



Mount Olive Devotions by Pastor Glenn Monson

The Final Week After Pentecost (November 21 – 25, 2022)

Monday

Psalm 113

¹ Praise the LORD! Praise, O servants of the LORD; praise the name of the LORD.

² Blessed be the name of the LORD from this time on and forevermore.

³ From the rising of the sun to its setting, the name of the LORD is to be praised.

⁴ The LORD is high above all nations and his glory above the heavens.

⁵ Who is like the LORD our God, who is seated on high,

⁶ who looks far down on the heavens and the earth?

⁷ He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap,

⁸ to make them sit with princes, with the princes of his people.

⁹ He gives the barren woman a home, making her the joyous mother of children.

Praise the LORD!

This psalm is traditionally sung by Jewish families as they gather for the Passover observance. It is a hymn of praise that acknowledges that our God is unlike any other god, “high above all nations, whose glory is in the heavens.” As we make plans to be with family on Thanksgiving Day, this psalm might be a great way to begin the meal together. Even children could be encouraged to participate by thanking God for something for which they are grateful. Giving praise to God is always appropriate, and even more so when we gather as God’s people to give thanks for God’s blessings.

Prayer

There is none like you, Holy One. You are seated on high and yet you come to be amongst us in the person of Jesus. You are without sin and yet you come to be with us who are sinful. You are immortal and yet you come and dwell with us who are dust. How can we ever thank you, O God. There are not words to express your greatness. We praise you and thank you this day for all your greatness and love. AMEN.

Tuesday

Mark 12:41-44

⁴¹ [Jesus] sat down opposite the treasury and watched the crowd putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. ⁴² A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny. ⁴³ Then he called his disciples and said to them, “Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. ⁴⁴ For all of them have contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.”

When we read this familiar story we sometimes wonder how good Jesus is at math. We are told that rich people put large sums in the offering and the widow only gave two copper coins, yet Jesus says that the widow gave the most. How can that be? The answer is in the last line. We are told she put in “all she had to live on.” A better translation might be “her whole life.” What Jesus is teaching us here is that giving one’s life to God far outweighs any monetary gift we might give. When we give our life to God, we are giving God first place in our life; we are declaring our ultimate loyalty to God; we are saying that nothing is more precious to us than our relationship with God. That’s what the widow did. It’s true that she gave very little money, but she gave her whole self to God. Often overlooked is that all of us, no matter how much wealth we have or how little, are invited to do the same. We are invited every day to give our whole self to God, living in the joy and freedom of that relationship.

Prayer

Give us open hearts, O God. Give us hearts that are willing to put our whole lives into your hands. Help us to release into your safe-keeping all that we treasure, and to trust you for all that we need to live and grow. We pray this in the name of Jesus. AMEN.

Wednesday

Proverbs 14:12-20

¹² There is a way that seems right to a person, but its end is the way to death.

¹³ Even in laughter the heart is sad, and the end of joy is grief.

¹⁴ The perverse get what their ways deserve, and the good, what their deeds deserve.

¹⁵ The simple believe everything, but the clever consider their steps.

¹⁶ The wise are cautious and turn away from evil, but the fool throws off restraint and is careless.

¹⁷ One who is quick-tempered acts foolishly, and the schemer is hated.

¹⁸ The simple are adorned with folly, but the clever are crowned with knowledge.

¹⁹ The evil bow down before the good, the wicked at the gates of the righteous.

²⁰ The poor are disliked even by their neighbors, but the rich have many friends.

This section of Proverbs has to do with wisdom and folly. The image that is given is that we “wear” our wisdom and our folly. In other words, others can see it. The simple ones - that is, fools – “are adorned with folly.” When others look at fools, they see their foolishness. It is obvious. The clever ones – those who live wisely – “are crowned with knowledge.” Again, the world can see their wisdom, and it is a sign of royalty. One of my school teachers while I was growing up would sometimes recite this quote attributed to Abraham Lincoln: “You can fool all the people some of the time, and some of the people all of the time, but you can’t fool all of the people all of the time.” The wisdom writer of Proverbs would agree: eventually it will be known whether we are fools or wise ones.

