



## Mount Olive Devotions by Pastor Glenn Monson

The First Week in Lent (March 7-11, 2022)

### Monday

Exodus 5:15-23

<sup>15</sup> Then the Israelite supervisors came to Pharaoh and cried, “Why do you treat your servants like this?” <sup>16</sup> No straw is given to your servants, yet they say to us, ‘Make bricks!’ Look how your servants are beaten! You are unjust to your own people.” <sup>17</sup> He said, “You are lazy, lazy; that is why you say, ‘Let us go and sacrifice to the LORD.’” <sup>18</sup> Go now, and work; for no straw shall be given you, but you shall still deliver the same number of bricks.” <sup>19</sup> The Israelite supervisors saw that they were in trouble when they were told, “You shall not lessen your daily number of bricks.” <sup>20</sup> As they left Pharaoh, they came upon Moses and Aaron who were waiting to meet them. <sup>21</sup> They said to them, “The LORD look upon you and judge! You have brought us into bad odor with Pharaoh and his officials, and have put a sword in their hand to kill us.” <sup>22</sup> Then Moses turned again to the LORD and said, “O LORD, why have you mistreated this people? Why did you ever send me?” <sup>23</sup> Since I first came to Pharaoh to speak in your name, he has mistreated this people, and you have done nothing at all to deliver your people.”

This passage is part of the account of the slavery of the Israelites in Egypt during the time of Moses. If you know the story, you know Moses arrived very late in this story, after the Israelites had been in slavery for many years. His call from God was to announce to Pharaoh that the Israelites needed to be freed. Predictably, this fell on deaf ears. What happened, as we note here, is that Pharaoh responded to Moses’ request by pushing the Israelites even harder. Understandably, when this happened, the Israelites were angry at Moses, for the one they thought would be their champion was now the one responsible for making their life even harder. Finally, Moses turned his frustration toward God, complaining that it was a mistake for him to ever have entered into this situation, thinking that he could make a difference. This story reminds us of what often happens when we begin the process of confronting a system that mistreats or harms vulnerable people. The ones responsible often do not take kindly to our overtures, and may even visit their annoyance at our suggestions with increased harm on those most vulnerable. This is bound to be discouraging to us who feel that God is calling us to stand up for these people. We might even complain to God as Moses did. But remember the end of this story: God’s people were eventually freed from slavery. It was not an easy road, but freedom came.

### Prayer

Almighty God, your call sometimes includes the work of confronting evil in our midst. We know this is so, and yet we often are reluctant to heed this call. Even when we do, we are easily discouraged. Grant us courage. Grant us wisdom. Use us to bring your kingdom on earth, we pray. In Christ’s Name. AMEN.

## Tuesday

John 12:23-28

<sup>23</sup> Jesus answered them, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. <sup>24</sup> Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. <sup>25</sup> Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. <sup>26</sup> Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor.

<sup>27</sup> “Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say—‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. <sup>28</sup> Father, glorify your name.” Then a voice came from heaven, “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.”

In the book of John, Jesus regularly refers to his dying as the place where he will be glorified. This is hard for us to wrap our heads around because we associate glory with triumph, strength, and victory, not with defeat and dying. Jesus helps us understand what this looks like by giving us the image of a grain of wheat. If you have ever planted a garden you know how this works. The first thing that must happen for new life to come is that a seed must be buried in the soil and give up its own life. A seed that remains only a seed, never buried in the soil and never planted, remains for all practical purposes, useless. But when it is buried and it loses its own life, life springs forth. A stalk appears. Buds appear. Fruit is borne. This is how it is with Jesus. His death and burial begin the process of new life for the world. His death begins the process of his glorification. His death begins the process whereby we also die to ourselves and are born again in Him. As we live in Christ and Christ lives in us, more and more we die to our own egos and agendas, and more and more we are drawn into the life of Christ. This then, leads to fruit borne in us - fruits of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. This is the glory Christ bears in us.

## Prayer

How can we thank you, Lord Christ, for your willingness to go to the Cross for us? Your love for us is beyond anything we can imagine. Grant us faith to follow you, to lose our lives for your sake, so that we might bear the fruit that brings you glory. In your holy name, we pray. AMEN.

