



Mount Olive Devotions by Pastor Glenn Monson

The 14th Week After Pentecost (September 12 – 16, 2022)

Monday

Psalm 119:97-104

⁹⁷ Oh, how I love your law! It is my meditation all day long.

⁹⁸ Your commandment makes me wiser than my enemies, for it is always with me.

⁹⁹ I have more understanding than all my teachers, for your decrees are my meditation.

¹⁰⁰ I understand more than the aged, for I keep your precepts.

¹⁰¹ I hold back my feet from every evil way, in order to keep your word.

¹⁰² I do not turn away from your ordinances, for you have taught me.

¹⁰³ How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!

¹⁰⁴ Through your precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way.

Psalm 119 is broken up into 22 sections of 8 verses each, all proclaiming the greatness of God's word. In this section the psalmist is reflecting on the wisdom that is in God's word, wisdom that has been important for people of faith down through the generations. Many of us can attest to the way that God's word, though ancient, continues to speak to us today. We find guidance, encouragement, and comfort there. We also find wisdom for being a good neighbor, for parenting, for aging, and even for healthy financial habits. Most of all, God's word proclaims to us God's everlasting love for us, shown most profoundly in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. In Christ is true wisdom, and the way to the abundant life God wants for us all.

Prayer

We praise and thank you, Almighty God, for the gift of your word. Thank you that your word continues to speak to us, to guide and correct us, and to redirect us in the ways of life whenever we need it. Give us open ears and open hearts to hear and respond to your wisdom. In Christ's name we pray. AMEN.

Tuesday

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, ² and he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

³ Now by this we know that we have come to know him, if we obey his commandments. ⁴ 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; ⁵ but whoever obeys his word, truly in this person the love of God has reached perfection. By this we know that we are in him: ⁶ whoever says, "I abide in him," ought to walk in the same way as he walked.

In this, John's first letter, he is warning his people about folks who understood faith in Christ to be mostly an intellectual affair. These people were called Gnostics, which is a word having as its root, "gnosis," which is the Greek word for knowledge. These Christians believed that faith was a matter of knowing some secret spiritual knowledge, and if you had that secret knowledge you were saved. John wants to correct that. He says that faith is not about knowing but about loving. Faith is not about secret knowledge, but public acts of mercy and justice. Faith is not about having some personal insight, but very much about living in community, and sharing joys and sorrows with other people of faith. These days, more than ever, we as people of faith, need to remember that "walking in the same way that [Jesus] walked" is absolutely essential. The world does not need people who claim to be followers of Jesus but live lives that are anything but Jesus-like. Luther said we are called to be "little Christs" for one another, and so we are.

Prayer

Gracious God, forgive us for sometimes "talking the talk" but not "walking the walk." Forgive us for claiming to follow you but failing to live that out. Convict us when we err. Show us the way forward. Strengthen us to live in Christlike ways this day and every day. In your strong name we pray. AMEN.

Wednesday

Deuteronomy 12:8-12

⁸ "You shall not act as we are acting here today, all of us according to our own desires, ⁹ for you have not yet come into the rest and the possession that the LORD your God is giving you. ¹⁰ When you cross over the Jordan and live in the land that the LORD your God is allotting to you, and when he gives you rest from your enemies all around so that you live in safety, ¹¹ then you shall bring everything that I command you to the place that the LORD your God will choose as a dwelling for his name: your burnt offerings and your sacrifices, your tithes and your donations, and all your choice votive gifts that you vow to the LORD. ¹² And you shall rejoice before the LORD your God, you together with your sons and your daughters, your male and female slaves, and the Levites who reside in your towns (since they have no allotment or inheritance with you).

It's interesting that the first thing the people of Israel were to do when they entered the Promised Land was to give an offering. Not just burnt offerings, but tithes and other donations were also commanded. Was it because a tabernacle building addition was being considered? Perhaps. More likely, it was commanded simply because, having received a whole new land and life from the hands of Almighty God, this was 'right and meet so to do.' In other words, given the generosity of God, the only appropriate response was to be generous in return. This is the same for us today. We are also commanded to bring offerings to God's house. In our day and age these offerings sustain and support our congregation and its mission goals, but more than that, these offerings are a tangible way of expressing our gratitude to God. God has given us so much in Christ. We are free and forgiven. We are children of God, heirs of eternal life. We are recipients of God's Spirit that inspires us every day. How can we not express our gratitude to this generous God?

