



## Mount Olive Devotions by Pastor Glenn Monson

The 19th Week After Pentecost (October 17 -21, 2022)

### Monday

Nehemiah 13:15-18

<sup>15</sup>In those days I saw in Judah people treading winepresses on the Sabbath and bringing in heaps of grain and loading them on donkeys, and also wine, grapes, figs, and all kinds of burdens that they brought into Jerusalem on the Sabbath day, and I warned them at that time against selling food. <sup>16</sup>Tyrians also, who lived in the city, brought in fish and all kinds of merchandise and sold them on the Sabbath to the people of Judah in Jerusalem. <sup>17</sup>Then I contended with the nobles of Judah and said to them, “What is this evil thing that you are doing, profaning the Sabbath day? <sup>18</sup>Did not your ancestors act in this way, and did not our God bring all this disaster on us and on this city? Yet you bring more wrath on Israel by profaning the Sabbath.”

Nehemiah is a very unlikely reformer, and yet a reformer he was. He was not a priest, nor a prophet, but a layperson, a servant of the Persian King Artaxerxes. While serving as a cupbearer in the court he heard tales of his people in Israel living in disarray and dysfunction, and his sorrow over their state was such that the king asked him what was wrong. After Nehemiah described the reason for his anguish, the king gave him leave to go back home and see what he could do to help. In various ways Nehemiah then began to lead a renaissance and reform movement in Israel. As one of his final acts he even began to suggest reforms in piety, such as Sabbath practice, highlighted in this text. As we approach Reformation Sunday it is good to remember that the Church of Christ has always been in need of reforming. We get off track, we forget what is really important, we become engaged in pointless debates or fruitless quarrels. Faithful people like Nehemiah, courageous, hard-working, and lovers of God and God’s people, will always be needed in the Church. It is the way God continues to lead us in life-giving ways.

### Prayer

Thank you, Gracious God, for courageous reformers. Thank you for people who will take risks to say things that get our attention and cause us to reevaluate our priorities. Thank you for people who challenge us in love and who hold us close even while they lead us in truth. Guide us each day, we pray. In Christ’s name. AMEN.

### Tuesday

Hebrews 3:7-14

<sup>7</sup>Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, “Today, if you hear his voice,  
<sup>8</sup>do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, as on the day of testing in the wilderness,  
<sup>9</sup>where your ancestors put me to the test, though they had seen my works <sup>10</sup>for forty years.  
Therefore I was angry with that generation, and I said, ‘They always go astray in their hearts,

and they have not known my ways.’ <sup>11</sup> As in my anger I swore, ‘They will not enter my rest.’ ”

<sup>12</sup> Take care, brothers and sisters, that none of you may have an evil, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. <sup>13</sup> But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today,” so that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. <sup>14</sup> For we have become partners of Christ, if only we hold our first confidence firm to the end.

These verses in Hebrews remind us that we are dependent upon one another to remain faithful to Christ. “Going astray in our hearts” is how the writer describes what happens when we drift away from the faith. Perhaps this means that our desires change or our priorities and commitments change, but suddenly, without meaning to, we are drifting away from the community of faith. When this happens and we are no longer connected regularly to other followers of Christ, we can enter into an even more precarious place, “hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.” The antidote for this is for each of us to be vigilant in staying connected with our siblings in Christ. Have you noticed that someone hasn’t been around church for a while? Give them a call and tell them they are missed. Have you noticed that a person who went through a difficult time like the death of a loved one or a job loss or a major disappointment has been seen only seldom in worship? Drop them a card and tell them you are thinking about them. These acts of compassion and love can make all the difference in keeping a person as part of the Body of Christ or not. We are keepers, one of another.

### **Prayer**

God of Love and Compassion, we thank you for the people of God, your Church. We thank you for those who love us and listen to us and both celebrate with and console us. We could not be the people we are without them. Give us hearts that love and listen, celebrate and console, that all your people may be found ever close to you. In your precious name we pray. AMEN.

### **Wednesday**

Luke 6:6-11

<sup>6</sup> On another Sabbath [Jesus] entered the synagogue and taught, and there was a man there whose right hand was withered. <sup>7</sup> The scribes and the Pharisees were watching him to see whether he would cure on the Sabbath, so that they might find grounds to bring an accusation against him. <sup>8</sup> But he knew what they were thinking, and he said to the man who had the withered hand, “Come and stand in the middle.” He got up and stood there. <sup>9</sup> Then Jesus said to them, “I ask you, is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath, to save life or to destroy it?” <sup>10</sup> After looking around at all of them, he said to him, “Stretch out your hand.” He did so, and his hand was restored. <sup>11</sup> But they were filled with fury and began discussing with one another what they might do to Jesus.