Prayer

Give us wisdom, Creator of All. Give us clear minds and faithful counselors as we live our days. There is so much foolishness in the world. Keep us from its snares. Keep us faithful to you all our days. In your holy name we pray. AMEN.

Thursday

Deuteronomy 26:1-4, 8-11

“When you have come into the land that the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance to possess and you possess it and settle in it, ² you shall take some of the first of all the fruit of the ground, which you harvest from the land that the LORD your God is giving you, and you shall put it in a basket and go to the place that the LORD your God will choose as a dwelling for his name. ³ You shall go to the priest who is in office at that time and say to him, ‘Today I declare to the LORD your God that I have come into the land that the LORD swore to our ancestors to give us.’ ⁴ When the priest takes the basket from your hand and sets it down before the altar of the LORD your God, ⁵ you shall make this response before the LORD your God: ⁸ The LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with a terrifying display of power, and with signs and wonders; ⁹ and he brought us into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. ¹⁰ So now I bring the first of the fruit of the ground that you, O LORD, have given me.’ You shall set it down before the LORD your God and bow down before the LORD your God. ¹¹ Then you, together with the Levites and the aliens who reside among you, shall celebrate with all the bounty that the LORD your God has given to you and to your house.

This passage is a part of the First Reading appointed for Thanksgiving Day. As I read it I cannot help but think that those early settlers in North America, people we sometimes call the Pilgrims, might well have resonated with these words as they sat down to their first harvest meal in this new land. While much has been said about that first Thanksgiving, some of it historical and some of it legend, there is no doubt that these early settlers were Christians who came to this land seeking freedom from persecution. Their practices and beliefs did not match well with those of their fellows in their homeland, and so they left for parts unknown. It is not hard to imagine that as they lived through the hardship of that first year in this new land that stories from the Bible which spoke of the Israelites in the wilderness would have resonated with them. The Lord had brought them through a difficult time to a land “flowing with milk and honey.” They had survived. They would continue. They knew their life was a gift of God. Our lives too are a gift from God. As we celebrate this Thanksgiving Day, let us remember that the bounty that we enjoy comes from the Lord’s hand.

Prayer

God of Abundance, we thank you this day for all your blessings to us: family, friends, home, work, health, and faith. We live by your grace. Give us grateful hearts on this and every day, and make us agents of your generosity to all we meet. In Christ’s name we pray. AMEN.

Friday

I Corinthians 9:19-23

¹⁹ For though I am free with respect to all, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I might gain all the more. ²⁰ To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to gain Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though I myself am not under the law) so that I might gain those under the law. ²¹ To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (though I am not outside God's law but am within Christ's law) so that I might gain those outside the law. ²² To the weak I became weak, so that I might gain the weak. I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some. ²³ I do it all for the sake of the gospel, so that I might become a partner in it.

In this passage we hear St. Paul giving voice to his determination to “keep the first things the First Thing.” He says that he has all sorts of identities that he could claim: a freeman, a Jew, a person living under Jewish law, etc. Finally, however, those identities don't matter as much as the fact that he is an ambassador for Christ. He has been called to bring the Gospel to the world, and if that means abandoning some of his identities for a short time, then so be it. The Gospel is worth it. This is a challenge to us. We are often tempted to make unimportant things the First Thing. Maybe it's money or our status or our preferences around lifestyle. Whatever it may be, if we let these secondary things become the First Thing, they threaten our call to be ambassadors for Christ. We will need to learn to live with an open hand with some of our identities, so that we might be, as St. Paul says, “all things to all people” for the sake of the Gospel. It is what God calls us to.

Prayer

Use us in your service, dear Lord. Keep us from selfishness or stubbornness that limits how you can use us. Let us live freely, trusting that when we keep our relationship with you central in our life, life is lived in all of its fullness. We pray this in your holy name. AMEN.