



Monday

Psalm 53:1-5

¹ Fools say in their hearts, “There is no God.” They are corrupt, they commit abominable acts; there is no one who does good.

² God looks down from heaven on humankind to see if there are any who are wise, who seek after God.

³ They have all fallen away, they are all alike perverse; there is no one who does good, no, not one.

⁴ Have they no knowledge, those evildoers, who eat up my people as they eat bread, and do not call upon God?

⁵ There they shall be in great terror, in terror such as has not been. For God will scatter the bones of the ungodly; they will be put to shame, for God has rejected them.

It is an irony of our present day that the Russian novelist, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, wrote these words: “If God does not exist, everything is permissible.” It is ironic, since this seems to be exactly what is going on in the case of Russian President Vladimir Putin, who with his armies, continues to slaughter civilians and military alike in the war against Ukraine. The psalmist, in Psalm 53, makes the statement that when a person says “There is no God,” or its corollary, “I am my own god,” all sorts of perverse and horrific acts follow. We can now attest to the truth of this. The psalmist also calls such a person one “without knowledge,” certainly a precarious place to be. Finally, this writer predicts that those who live in this way, who inflict terror on others, will themselves come to the place of great terror. Perhaps what the psalmist is saying is that finally they will learn that there *is* a God in the heavens and how we live and treat our fellow human beings matters to this God. May it be so.

Prayer

Come to the aid of your people, O God, and hear the cries of those who suffer from violence and war. Cause the plans of those who would inflict violence on the world to be thwarted at every turn. Bring wisdom and courage to those who negotiate peace, and to all give a strong sign that you are near. We pray this in the strong name of Christ Jesus, our Lord. AMEN.

Tuesday

II Kings 4:1-7

Now the wife of a member of the company of prophets cried to Elisha, “Your servant my husband is dead; and you know that your servant feared the LORD, but a creditor has come to take my two children as slaves.”² Elisha said to her, “What shall I do for you? Tell me, what do you have in the house?” She answered, “Your servant has nothing in the house, except a jar of oil.”³ He said, “Go outside, borrow vessels from all your neighbors, empty vessels and not just a few.”⁴ Then go in, and shut the door behind you and your children, and start pouring into all these vessels; when each is full, set it aside.”⁵ So she left him and shut the door behind her and her children; they kept bringing vessels to her, and she kept pouring.⁶ When the vessels were full, she said to her son, “Bring me another vessel.” But he said to her, “There are no more.” Then the oil stopped flowing.⁷ She came and told the man of God, and he said, “Go sell the oil and pay your debts, and you and your children can live on the rest.”

There are a number of such miracle stories around the prophet Elisha recorded in the book of Second Kings. Upon reading them, we are struck by their fantastic nature. They seem to suggest that some sort of magic or supernatural powers have been given to Elisha. While we modern folk are likely very skeptical of the factual nature of such stories, it begs the question, “How much of life is truly understood?” I would argue that there is little that we *truly* understand, and that, in fact, mysteries abound even in everyday life. Why is one person born into a family with strength, health, and wisdom, while another is born into a family saddled with weaknesses of body and mind? Why is one nation blessed with abundant soil, water, and agreeable weather, while another knows only drought or flood or wasteland? Why do some come to faith in God and others do not? The questions are endless. I would submit that life is full of mystery, and our posture is best one of humble curiosity, even in the face of events we are certain couldn’t have happened. It may just be that God is at work in ways that are well beyond our imagination.

Prayer

Give us humble hearts and minds, O God. Teach us to listen, watch, and ponder, rather than insisting that we have nothing to learn. Give us joy in the mysteries of life, and fill us every day with your Spirit, so that we might have true wisdom and goodness. In the name of Christ, we pray.

AMEN.

Wednesday

Luke 9:12-17

¹²The day was drawing to a close, and the twelve came to him and said, “Send the crowd away, so that they may go into the surrounding villages and countryside, to lodge and get provisions; for we are here in a deserted place.” ¹³But he said to them, “You give them something to eat.” They said, “We have no more than five loaves and two fish—unless we are to go and buy food for all these people.” ¹⁴For there were about five thousand men. And he said to his disciples, “Make them sit down in groups of about fifty each.” ¹⁵They did so and made them all sit down. ¹⁶And taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke them, and gave them to the disciples to set before the crowd. ¹⁷And all ate and were filled. What was left over was gathered up, twelve baskets of broken pieces.

