



Mount Olive Devotions by Pastor Glenn Monson

The Seventh Week After Pentecost (July 25 – 29, 2022)

Monday

Isaiah 56:3-7

³ Do not let the foreigner joined to the LORD say, “The LORD will surely separate me from his people,” and do not let the eunuch say, “I am just a dry tree.”

⁴ For thus says the LORD: To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, who choose the things that please me and hold fast my covenant,

⁵ I will give, in my house and within my walls, a monument and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off.

⁶ And the foreigners who join themselves to the LORD, to minister to him, to love the name of the LORD, and to be his servants, all who keep the Sabbath and do not profane it and hold fast my covenant— ⁷ these I will bring to my holy mountain and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar, for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.

These verses from the last section of Isaiah speak of God’s radical welcome. For most of Israel’s history it was understood that eunuchs (males whose sexual organs had been removed) and foreigners were not welcome in God’s house or amongst God’s people. Indeed the local synagogue was set up with very clear boundaries as to who could be present and how close they could be to the holy vessels and Scriptures. Isaiah’s new vision breaks down all those distinctions. Instead of bloodlines and heritage, origin and clan being most important, now faithfulness to God was the priority. Those who held fast to the covenant and did the things that pleased God now gave one “a name better than sons and daughters.” This is a radical statement. No more did those who were born outside of Israel have to fear that God would not embrace them. “For my house shall be called a house of prayer for *all people*,” says the Lord.

Prayer

How we thank and praise you, Almighty God, for your generous welcome of us all. Forgive us for ever believing that there are limits to your grace. As we have been welcomed, let us welcome others. In the name of Christ we pray. AMEN.

Tuesday

Matthew 9:27-34

²⁷ As Jesus went on from there, two blind men followed him, crying loudly, “Have mercy on us, Son of David!” ²⁸ When he entered the house, the blind men came to him, and Jesus said to them, “Do you have faith that I can do this?” They said to him, “Yes, Lord.” ²⁹ Then he touched their eyes and

said, "According to your faith, let it be done to you." ³⁰ And their eyes were opened. Then Jesus sternly ordered them, "See that no one knows of this." ³¹ But they went away and spread the news about him through all of that district. ³² After they had gone away, a demon-possessed man who was mute was brought to him. ³³ And when the demon had been cast out, the one who had been mute spoke, and the crowds were amazed and said, "Never has anything like this been seen in Israel." ³⁴ But the Pharisees were saying, "By the ruler of the demons he casts out the demons."

This passage reminds me of our present day media. Several amazing events happen – Jesus opens the eyes of a blind man, and casts out a demon from a man who had been mute – and immediately the spin doctors go into action. Some who witnessed the events are amazed, rejoice, apparently believe this Jesus is a man of God, and declare it to be so. Others – the opponents of Jesus who are eager to discredit him – interpret these spectacular events as the work of Satan. "Sure he has power; there's no denying that. But where does it come from?" They ask. Their aim is to sow doubt in the hearts of those who might be ready to believe. The obvious fact that the Pharisees failed to see, however, was that what Jesus had done was *life-giving*. He gave sight to a blind man, and speech to a mute. Satan has no interest in giving life to people. These life-giving acts were clearly of God because that's what God does. Whenever we are confronted with people who claim to know or do the will of God, the simple question we need to ask is, "Is what they are saying or doing life-giving?" As Jesus said, "By their fruits you shall know them."

Prayer

Give us discernment, Gracious Lord, whenever we encounter spectacular events. Grant us faith to see and believe your gracious work, and wisdom to know when the works before us are not of you. Thwart the efforts of Satan and other evil powers, and keep us all faithful to you. In your Son's name we pray. AMEN.

Wednesday

Psalm 64:1-8

¹ Hear my voice, O God, in my complaint; preserve my life from the dread enemy.

² Hide me from the secret plots of the wicked, from the scheming of evildoers,

³ who whet their tongues like swords, who aim bitter words like arrows,

⁴ shooting from ambush at the blameless; they shoot suddenly and without fear.

⁵ They hold fast to their evil purpose; they talk of laying snares secretly,

thinking, "Who can see us? ⁶Who can search out our crimes?

We have thought out a cunningly conceived plot." For the human heart and mind are deep.

⁷ But God will shoot his arrow at them; they will be wounded suddenly.

⁸ Because of their tongue he will bring them to ruin; all who see them will shake with horror.

