



Mount Olive Devotions by Pastor Glenn Monson

The Fourth Week of Easter (May 9 – 13, 2022)

Monday

Luke 5:4-9

⁴When [Jesus] had finished speaking, he said to Simon, “Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch.” ⁵Simon answered, “Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets.” ⁶When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break. ⁷So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both boats, so that they began to sink. ⁸But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, “Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!” ⁹For he and all who were with him were amazed at the catch of fish that they had taken.

The progression of faith present in this story is remarkable. Jesus asks Simon to put into the deep water and let down the nets. First, he gives a pretty good reason why that would be pointless, but kind of like a child begrudgingly obeying a parent, he says, “If you say so...” You can almost see him rolling his eyes and getting ready to say later, “See, I told you there were no fish there.” But, of course what happens, in spite of this less-than-enthusiastic obedience, is that the haul of fish is amazing. And what is Simon’s reaction? A definite step up in his faith journey: “Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!” Notice that his address to Jesus changes from Master to Lord. A master is one who has a following of disciples. A lord is someone who rules, someone who is in charge of others, perhaps even in charge of all things. In addition, Simon also recognizes his own unworthiness to be in the presence of this Lord. Perhaps Simon’s journey resembles your own. Perhaps you too have known Christ as Master, and now you know him as Lord. Perhaps you too once described yourself as a disciple of Christ, but now your whole life is in his hands. Or perhaps you are on that journey right now. Blessings to you as you journey on.

Prayer

We thank you, Gracious God, for allowing us the privilege of growing in faith. Grant that each day we might know you more closely, love you more dearly, and walk in your ways more faithfully. In the name of Christ we pray. AMEN.

Tuesday

Revelation 5:1-5

Then I saw in the right hand of the one seated on the throne a scroll written on the inside and on the back, sealed with seven seals; ² and I saw a mighty angel proclaiming with a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?" ³ And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it. ⁴ And I began to weep bitterly because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it. ⁵ Then one of the elders said to me, "Do not weep. See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals."

In typical Book of Revelation imagery, St. John is describing a vision he has had. In this vision he sees a scroll which contains the entire plan and purpose of God for the earth. But when the angel calls out for someone to come forward who can break the seals and make known God's will for all creation, there are none on earth, nor any above or below it, who are up to this task. John begins to weep. But just then, one of the elders, who is present in John's vision, calls out, "Look, the Lion of Judah. This One is the Conqueror of all our enemies. He can break the seals and open the scroll." The Lion of Judah is Christ, the one whom John calls earlier "The Lamb of God." Here Christ is seen not as the Lamb of God, holding a sacrificial role, but as a Lion, a mighty beast whose strength exceeds any other creature's. This is the amazing Christ we have. Jesus is not only truly a man and truly divine, but also truly a lamb and also truly a lion. His humility and majesty co-exist as in no other. Is this all beyond our comprehension? Yes. But we, like St. John, rejoice knowing that the One who breaks unbreakable seals is also the one who has died and been raised for us and our salvation. In him we live.

Prayer

God of Heaven and Earth, your majesty is beyond our understanding and your love deeper than anything we can imagine. Expand our hearts that we might gain a glimpse of your glory, and in so doing, live our lives in praise of you all our days. In your Holy name we pray. AMEN.

Wednesday

Psalm 23

¹ The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.

² He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters;

³ he restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name's sake.

⁴ Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil;
for you are with me; your rod and your staff— they comfort me.

⁵ You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

⁶ Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD my whole life long.

There are no more beloved verses in Scripture than Psalm 23. These words speak to us in so many ways and in so many situations. One of the images I particularly like is from verse 5, where we hear, “You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.” The scene is one where one’s enemies are forced to watch as God lavishes abundance on us. This is how it has seemed to me sometimes at the funeral of a person of faith. The person has died. Mourning is definitely happening. People are weeping, and the sting of death is very present. Yet, in the midst of this grief come t

these sounds of joy. Songs of faith are sung. Scriptures announcing Christ’s victory over death are proclaimed. And through their tears, worshippers confess their faith. As this happens I can just see the Devil raging, “But this can’t be! I have destroyed you! Death has won! You can’t possibly be joyful!” And yet it is so. A table of abundant grace has been laid out even in the presence of our Last Enemy, Death, and we announce, “Christ is Alive, and our resurrection is sure as well!” What a great scene this is!

