



Mount Olive Devotions by Pastor Glenn Monson

The Fourth Week After Pentecost (July 4 – 8, 2022)

Monday

Psalm 5:1-5, 11-12

¹ Listen to my words, O LORD; attend to my sighing.

² Listen to the sound of my cry, my King and my God, for to you I pray.

³ O LORD, in the morning you hear my voice; in the morning I plead my case to you and watch.

⁴ For you are not a God who delights in wickedness; evil will not sojourn with you.

⁵ The boastful will not stand before your eyes; you hate all evildoers.

¹¹ But let all who take refuge in you rejoice; let them ever sing for joy.

Spread your protection over them, so that those who love your name may exult in you.

¹² For you bless the righteous, O LORD; you cover them with favor as with a shield.

Whenever I sigh and my wife hears me, she says, “What’s wrong?” She knows that sighing is a sign of weariness or worry or consternation. The psalmist here is sighing. Clearly this writer is weary of the wickedness that seems to have the upper hand, or the evil that will not go away. We all know what this is like. We too weary of wickedness and evildoers that seem to have their way in the world. We sigh when we see dictators prevail, and despots gain power. We groan when liars and grifters continue to gain influence. Yet, we stand with the psalmist who declares God’s truth that God does not delight in wickedness but in righteousness. God blesses the righteous, those who walk in the ways of integrity and compassion, those who live uprightly and seek out the common good. God will not abandon those who walk in God’s ways, but promises blessings evermore.

Prayer

Gracious and Merciful God, be near us in our sighing. When we are downhearted, lift us up. When we are weak strengthen us. When we are feeling as though we are all alone, remind us of your presence. You are our God. You stand with us. Give us faith. In the name of Christ, we pray.

AMEN.

Tuesday

Jonah 3:10-4:5

¹⁰ When God saw what [the Ninevites] did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed his mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them, and he did not do it.

4 But this was very displeasing to Jonah, and he became angry. ² He prayed to the LORD and said, “O LORD! Is not this what I said while I was still in my own country? That is why I fled to Tarshish at the beginning, for I knew that you are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from punishment. ³ And now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live.” ⁴ And the LORD said, “Is it right for you to be angry?” ⁵ Then

Jonah went out of the city and sat down east of the city and made a booth for himself there. He sat under it in the shade, waiting to see what would become of the city.

The book of Jonah is a very clever parable about repentance. Repentance is understood as turning away from a certain practice or way of thinking and turning anew toward something life-giving. Jonah was commanded by God to go to the hated city of Nineveh and preach repentance to the people. Jonah refused and famously ended up in the belly of a large fish because of it. Eventually *he* repented and did what God had commanded. Much to his dismay, when he *did* preach to the Ninevites, they repented, and Jonah knew what that meant: they would not be destroyed. He was not pleased. Notice Jonah's response, "I knew that you are a gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from punishment. And now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live." God's mercy was a scandal to Jonah. He would rather die than have God spare the Ninevites. He didn't want the Ninevites to repent; he wanted them judged! Jonah's attitude is one we may well recognize. Are there people that we would rather have God judge than forgive?

Prayer

Gracious God, forgive us for not wanting mercy for all. Forgive us for our failure to love our enemies even as Christ commands. Grant us your generous Holy Spirit so that we might gain a spirit of compassion and love for all. And grant us your mercy, we pray. In Jesus' name. AMEN.

Wednesday

Acts 8:26-31, 35-38

²⁶ Then an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Get up and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." (This is a wilderness road.) ²⁷ So he got up and went. Now there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of the Candace, the queen of the Ethiopians, in charge of her entire treasury. He had come to Jerusalem to worship ²⁸ and was returning home; seated in his chariot, he was reading the prophet Isaiah. ²⁹ Then the Spirit said to Philip, "Go over to this chariot and join it." ³⁰ So Philip ran up to it and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah. He asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?" ³¹ He replied, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to get in and sit beside him.

³⁵ Then Philip began to speak, and starting with this scripture he proclaimed to him the good news about Jesus. ³⁶ As they were going along the road, they came to some water, and the eunuch said, "Look, here is water! What is to prevent me from being baptized?" ³⁸ He commanded the chariot to stop, and both of them, Philip and the eunuch, went down into the water, and Philip baptized him.