## **Wednesday**

I John 2:1-6

My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; <sup>2</sup> and he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

<sup>3</sup> Now by this we may be sure that we know him, if we obey his commandments. <sup>4</sup> Whoever says, "I have come to know him," but does not obey his commandments, is a liar, and in such a person the truth does not exist; <sup>5</sup> but whoever obeys his word, truly in this person the love of God has reached perfection. By this we may be sure that we are in him: <sup>6</sup> whoever says, "I abide in him," ought to walk just as he walked.

It is a simple concept: if we say that we are followers of Jesus we should resemble Jesus. This is not to say that we can be perfect as Jesus was, only that those things that characterized Jesus should at least be recognizable in us. Sadly, in recent years it has become the practice of some to claim the name "Christian" and yet be willing to inflict violence on others. Indeed, pollsters have discovered that many people in our country who claim the title "evangelical" only understand that as a political affiliation, not a religious identity. We in the Evangelical Lutheran Church understand that the word "evangelical" means "good news," and so those that call themselves by that name, as we do, must be those who bear good news to others. It is not simply a political category. It is an identity. And what does it mean to bear good news to others? St. John tells us: to act and speak in the way that Jesus would – with compassion, wisdom, patience, and humility. How the world needs evangelicals to bear good news.

## **Prayer**

Forgive us, Lord, whenever we have claimed to be your disciples and then lived as those who do not know you. We are heartily sorry for the times in which we have done this. Forgive us and grant us a new start, a new way forward, following in your way. In your holy name we pray. AMEN.

## Thursday

Psalm 17:8-13

<sup>8</sup> Guard me as the apple of the eye; hide me in the shadow of your wings,

<sup>9</sup> from the wicked who despoil me, my deadly enemies who surround me.

<sup>10</sup> They close their hearts to pity; with their mouths they speak arrogantly.

<sup>11</sup> They track me down; now they surround me; they set their eyes to cast me to the ground.

<sup>12</sup> They are like a lion eager to tear, like a young lion lurking in ambush.

<sup>13</sup> Rise up, O LORD, confront them, overthrow them! By your sword deliver my life from the wicked,

In this psalm we hear the psalmist asking God to regard him as “the apple of the eye.” Perhaps you have heard this term before. This phrase comes from the notion that if you look closely into someone’s eye you can see your own reflection there. This then translates into a metaphor for one whose favor we enjoy. The psalm goes on to ask for deliverance from enemies who regard him without pity, enemies too great for him. There are times in all of our lives when we might pray such a prayer. Perhaps we literally are surrounded by those who wish us ill. Or perhaps our circumstances have become so difficult that it seems like the world is closing in on us. It is during times like this that we are encouraged to call out to God for deliverance. And when we do we can know that God hears us, and will respond. We are God’s children. Our God is never more than a prayer away.

## Prayer

Thank you for being our deliverer, O God. When we are beset by enemies within or without, thank you for protecting and guarding us. Grant us relief in times of trouble. Give us faith that you stand with us. Bless us with your presence, we pray. In the name of Christ. AMEN.

## Friday

Luke 21:29-36

<sup>29</sup> Then he told them a parable: “Look at the fig tree and all the trees; <sup>30</sup> as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near. <sup>31</sup> So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. <sup>32</sup> Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place. <sup>33</sup> Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

<sup>34</sup> “Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day does not catch you unexpectedly, <sup>35</sup> like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth. <sup>36</sup> Be alert at all times, praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.”

Just the other day, I noticed, for the first time, the buds on the young maple tree in our front yard. We typically adorn this tree with white lights for Christmas, and now that the snowbanks have somewhat melted and I can get to them, I was taking the lights off that tree. Even though I was still wearing my winter coat, and hat and gloves, while taking down those lights, there was no mistaking the fact that buds had already formed on that tree. Spring is on its way. Jesus reminds us that his coming is like this. Someday he will return to claim his place as Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier of the whole earth. It will be a day when life in all of its fullness is restored. He also tells us that signs of this day are all around us. Whenever acts of love, compassion and faith break through, those are like buds on the tree, reminding us of Christ’s imminent return. Whenever the powers of evil and disorder are defeated, those are like buds on the tree as well, reminding us again of the way of Christ which is emerging. So we look for signs of spring, in the world around us, in our own lives, and in the people of God, rejoicing whenever we do.

## Prayer

Thank you, Creating God, for signs of spring and signs of life amongst us. Thank you for the warm sun of your love, shining down on us every day. Thank you for people of faith who give us hope and encouragement. Grant your whole creation new life and wholeness as we await your coming. In the Name of Christ we pray. AMEN.