then the king said, "What honor or distinction has been bestowed on Mordecai for this?" The king's servants who attended him said, "Nothing has been done for him." ⁴ The king said, "Who is in the court?" Now Haman had just entered the outer court of the king's palace to speak to the king about having Mordecai hung on the pole that he had prepared for him. ⁵ So the king's servants told him, "Haman is there, standing in the court." The king said, "Let him come in." ⁶ So Haman came in, and the king said to him, "What shall be done for the man whom the king wishes to honor?" Haman said to himself, "Whom would the king wish to honor more than me?" ⁷ So Haman said to the king, "For the man whom the king wishes to honor, ⁸ let royal robes be brought, which the king has worn, and a horse that the king has ridden, with a royal crown on its head " ¹⁰ Then the king said to Haman, "Quickly, take the robes and the horse, as you have said, and do so to Mordecai the Jew who sits at the king's gate. Leave out nothing that you have mentioned." ¹¹ So Haman took the robes and the horse and robed Mordecai and led him riding through the open square of the city, proclaiming, "Thus shall it be done for the man whom the king wishes to honor."

This snippet from the book of Esther is near the climax of the story where the evil henchman, Haman, who has planned the hanging of Mordecai (one of the heroes of the story), is forced to honor Mordecai. It is a delightful reversal of fortune, and whenever I read it I think this story would make a great movie. Great reversals are what Jesus is all about. He champions those whom no one pays any attention to, calling them children of God. He blesses those who are poor and hungry, and gives warning to those who are rich and sated. Again and again he lifts up those whom the world ignores, and he ignores those whom the world adores. Whenever we are feeling lost or abandoned, battered and bruised, we can know that Jesus stands near. He is our Savior; he is the one who defies even death for us. After all, the Resurrection is the greatest reversal of all.

Prayer

Gracious Lord, Savior of us all, we thank and praise you for your care of us in our time of need. When all seems lost, you are our champion. When the world calls us cursed, you call us blessed. Grant us faith to hold onto you, even in our darkest hour, and to trust that you will bring us through. In your strong name we pray. AMEN.

Tuesday

Matthew 5:43-48

⁴³ “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ ⁴⁴ But I say to you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵ so that you may be children of your Father in heaven, for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. ⁴⁶ For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? ⁴⁷ And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the gentiles do the same? ⁴⁸ Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Talk about a high bar! Be perfect even as your heavenly Father is perfect? C’mon! Get real, Jesus! If, however, we look at the context of what Jesus is saying, we might better understand this command. Notice that the whole passage is about love: loving neighbor, loving enemies, loving those who love you and those who don’t, and greeting those you know and those you don’t. Over and over Jesus is exhorting us to love. Martin Luther says that this happens “when I *let love move* along on the true middle course, treating everyone alike and excluding no one.” Notice how Luther says that we “let love move” in us. This means we allow Christ, who *is* love, free reign in our lives. We don’t stifle the life of Christ within us, nor insist on trying to love on our strength alone. Certainly this is futile. But when we allow Christ to reign in our hearts, his love for all people shines through us, and we, being filled with Christ’s spirit, are given the ability to love even those whom we thought we could not. What a miracle this is!

Prayer

Come and live within us, Loving Lord. Send your Spirit into our small hearts and make them grow. Grant that our love for all people, even those with whom we struggle, might grow daily, until we are, in some regard, a reflection of you. We ask this in your strong name. AMEN.

Wednesday

Psalms 49:1-6, 10-12

¹ Hear this, all you peoples; give ear, all inhabitants of the world,
² both low and high, rich and poor together. ³ My mouth shall speak wisdom; the meditation of my heart shall be understanding. ⁴ I will incline my ear to a proverb; I will solve my riddle to the music of the harp. ⁵ Why should I fear in times of trouble, when the iniquity of my persecutors surrounds me, ⁶ those who trust in their wealth and boast of the abundance of their riches?
¹⁰ When we look at the wise, they die; fool and dolt perish together and leave their wealth to others.
¹¹ Their graves are their homes forever, their dwelling places to all generations, though they named lands their own. ¹² Mortals cannot abide in their pomp; they are like the animals that perish.