Prayer

Thank you, God of Life, for blessings beyond number. Your abundance is our constant supply. We have all we need and more than we need. We are assured of an eternal home. We have all things in Christ. Accept our grateful sacrifices and our offerings to you. In your holy name we pray. AMEN.

Thursday

Luke 8:22-25

²² One day [Jesus] got into a boat with his disciples, and he said to them, “Let us go across to the other side of the lake.” So they put out, ²³ and while they were sailing he fell asleep. A windstorm swept down on the lake, and the boat was filling with water, and they were in danger. ²⁴ They went to him and woke him up, shouting, “Master, Master, we are perishing!” And waking up, he rebuked the wind and the raging waves; they ceased, and there was a calm. ²⁵ Then he said to them, “Where is your faith?” They were terrified and amazed and said to one another, “Who then is this, that he commands even the winds and the water and they obey him?”

Anyone who grows up on a lake knows how it is when the wind really comes up. The waves become whitecaps, and they are no longer harmless rollers, but heavy swells capable of swamping boats and even causing loss of life. Jesus certainly knew all about the wind and waves. Indeed, in Old Testament poetry, the wind and waves are a metaphor for chaos. The sea is considered a place of danger, filled with monsters and unknown perils. The sea is a place where a person is at the mercy of the elements. So when Jesus said, “Where is your faith?” he was not simply asking the disciples about their present worries, but about his care of them generally. “Do you not trust me? Did you think I brought you out here to die? Do you not remember that I have come to give life?” These are questions that Jesus might ask *us* when we are in the stormy days of life, when we are tempted to say, along with the disciples, “Do you not care that we are perishing?” Yes, Jesus cares that we are perishing, and he has come precisely to save us from those violent waves of sin and death that would destroy us.

Prayer

Thank you, Jesus for saving us from sin and death. Thank you for saving us from those dangers that threaten us and those voices that accuse us. Thank you, Jesus for being able to quiet the raging storm around us and within us, and give us peace. Be near us always, and bring us to everlasting life, we pray. In your holy name. AMEN.

Friday

Colossians 2:16-23

¹⁶Therefore, do not let anyone condemn you in matters of food or drink or of observing festivals, new moons, or Sabbaths. ¹⁷These are only a shadow of what is to come, but the body belongs to Christ. ¹⁸Do not let anyone disqualify you, insisting on self-abasement and worship of angels, initiatory visions, puffed up without cause by a human way of thinking, ¹⁹and not holding fast to the head, from whom the whole body, nourished and held together by its ligaments and tendons, grows with a growth that is from God.

²⁰If with Christ you died to the elemental principles of the world, why do you live as if you still belonged to the world? Why do you submit to regulations, ²¹“Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!”? ²²All these regulations refer to things that perish with use; they are simply human commands and teachings. ²³These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-imposed piety, humility, and severe treatment of the body, but they are of no value in checking self-indulgence.

Paul is taking on here what has sometimes been called “negative religion.” Negative religion is epitomized by what Paul calls “regulations”: “Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!” It is characterized by the old saying amongst some pious men who have been known to say, “I don’t drink, smoke, or chew, or go with girls who do.” On the surface the concept of negative religion seems to make some sense. Boundaries, after all, are important and even healthy. But negative religion finally is a joyless expression of life in God’s kingdom. It is joyless because it leaves out the essence of faith, which is love; love for God, love for neighbor, and love for God’s creation and even our own selves. Negative religion finally is self-absorbed, and all about our ability to keep rules, no matter how joyless and loveless they might be, and to be sure that we congratulate ourselves in this deadly task. Quite in contrast to this, God’s will is for us to live freely, joyfully, fully in love with God and God’s world in all of its expressions. This is a *positive* religion, one that Christ walked, and invites us to live out every day.

Prayer

Thank you, dear Lord, for inviting us into joy. Thank you for inviting us into a life of love. Grant us freedom from believing that life in you is all about rules. Lead us in the way of freedom, and help us to be a blessing to all we encounter. In Jesus’ name, we pray. AMEN.