The story of the feeding of the five thousand is one of the few miracles stories of Jesus that is recorded in all four gospels. This makes it abundantly clear that the gospel writers were not shy about telling this story, but, in fact, wanted to be sure this story was remembered. We can decide to take it at face value, attributing the miracle to the divinity of Christ, and leave it at that, or we can look beyond that and ask what more this story is teaching us. One of the clear teachings here is that God is an abundant provider. “Do not doubt God’s abundant provision!” could well be a central teaching here. This miracle also seems dependent on the action of Christ, as he “blessed and broke” the loaves and fish. Many scholars have pointed out the similarity between these words and St. Paul’s words in describing Jesus’ actions at the Last Supper. Are we being pointed to Christ as the Bread of Life? No matter how you understand it, this story is full of good news.

Prayer

We praise and thank you, God of All Life, for your abundant provision for this earth. Sun, soil, and seed all come together to bring food to all creatures. You are a God of abundance. Grant us faith in your provision all our days, and let us take joy in all that your hand provides. In your holy name we pray. AMEN.

Thursday

Philippians 2:19-24

¹⁹ I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I may be cheered by news of you. ²⁰ I have no one like him who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare. ²¹ All of them are seeking their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. ²² But Timothy's worth you know, how like a son with a father he has served with me in the work of the gospel. ²³ I hope therefore to send him as soon as I see how things go with me; ²⁴ and I trust in the Lord that I will also come soon.

Having a faithful friend is a great gift. The Apostle Paul knew this well. He experienced both loyalty and betrayal from those close to him, but it seems that Timothy was the one person who never wavered in his loyalty to Paul. As Paul says here, Timothy is like a son to him. His commendation is interesting: Paul describes him as one who is "genuinely concerned for your welfare" while others seek only "their own interests." One of the newspaper columnists I regularly enjoy reading is a businessman named Harvey Mackay. Mr. Mackay is clearly a very successful business person and he is also very clear that success in business does not come from simply pursuing your own interests. His columns are filled with stories of successful people whose success includes being genuinely concerned for the welfare of others, sometimes to the point of enduring tremendous self-sacrifice. Loyalty, integrity, faithfulness, and perseverance, these are the qualities, according to Mackay, that are consistently found in those who find success. Perhaps what we have here is St. Paul lifting up his mentee, Timothy, as an example for others to follow, as they try to find good success.

Prayer

Thank you, Gracious God, for people of integrity and faithfulness. Thank you for business people whose aim it is to serve the broader community, even as they endeavor to provide for themselves and their families. Give your Church faithful pastors, leaders, and workers, that your gospel might go forth with vigor. Keep us from foolish and wasteful paths. Bless us with wisdom, we pray. In the name of Christ. AMEN.

Friday

Psalm 126

¹ When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream.

² Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy; then it was said among the nations, "The LORD has done great things for them."

³ The LORD has done great things for us, and we rejoiced.

⁴ Restore our fortunes, O LORD, like the watercourses in the Negeb.

⁵ May those who sow in tears reap with shouts of joy.

⁶ Those who go out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, carrying their sheaves.

This psalm is both a song of praise and a prayer for deliverance. The psalmist is remembering a time when the hope of God's people had dried up like a watercourse in the time of drought. Perhaps a trickle of hope flowed amongst the people, but even that was certain to eventually disappear. But then, like a mighty thunder storm, the deliverance of God came forth, and the river banks were overflowing. The hope of God was restored and those who had sown in tears reaped with shouts of joy. It is a common experience for us all to have "dry times" in our spiritual life. We may feel no closeness with God. Our prayers seem unanswered. The words of Scripture and the beloved hymns that used to bring us joy, now seem dull and dry. In those times we might even believe *our faith* has dried up. The psalmist would say otherwise. It might be that *joy* has dried up for a season, but faith has not, for even our complaints to God are evidence that our relationship with God is intact. Do not fear the dry times. The rains will come. God is faithful. Joy will return.

Prayer

Gracious God of All, you bless us with faith and joy. You give us the gift of your people to sustain us, even in times of weariness. Keep us from despair. Gather around us people who will remind us of your faithfulness. Bless us with your presence. In the Name of Jesus we pray. AMEN.