



## Mount Olive Devotions by Pastor Glenn Monson

The Fifth Week After Pentecost (July 11-15, 2022)

### Monday

Acts 22:6-11

<sup>6</sup> “While I was on my way and approaching Damascus, about noon a great light from heaven suddenly shone about me. <sup>7</sup> I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?’ <sup>8</sup> I answered, ‘Who are you, Lord?’ Then he said to me, ‘I am Jesus of Nazareth whom you are persecuting.’ <sup>9</sup> Now those who were with me saw the light but did not hear the voice of the one who was speaking to me. <sup>10</sup> I asked, ‘What am I to do, Lord?’ The Lord said to me, ‘Get up and go to Damascus; there you will be told everything that has been assigned to you to do.’ <sup>11</sup> Since I could not see because of the brightness of that light, those who were with me took my hand and led me to Damascus.

Sometimes God chooses the most unlikely people to be God’s instruments. I remember one particularly challenging confirmation class I once taught. The disruption that was a regular part of that class came principally through a set of twins that lived up to the moniker “holy terror.” Those two boys were just impossible, to the point that one day I called their mother in and told her and them that I was at my wit’s end, and if they didn’t shape up I was going to kick them out of the program. Well, they settled down a bit, but as far as I could tell, never really got the message. Imagine my surprise when years later, after I had left that congregation, I learned that those boys had become important leaders in the youth group there. They were doing great things, using all their creative energies to give life and breadth to the program, instead of causing it to blow apart. St. Paul was like that too. When the Risen Lord came to him on the road to Damascus he was truly “a holy terror,” bent on destroying the Church. But by the time God was finished with him he was an evangelist and pastor whose work is still a blessing to the Church today.

### Prayer

Thank you, Lord Jesus, for St. Paul and other unlikely saints whom you have chosen to bring the gospel to the world. Grant us faith in your ability to use even all people to bring your good news to the world. And help us to be open to your call. In Christ’s name we pray. AMEN.

### Tuesday

Matthew 9:2-8

<sup>2</sup> And some people were carrying to him a paralyzed man lying on a stretcher. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, “Take heart, child; your sins are forgiven.” <sup>3</sup> Then some of the scribes said to themselves, “This man is blaspheming.” <sup>4</sup> But Jesus, perceiving their thoughts, said, “Why do you think evil in your hearts? <sup>5</sup> For which is easier: to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Stand up and walk?’ <sup>6</sup> But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins”— he then said to the paralytic—“Stand up, take your bed, and go to your home.” <sup>7</sup> And he stood up

and went to his home. <sup>8</sup> When the crowds saw it, they were filled with awe, and they glorified God, who had given such authority to human beings.

There is much to ponder in this healing story, but one line sticks out for me: “When Jesus saw *their faith* he said to the paralytic, ‘Take heart, child; your sins are forgiven.’” This whole miracle story apparently begins by Jesus recognizing the faith of the people bringing the paralyzed man to him, *not* the faith of the man himself. This is amazing to us because we always assume that what is essential in a healing is *the patient’s faith*, not the faith of others. Yet, here it is clearly the faith of those who cared for this man that sets things in motion. Non-western cultures would not find this story curious at all; they know the importance of community. Indeed, many cultures hold up the community as much more important than the individual. This is precisely what St. Paul meant when he wrote about the Body of Christ. He said, “When one suffers, all suffer, and when one rejoices, all rejoice.” We might add, “When one has faith, *all* have faith.” In other words, the faith of *the community* is what is crucial, not only the faith of the individual. How freeing this is, to know that even when *our* faith falters, the faith of God’s people is there to hold us up.

### **Prayer**

Thank you for your people, the Church, Lord Jesus. Thank you for the faith and love you give to your people. Thank you for the gifts you bestow on us. Thank you for the gifts that your people share with all of us and the world. Grant us all faith so that all may be healed. In your holy name we pray. AMEN.

### **Wednesday**

Psalm 68:32-35

<sup>32</sup> Sing to God, O kingdoms of the earth; sing praises to the Lord,

<sup>33</sup> O rider in the heavens, the ancient heavens; listen, he sends out his voice, his mighty voice.

<sup>34</sup> Ascribe power to God, whose majesty is over Israel and whose power is in the skies.

<sup>35</sup> Awesome is God in his sanctuary, the God of Israel; he gives power and strength to his people.

Blessed be God!

