



Mount Olive Devotions by Pastor Glenn Monson

The Fourth Week in Lent (March 28 – April 1, 2022)

Monday

Romans 2:12-16

¹²All who have sinned apart from the law will also perish apart from the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law. ¹³For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous in God's sight, but the doers of the law who will be justified. ¹⁴When Gentiles, who do not possess the law, do instinctively what the law requires, these, though not having the law, are a law to themselves. ¹⁵They show that what the law requires is written on their hearts, to which their own conscience also bears witness; and their conflicting thoughts will accuse or perhaps excuse them ¹⁶on the day when, according to my gospel, God, through Jesus Christ, will judge the secret thoughts of all.

St. Paul, in this passage, is reminding his readers that the ancient people of God (i.e. the Jews) do not have any advantage in God's eyes over people who were not given God's law. As Paul says, everyone, by their actions, shows whether God's law is written on their hearts or not. Martin Luther, in his discussion of the behavior of Christians, famously argued that a person of faith simply cannot help but want to do good things. He said that good works follow faith naturally, like a well-rooted tree bears good fruit. Perhaps by taking both St. Paul's and Luther's words seriously, we are led to be watchful over what is "written on our hearts." What we spend our time reading, watching, and talking about are likely to find their way into our hearts. This in turn will bear fruit in our lives, either for good or for ill.

Prayer

Gracious God, give us attentive hearts and minds. Help us to discern what it is that will help us be more faithful, more compassionate, more generous, and more Christlike. Keep us from patterns of life that would lead us away from you, and grant us a generous portion of your spirit. We pray in the name of Christ. AMEN.

Tuesday

Luke 13:18-21

¹⁸He said therefore, "What is the kingdom of God like? And to what should I compare it? ¹⁹It is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in the garden; it grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air made nests in its branches."

²⁰And again he said, "To what should I compare the kingdom of God? ²¹It is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened."

Both of these parables speak of very small things that make a very big difference. They remind me of a saying that has stuck with me: “The moments add up.” The person who said this wanted to make the point that life is made up of little encounters, a word here, a word there, a gesture, a look, a small act of kindness or meanness; they all add up and make us what we are. Often we can remember a small word of affirmation or encouragement that someone whom we respect gave us that made all the difference. Conversely we can sometimes remember a word of discouragement or criticism that also was influential in the direction that we eventually took. We all have had dreams of doing something grand or being someone whom people recognize. While such dreams are wonderful, the fact remains that life is still lived one breath, one minute, one hour, one day at a time, and what we do with the moments we have is what will finally matter most. Will we be a tree that bears much fruit? Will we be a glorious loaf of bread whose very aroma makes people smile? As we use the moments that God gives us to bless others, the answer is Yes!

Prayer

Thank you, Generous God, for using us to bless others. Thank you for giving us the gift of moments in which we can make a difference in someone’s life. Help us to use our moments in the best ways possible, always seeking to bear the light of Christ in all we say and do. In your holy name we pray. AMEN.

Wednesday

Numbers 13:1-3, 25-28

The LORD said to Moses, ²“Send men to spy out the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the Israelites; from each of their ancestral tribes you shall send a man, every one a leader among them.” ³So Moses sent them from the wilderness of Paran, according to the command of the LORD, all of them leading men among the Israelites.

²⁵At the end of forty days they returned from spying out the land. ²⁶And they came to Moses and Aaron and to all the congregation of the Israelites in the wilderness of Paran, at Kadesh; they brought back word to them and to all the congregation, and showed them the fruit of the land. ²⁷And they told him, “We came to the land to which you sent us; it flows with milk and honey, and this is its fruit. ²⁸Yet the people who live in the land are strong, and the towns are fortified and very large; and besides, we saw the descendants of Anak there.”