In the movie, *Chocolat*, a young mother and her daughter move into a quiet French town and open a chocolate shop. Her chocolates prove to be more than mere delicacies, however; they are life-giving. It turns out that the townspeople are held in moral bondage by a mayor who somehow

believes that strict piety will lead to the abundant life, and these little treats become a threat to that system. A few of the townspeople, some of them withering under the regulations imposed upon them, boldly step out of their moral cages and begin to come alive as they experience the freedom they have longed for. Other townspeople simply find joy in these new delicacies. Finally, the mayor himself succumbs to their allure. In his new-found freedom he finally sees life in all of its fullness and begins to lead the people in a new and joyful way. In much the same way, Jesus was showing us a new way. He made sure that we knew that saving life and doing good were far more important than any piety. He showed us that compassion rather than adherence to rules must be our concern. He showed us that sacrifice for the sake of the neighbor was more important than any offering we could ever give. He showed us the path of life.

### **Prayer**

Life-giving Christ, forgive us when we start to believe that rules lead to life. Forgive us when we act as though judging others is our main task. Remind us that love will always be our guide, and your compassion and sacrifice are our call. In your holy name we pray. AMEN.

### **Thursday**

Psalm 112

<sup>1</sup> Praise the LORD! Happy are those who fear the LORD,  
who greatly delight in his commandments.

<sup>2</sup> Their descendants will be mighty in the land;  
the generation of the upright will be blessed.

<sup>3</sup> Wealth and riches are in their houses, and their righteousness endures forever.

<sup>4</sup> They rise in the darkness as a light for the upright; they are gracious, merciful, and righteous.

<sup>5</sup> It is well with those who deal generously and lend, who conduct their affairs with justice.

<sup>6</sup> For the righteous will never be moved; they will be remembered forever.

<sup>7</sup> They are not afraid of evil tidings; their hearts are firm, secure in the LORD.

<sup>8</sup> Their hearts are steady; they will not be afraid; in the end they will look in triumph on their foes.

This psalm is remarkable in its promises to those who delight in God's commandments. At the outset we hear that they are *happy*. Then we hear that their descendants will be *blessed*. We learn that their good deeds will *endure*, in other words, they will be remembered. They are *a light*, a guide perhaps, for others. Things *go well* with them and they are *steady*, immovable. They are also *not living in fear* nor anxious about the days to come. Finally, they will look in *triumph* on those who oppose them. Do you know people like this? I can remember more than one faithful church member I have known whom this describes. It is true; they are unforgettable, steady, happy, immovable, and non-anxious. All of these characteristics are theirs. They do not fear death and even as they have grown old they continue to bear fruit and be a blessing to others. Perhaps this really is a recipe for the abundant life – to delight in God's commandments.

## **Prayer**

God of All Life, you have blessed us in many ways: with your Church, with your Word, with your Spirit, with your provision for all we need from day to day. How can we ever thank you. Give us hearts that delight in your commandments that we might always be found in your peace and joy. We pray this in Jesus' name. AMEN.

## **Friday**

Proverbs 18:1-8

The one who lives alone is self-indulgent, showing contempt for all sound judgment.

<sup>2</sup> A fool takes no pleasure in understanding, but only in expressing personal opinion.

<sup>3</sup> When wickedness comes, contempt comes also, and with dishonor comes disgrace.

<sup>4</sup> The words of the mouth are deep waters; the fountain of wisdom is a gushing stream.

<sup>5</sup> It is not right to be partial to the guilty or to subvert the innocent in judgment.

<sup>6</sup> A fool's lips bring strife, and a fool's mouth invites a flogging.

<sup>7</sup> The mouths of fools are their ruin, and their lips a snare to themselves.

<sup>8</sup> The words of a whisperer are like delicious morsels; they go down into the inner parts of the body.

These verses from Proverbs are some of my favorites, but none more so than the second verse:

“A fool takes no pleasure in understanding, but only in expressing personal opinion.” Perhaps this describes people who have always been with us, but especially today, in our media-saturated world, it seems like we are flooded with voices who have no interest in understanding anything, but only in spouting off. How wearisome this is. Conversely, how refreshing it is when we encounter a person who is actually seeking understanding and trying to find out the truth about one thing or another. The writer of these verses also goes on to say what the lips of fools produce: strife, ruin, and a snare. These too seem to be characteristics of people who have no pleasure in understanding. They do indeed cause problems and ruin wherever they go. We must commit ourselves to be people of humility and grace, ever listening for true wisdom and true insight, helped by others and helpful to others for the sake of the world.

## **Prayer**

Grant us wisdom, God of All. Grant us discernment so that when we encounter voices that sound authoritative but actually know little, we shall know them for who they are. Give us leaders who will lead us humbly, with grace, ever learning, ever seeking to hear the way you are leading them for the sake of the world. In Christ's name we pray. AMEN.