This psalm is remarkable in that it compares bitter words to arrows. It lays out a scene where an enemy speaks ill of us secretly, without fear, and thinks “Who can see us? Who can search out our crimes?” This scene is one we seem to encounter regularly in the news these days. From the January 6 hearings in the Congress, for example, we have heard over and over of high government officials who have often done this very thing: slandering, lying, conspiring, and doing it all with impunity, saying, “No one will ever know.” Of course, as the psalmist points out, those who act in such ways forget that whatever they have been up to has not gone unnoticed by God. God sees all things, and as Jesus said, the day will come when all will be disclosed. This should give us pause if we are ever foolish enough to believe that any dishonesty can be hidden from God. As the old saying goes, “Honesty is the best policy.” It is also what God calls us to.

Prayer

Forgive us for our dishonesty, Lord. Forgive us, especially, whenever we have been foolish enough to believe that we can hide anything from you. Give us courage and faith to live lives of integrity and honesty, and to honor those who do. We pray this in the strong name of Christ our Lord. AMEN.

Thursday

I Corinthians 1:18-24

¹⁸ For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. ¹⁹ For it is written, “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.”

²⁰ Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scholar? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? ²¹ For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of the proclamation, to save those who believe. ²² For Jews ask for signs and Greeks desire wisdom, ²³ but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to gentiles, ²⁴ but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

The opening verse of this passage has always fascinated me. It suggests that “perishing” and “being saved” is not a static identity for any of us. In other words, both are ongoing. Perhaps it is even likely that all of us are at one point drawn to the life that is perishing, but then at another point drawn to the life that leads to salvation. This reminds me of a great scene in the C.S Lewis book, *The Great Divorce*, where a woman’s ghost and a Bright Spirit who had apparently been her brother meet. The woman’s ghost is clearly amongst those perishing and the Bright Spirit amongst those who are being saved. In the dialogue the ghost says to the Spirit, “You are heartless. Everyone is heartless. The past was all I had.” “It was all you chose to have,” said the Spirit. “It was the wrong way to deal with sorrow. It was Egyptian – like embalming a dead body.” “Oh, of course. I’m wrong,” said the ghost. “Everything I say and do is wrong, according to you.” “But of course!” said

the Spirit, shining with love and mirth so that my eyes were dazzled. “That’s what we all find when we reach this country. We’ve all been wrong! That’s the great joke. There’s no need to go on pretending one was right! After that we begin living.” (p. 93) This is what St. Paul meant when he said that God makes foolish the wisdom of the world. Someday we will find out we’ve all been wrong about lots of things. And then we will be free.

Prayer

Your wisdom is beyond our comprehension, O God. Our wisdom is so small. Give us humility to hold all our wisdom lightly and to trust in your amazing grace. In Christ’s name we pray. AMEN.

Friday

Job 19:1-7, 21-22

Then Job answered: ²“How long will you torment me
and break me in pieces with words?

³These ten times you have cast reproach upon me; are you not ashamed to wrong me?

⁴And even if it is true that I have erred, my error remains with me.

⁵If indeed you magnify yourselves against me and make my humiliation an argument against me,
⁶know then that God has put me in the wrong and closed his net around me.

⁷Even when I cry out, ‘Violence!’ I am not answered; I call aloud, but there is no justice.

²¹Have pity on me, have pity on me, O you my friends, for the hand of God has touched me!

²²Why do you, like God, pursue me, never satisfied with my flesh?

The book of Job is an argument about the justice of God. The friends of Job insist that Job is suffering because he is wicked. Job insists that this is not the case. Still his friends continue to beat this drum, unwilling to consider that suffering comes to the righteous as well as the wicked. In this passage Job cries out to his friends and asks them why they torment him. “Have pity on me, O you my friends,” he cries. He simply wants them to be supportive of him in his suffering instead of making everything worse. This reminds me of the children’s book, *The Rabbit Listened*, by Cori Doerrfeld. In this book little Taylor built a wonderful tower of blocks that came tumbling down simply because some pesky birds flew into it. Taylor was devastated. One by one, Taylor’s friends, the chicken, the bear, the elephant, and the kangaroo came by and gave their advice. Finally the rabbit came by and simply sat quietly with Taylor while she grieved her loss. That’s all Taylor wanted. We do well to remember stories like these whenever we are tempted to try to explain the cause of someone else’s suffering. Listening to them and being present with them might be all they really need.

Prayer

Gracious God, you have mourned with us and rejoiced with us. You have been near us in good times and in bad. Help us to be this way with others. Keep us from needing to explain all things, and show us the quiet way of love. In your Son’s name we pray. AMEN.