Prayer

In this season of resurrection, we praise and thank you, Victorious One, for your victory over death. It is true, we are mortal, and yet we are children of God as well. Through you we are children of the resurrection, assured that because you rose, we shall rise as well. Death is defeated, and we fear it no more. All thanks and praise to you, Lord Christ. AMEN.

Thursday

Ezekiel 37:1-6

The hand of the LORD came upon me, and he brought me out by the spirit of the LORD and set me down in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. ² He led me all around them; there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very dry. ³ He said to me, "Mortal, can these bones live?" I answered, "O Lord GOD, you know." ⁴ Then he said to me, "Prophecy to these bones, and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. ⁵ Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. ⁶ I will lay sinews on you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am the LORD."

If you have never read Ezekiel 37, I urge you to read the whole chapter. It is a wonderful description of God's work in places of desolation. This whole scene hearkens back to Genesis 2 where we hear that "the Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils *the breath of life*; and the man became a living being." God's breath, or spirit, is what gives us life. It is what animates us. It is what takes us from being just a pile of skin, flesh, sinews, and bones, and makes us into God's image. I sometimes wish that we Lutherans had more regular spontaneous manifestations of the Spirit, like the Pentecostals do. I sometimes think it would be fun if, on a Sunday morning, people started calling out "Amen. Say it preacher!" I don't know what I'd do if people started speaking in tongues and rolling in the aisles, but I guess we would go with it. In any case, being spirit-filled, no matter how little we show it, is definitely one of the gifts of God. God's spirit is what gives us joy in sorrow, love in times of division, and faith in times of confusion. God's spirit gives us life.

Prayer

How we praise you, Lord God, for giving us your Spirit. Just as the Spirit descended upon Jesus at his baptism, so at our baptism, we were given that same spirit, and life was born anew in us. Renew us every day in our baptism, that we might be filled with your spirit and bear witness to the life you give. In Jesus' name we pray. AMEN.

Friday

John 10:31-39

³¹ The Jews took up stones again to stone him. ³² Jesus replied, “I have shown you many good works from the Father. For which of these are you going to stone me?” ³³ The Jews answered, “It is not for a good work that we are going to stone you, but for blasphemy, because you, though only a human being, are making yourself God.” ³⁴ Jesus answered, “Is it not written in your law, ‘I said, you are gods’? ³⁵ If those to whom the word of God came were called ‘gods’—and the scripture cannot be annulled— ³⁶ can you say that the one whom the Father has sanctified and sent into the world is blaspheming because I said, ‘I am God’s Son’? ³⁷ If I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe me. ³⁸ But if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, so that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father.” ³⁹ Then they tried to arrest him again, but he escaped from their hands.

Jesus made a simple statement: “I have shown you many good works from the Father. For which of these are you going to stone me?” It is really ironic, isn’t it, that Jesus is under attack for doing good works. He heals, he exorcises demons, he blesses, he preaches, and for this, he is under attack. Now, of course, his enemies claim that they are attacking him for blasphemy, but the truth is, they cannot abide his good works. Jesus’ works show too clearly their own failures. For they are leaders of the religious community in Israel, and they have been tasked with doing good works for the people, but for many reasons they have fallen short. It is as Mark Twain once quipped, “There is no such thing so annoying as a good example!” This is a lesson for us as well whenever we do good works and suffer for it. If we stand up for the marginalized, claim justice for the oppressed, and give aid to those who some say do not deserve it, we might well find ourselves under attack. We should not be surprised. As Rabbi Kushner once said, “Expecting the world to treat you fairly because you are a good person is like expecting the bull not to charge you because you are a vegetarian.” So it is.

Prayer

Give us courage, Lord, to do the works we are called to do. Give us resilience in the face of opposition. Give us strength when we falter. Give us faith that you stand with us in our call to bring justice to all. We are your people. Keep us near. In your strong name, we pray. AMEN.