This psalm is called “The Folly of Trust in Riches.” Trusting in riches is folly, according to this writer, because riches will not buy immortality; they will not even buy a lasting memory. I recall being in a vast cemetery, called the Pantheon, in Paris one afternoon. We had heard that this cemetery contained the graves of some famous people, so we went, hoping to see at least a few people we had heard of. Sure enough, we saw the graves of Alexander Dumas, the author of “The Three Musketeers,” and Adolph Sax, the inventor of the saxophone, and Nadia Boulanger, a famous teacher of many of the world’s great composers. But the striking thing was, we had never heard of most of the people whose graves we walked by. Assumedly, if they were in the Pantheon, they were people of note, but we had no idea who they were. So it will be with us all. We might claim wealth, or genius, or even some measure of fame, but someday someone is likely to happen by our grave and say, “Who’s that?” So the wisdom of the psalmist: “Mortals cannot abide in their pomp; they are like animals that perish.”

Prayer

God of the Living and the Dead, we praise you for your immortal wisdom. We praise you that even though we perish, you do not. We praise you chiefly for your great love which extends to us even when we are dust. You are the God of the Resurrection, and forgotten though we may be, you will not forget us, but will raise us to new life, held forever in your embrace. All praise to you, Holy God. AMEN.

Thursday

Ephesians 4:17-24

¹⁷ Now this I affirm and insist on in the Lord: you must no longer walk as the gentiles walk, in the futility of their minds; ¹⁸ they are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of their ignorance and hardness of heart. ¹⁹ They have lost all sensitivity and have abandoned themselves to licentiousness, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. ²⁰ That is not the way you learned Christ! ²¹ For surely you have heard about him and were taught in him, as truth is in Jesus, ²² to put away your former way of life, your old self, corrupt and deluded by its lusts, ²³ and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, ²⁴ and to clothe yourselves with the new self, created according to the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

Do you like new clothes? I do not. Mainly I don’t like the *feel* of them. New clothes always seem to me to be stiff and scratchy to the skin, unlike old clothes that feel soft and comfortable. Now, of course, all clothes began as new clothes at some point, but that process of “breaking in” a new shirt or a pair of pants is just something I would love to avoid. I wonder if it’s not like that for us and the old self that Paul talks about in Ephesians. He says that we need to put away the old self, and be renewed in the spirit of our minds, and clothe ourselves with the new self. New self or old self – which one is likely to feel more comfortable? Probably the old self. Yes, it’s corrupt in some regard, maybe even in profound ways, but it’s what we are used to. It’s comfortable. Paul says to throw it in the garbage. The old self deludes us into thinking that following our desires (our lusts) is the way to

life abundant. That's a lie. The new self, the one fashioned by the Great Tailor, is the one that will make us look our best. Indeed, clothed in Christ, everyone looks fabulous!

Prayer

Clothe us in your holiness, Lord Christ. Take away anything that would rob us of the authentic life you offer. Renew our minds by your Holy Spirit, and lead us in your wisdom all our days. In your holy name we pray. AMEN.

Friday

Mark 10:17-22

¹⁷ As [Jesus] was setting out on a journey, a man ran up and knelt before him and asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" ¹⁸ Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. ¹⁹ You know the commandments: 'You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not bear false witness. You shall not defraud. Honor your father and mother.' " ²⁰ He said to him, "Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth." ²¹ Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, "You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me." ²² When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions.

The last line of this passage has always struck me: "He was shocked and went away grieving." Why? "For he had many possessions." This is not what we expect. Being rich *and* shocked and grieving just don't seem to go together. Why exactly was he shocked? Because Jesus had put his finger on a place of vulnerability for this young man. Why was he grieving? Because his possessions owned him, that's why. If he was grieving that indicates that he *wanted* to do what Jesus asked but he simply *couldn't*. He couldn't let go. Or perhaps better said, he couldn't break free of what was holding him. In the First Letter to Timothy we read that "the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil," and so it is. As the writer goes on to say, "In their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains." Imagine that: the pursuit of wealth not only leads us away from the faith, but also ensures much pain. We are like this young man who encountered Jesus: we can pursue wealth, or we can follow Jesus. We must choose.

Prayer

Keep us near you, Lord of Life. Protect us from those beguiling spirits that would suggest that wealth is the equivalent of the abundant life you desire for us. Give us contentment with what we have, and joy in sharing with others. We ask this in Jesus' name. AMEN.