The Israelites had a dilemma. The land that God had promised to give them was very desirable, but, not surprising, it was already occupied. Taking it over was not going to be easy. Furthermore the people of the land appeared to be very large, and the towns were well-fortified. What would they decide to do? One thing that is not highlighted in this account is that God had already promised to give them the land. Presumably, when God did this, God knew the land was already inhabited. Did the people of Israel remember this? This dilemma can be summed up by what St. Paul calls “faith versus sight.” When we live by sight, our lives are basically controlled by fear. We see obstacles

everywhere. We see risks in everything. We are frozen in place because the choices before us do not, and probably cannot, offer us any guarantees. When we live by faith, our lives are *not* controlled by fear. We still see obstacles and risks, and understand that success is not guaranteed, yet we hear God's call to action, and we step out, confident that, come what may, God will be with us. Life lived in this way often results in a few bumps and bruises along the way, but the richness of such a life makes all of those seem insignificant. "Sin boldly, but believe all the more boldly still," said Martin Luther. In other words, "Don't be afraid to make a mistake. God is with you."

Prayer

Generous God of All, thank you for calling us to bold living. Thank you for calling us out of our fears and into a life that truly is life. Keep us from being controlled by our fears; push us forward into daring acts of sacrifice and service, confident that wherever you lead us, you will support us all our days. In the Name of Christ we pray. AMEN.

Thursday

II Corinthians 4:16-5:5

¹⁶ So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. ¹⁷ For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure, ¹⁸ because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal.

⁵ For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. ² For in this tent we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling— ³ if indeed, when we have taken it off we will not be found naked. ⁴ For while we are still in this tent, we groan under our burden, because we wish not to be unclothed but to be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. ⁵ He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.

I have a friend who has ALS, Lou Gehrig's Disease. Nothing could be more true than to say that his "outer nature is wasting away." His "earthly tent" is being destroyed, and he groans, longing to be clothed in his "heavenly dwelling." What makes all the difference for him and his family is knowing that heaven awaits him. Someday his suffering will end, and he will be embraced fully by Christ in a place where "death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away." (Rev. 21:4). The fact is, *all* of us are dying. That's what it means to be mortal. And the older we get the more we notice it. It usually doesn't happen in such dramatic fashion as with my friend with ALS, but nonetheless, it is happening. For us mortals, the promise that we have been given the Spirit of God as a guarantee of our inheritance as God's children, makes all the difference. As children of God, our mortality does not define us; instead our relationship with God does. We are beloved. We are being remade in God's image through the work of Christ. In all our days, from our first to our last, we belong to God.

Prayer

Ruler of Life and Death, give us faith in you all our days. We know our days are numbered. Knowing that, help us to live each day fully, gratefully, in your service. When our last day comes, give us peace, and embrace us in your love. We pray in the name of Jesus. AMEN.

Friday

Luke 15:1-7

Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. ² And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, “This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them.”

³ So he told them this parable: ⁴ “Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it? ⁵ When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices. ⁶ And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.’ ⁷ Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.

Pope Francis once said this: “There are two ways of thinking and of having faith: we can fear to lose the saved and we can want to save the lost. We stand at the crossroads of these two ways of thinking.” Another way of saying what Pope Francis said is to say that we can either be controlled by fear or by love. Clearly, Jesus was advocating being controlled by love. In this parable, he was even lifting up God’s *extravagant* love that was downright reckless. Leaving behind the ninety-nine to seek one lost sheep? That seems reckless. But that’s what God did in Christ, and that’s what love does. It does not count the cost; it simply responds in love and then rejoices when the lost are found. Maybe our churches should be a little more like hospital emergency rooms, existing mainly to help the ill and injured, and a little less like health clubs for the fit and active. In any case, seeking the lost is definitely the way of Jesus, and that is our call as well.

Prayer

All Compassionate God, give us hearts of compassion. Give us an authentic desire to care for those in need, and to minister to those for whom life is difficult. Forgive us when we turn in on ourselves, only worrying about our own well-being. We are your children; we never need to fear. In the name of Christ, we pray. AMEN.