Psalm 68 is one of the oldest psalms in the Bible. This psalm pictures God riding on a chariot of storm clouds, bringing deliverance to the oppressed, and hope to God’s people. I wonder if Marvel Comics ever referred to this psalm. You know how the superheroes in those comics are always riding around on thunderbolts and such. Who knows, maybe the makers of Marvel Comics got their inspiration from the Psalms! The point is, *God is powerful*. The psalmist wants to make that point. “Ascribe power to God,” the writer says. But beyond that, notice what God does with that power: God “gives power and strength to his people.” This is something that no comic book character ever did. Yes, God has all power and strength, but with that incredible power God gives the same to people, so that God’s people can overcome their own enemies – unbelief, fear, despair, and doubt. So we shout with the psalmist, “Blessed be God!”

## Prayer

We praise you, Almighty God, for your strength and power. We praise you that our enemies are no match for you. We praise you that your love and concern for us includes fighting our enemies alongside us. Assure us always of your love and power, O God, and help us to have courage whenever we are called to fight the good fight. In your holy name we pray. AMEN.

## Thursday

Genesis 22:1-3, 7-8

After these things God tested Abraham. He said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." <sup>2</sup> He said, "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains that I shall show you." <sup>3</sup> So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him and his son Isaac; he cut the wood for the burnt offering and set out and went to the place in the distance that God had shown him. <sup>7</sup> Isaac said to his father Abraham, "Father!" And he said, "Here I am, my son." He said, "The fire and the wood are here, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" <sup>8</sup> Abraham said, "God himself will provide the lamb for a burnt offering, my son." And the two of them walked on together.

This well-known Old Testament story is one of the most troubling stories in all of Scripture. From our point of view this request from God seems utterly unthinkable. How could a good and gracious God ask this? What kind of a God would do this – test a person in this way? What is at least as startling is the fact that Abraham, apparently without hesitation, obeyed. At least if he did put up a fuss, it is not recorded. The writer to the Hebrews has an explanation for Abraham's obedience: "By faith, Abraham, when put to the test, offered up Isaac... He considered the fact that God is able even to raise someone from the dead – and figuratively speaking, he did receive him back." (Heb. 11:17-19). Another explanation is that Abraham, who lived in a culture where child sacrifice was not unknown, may have wrongly assumed that God was like the cruel gods of the culture that surrounded him. Perhaps he, unlike us, actually thought that God might make this demand on him. Imagine his delight when, at the end of this story, God is shown to be utterly *unlike* those false gods, ever merciful, ever loving, ever just.

## Prayer

Ever Gracious and Loving God, how we praise you for your never-changing love. How we praise you for continuing to be the Merciful One, the God of Steadfast Love, the Lover of All Life. Keep us from ever seeing you as cruel, merciless, or without regard for creation. Give us faith in you and in your Son Jesus, who is the face of all mercy, in whose name we pray. AMEN.

## Friday

Luke 8:42b-48

As he went, the crowds pressed in on him. <sup>43</sup> Now there was a woman who had been suffering from a flow of blood for twelve years, and though she had spent all she had on physicians, no one could cure her. <sup>44</sup> She came up behind [Jesus] and touched the fringe of his cloak, and immediately her flow of blood stopped. <sup>45</sup> Then Jesus asked, "Who touched me?" When they all denied it, Peter said, "Master, the crowds are hemming you in and pressing against you." <sup>46</sup> But Jesus said, "Someone touched me, for I noticed that power had gone out from me." <sup>47</sup> When the woman realized that she could not remain hidden, she came trembling, and falling down before him, she declared in the presence of all the people why she had touched him and how she had been immediately healed. <sup>48</sup> He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace."

There is an interesting image in this miracle story. Jesus says that he noticed that power had gone out from him. It's almost as if Jesus is pictured as a well or a storehouse of power from which others might receive what they need. Also it's interesting that access to Jesus' power warehouse is "on the honor system." Anyone can access it at any time; at least that's what seems to have happened here. This woman, who had been suffering for 12 years, reached out and touched the cloak of Jesus and his healing power flowed into her. It wasn't until later that we learn of her faith. Jesus' power came into her even despite Jesus not even knowing who she was. This is a hopeful story for us because it assures us that God's healing power is available to us as well. We certainly don't know why some prayers for healing seem to be answered and others not, but we pray, believing that it is God's will to heal. We pray, understanding that God's unlimited storehouse of power and love is available to us whenever we need it. Thanks be to God for God's abundant mercy!

## Prayer

We are ever in need of your healing power, O God. Illnesses of every kind beset us: mental and physical illness, emotional instability, addictions, and injuries galore. Grant us healing from your great storehouse of power. Grant our loved ones your protection and healing as well. In all things, provide your people wholeness which leads to joy. We ask this through Christ our Lord. AMEN.