The story of Philip the evangelist and the Ethiopian official is one of the most unlikely evangelism stories you will ever encounter. First of all, the evangelist is commanded to go to a place where he is likely to encounter no one – the wilderness. Second, when he does encounter a person, this person

is 1) a foreigner; 2) a eunuch; and 3) a court official, who happens, at that very moment, to be reading the Hebrew bible. Finally, to top it off, though they are in the wilderness, water suddenly comes into view and the official is baptized. It seems clear that God's Spirit was very active in causing these events to take place, no matter how unlikely. This story remains to this day a formative story for Ethiopian Christians. If you ask them they will tell you that this is where the Ethiopian Christian Church began, not with some European colonial missionaries who brought the gospel to their shores. Indeed, Ethiopia remains one of the only countries in Africa that never lived under colonial rule. Perhaps this story serves as a reminder to us to never underestimate God's ability to make the unlikely a part of history.

Prayer

God of all times and places, increase our faith in your eternal activity in the world. Grow our ability to see you at work in all circumstances, despite appearances to the contrary. Give us eyes to see you at work and faith to believe that you are growing your Church so that people everywhere might come to know the life that is truly life. In your Son's name we pray. AMEN.

Thursday

Mark 7:24-30

²⁴ From there [Jesus] set out and went away to the region of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know he was there. Yet he could not escape notice, ²⁵ but a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately heard about him, and she came and bowed down at his feet. ²⁶ Now the woman was a gentile, of Syrophenician origin. She begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter. ²⁷ He said to her, "Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." ²⁸ But she answered him, "Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs." ²⁹ Then he said to her, "For saying that, you may go—the demon has left your daughter." ³⁰ And when she went home, she found the child lying on the bed and the demon gone.

This story has long been a source of consternation to preachers. How could Jesus say these things? we say. How could he be so cruel? Actually, the truth is, he was doing what the people of his day would have assumed he'd do; he was paying no attention to a foreign woman. As a Hebrew rabbi, she had no right to even address him, much less ask him for a favor. Yet, Jesus *did* hear her, and hearing her, he rethought his position. We aren't told that Jesus paused at the woman's response to him, but it's not hard to imagine that there was some silence between the woman's response and Jesus' next words, for he says to her, "For saying *that*, you may go – the demon has left your daughter." In other words, "For believing in God's mercy with such fervor, for not be willing to let go of God's love for you and your daughter, yes, your request is granted." What a surprise that must have been to those who observed this. Mercy for this woman? Mercy for a foreigner? Mercy for one who has no claim on you? How *could* you Jesus? Yet, that's how God's love is: expansive beyond anything we can imagine.

Prayer

We praise you, Gracious God, for your vast storehouse of mercy. From your abundance we are forgiven again and again. From your abundance we are healed of our diseases, given strength in our weakness, and light in our darkness. Grant us grace every day to receive your gifts and live in gratitude. In your holy name we pray. AMEN.

Friday

Nehemiah 2:1-6

In the month of Nisan, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when wine was served him, I carried the wine and gave it to the king. Now, I had never been sad in his presence before. ² So the king said to me, "Why is your face sad, since you are not sick? This can only be sadness of the heart." Then I was very much afraid. ³ I said to the king, "May the king live forever! Why should my face not be sad, when the city, the place of my ancestors' graves, lies waste and its gates have been destroyed by fire?" ⁴ Then the king said to me, "What do you request?" So I prayed to the God of heaven. ⁵ Then I said to the king, "If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favor with you, I ask that you send me to Judah, to the city of my ancestors' graves, so that I may rebuild it." ⁶ The king said to me (the queen also was sitting beside him), "How long will you be gone, and when will you return?" So it pleased the king to send me, and I set him a date.

The book of Nehemiah is unusual in that Nehemiah was neither a priest nor a prophet; he was the cupbearer of a Babylonian king. In the first chapter of this book he receives a report from his brother Hanani that Judah was in a shambles. As he reports to the king, "The city, the place of my ancestors' graves, lies waste and its gates have been destroyed by fire." This gives him great sorrow. The king then says to him, "What do you request?" And he replies, "Let me return home to rebuild the city." His request is granted, but only on the condition that he will return to Babylon, which assumedly he does. Nehemiah is an example for us who will never be pastors or teachers in the Church that God is at work through *all* of us. We might be only "cupbearers of the king" (e.g. engineers, nurses, data analysts, teachers, day care workers, etc.) and yet God can use us for important tasks. What is required? Only a compassionate heart, a willing spirit, and a faith in God's call. God's people have never *all* been called to be professional church workers. No, God's work is done in many times and places by people of faith, heeding God's call.

Prayer

We are your servants, Holy One. We are those who live under your gentle rule, who know you as Lord and Savior, who honor you as Creator and Sustainer of all life. Help us see ourselves as agents in your work to bring life to the world. Use us again and again to bring your saving gospel to a world in disrepair. In the name of Jesus we pray. AMEN.