



Monday

Psalm 97:1-9

¹ The LORD is king! Let the earth rejoice; let the many coastlands be glad!

² Clouds and thick darkness are all around him;
righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne.

³ Fire goes before him and consumes his adversaries on every side.

⁴ His lightnings light up the world; the earth sees and trembles.

⁵ The mountains melt like wax before the LORD, before the Lord of all the earth.

⁶ The heavens proclaim his righteousness, and all the peoples behold his glory.

⁷ All servants of images are put to shame, those who make their boast in worthless idols;
all gods bow down before him.

⁸ Zion hears and is glad, and the towns of Judah rejoice because of your judgments, O God.

⁹ For you, O LORD, are most high over all the earth; you are exalted far above all gods.

This psalm reminds us of one of the most fundamental claims we make as people of faith: The Lord is king, there is no other. Or, as Martin Luther wrote in his Large Catechism: “You shall worship me *alone* as your God.” This is important to remember as we celebrate Memorial Day because sometimes it is easy to confuse allegiance to our country with obedience to God. We pledge allegiance to our country, yes. This means that we are loyal and devoted citizens, striving to uphold the highest ideals of our country. But to God we do more than pledge allegiance; we worship, we adore, we praise God for life. Our deepest desires and hopes are bound up in God. Our bond with Christ is beyond any bond we have with our nation, our neighbor, or even our own flesh and blood. Our very soul, that is to say, the core of our being, is claimed by God, for as St. Paul said, “We are not our own, but we have been bought with a price.” So as you celebrate Memorial Day today, and give thanks for our country, remember the God who is the Giver of all good things.

Prayer

We thank you, Giver of Life, for our nation. We thank you for the blessings that come our way as citizens of this country. Grant us humble gratitude for all we have received and a willingness to share eagerly our blessings with others. We ask this in Christ’s name. AMEN.

Tuesday

John 1:14-18

¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. ¹⁵ (John testified to him and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me.' ") ¹⁶ From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. ¹⁷ The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸ No one has ever seen God. It is the only Son, himself God, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.

I remember one particular time in my life when I was really discouraged. I was tired. I was broke. I felt like my life was going nowhere. It was during this period that I read this passage from John's gospel, and I was stopped dead in my tracks. "From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace." As I read that sentence I realized how true it was. My entire life had been one of receiving grace. My growing up days had been everything a boy could desire – good friends, a supportive family, a lake to swim and fish in right down the hill from the house, and on and on. My college days had also been filled with grace – wonderful teachers, new and life-long friends, a start to a life-long career, and many wonderful experiences. Grace upon grace, gift upon gift, all received without my deserving – that was my life story. How could I be discouraged? Counting blessings is an age old cure for discouragement. After all, as the old song says, "Since Christ is Lord of heaven and earth, how can I keep from singing?"

Prayer

Thank you, Generous God, for blessing us with so much. We are recipients of grace upon grace. Your forgiveness is unending. Your provision for our lives is abundant. Your people are a continual source of encouragement and support. Thank you for all your gifts. In your holy name we pray.
AMEN.

Wednesday

¹ Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD.

² Lord, hear my voice! Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications!

³ If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities, Lord, who could stand?

⁴ But there is forgiveness with you, so that you may be revered.

⁵ I wait for the LORD; my soul waits, and in his word I hope;

⁶ my soul waits for the Lord more than those who watch for the morning,
more than those who watch for the morning.

⁷ O Israel, hope in the LORD! For with the LORD there is steadfast love,
and with him is great power to redeem.

⁸ It is he who will redeem Israel from all its iniquities.

As I view the grief surrounding the shootings that took place in an elementary school in Uvalde, Texas last week, the opening verses of Psalm 130 ring in my ears, “Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord. Lord hear my voice!” The depths of grief, anger, and despair are certainly where this community lies right now. Parents and grandparents, brothers and sisters, teachers and fellow citizens, all grieve together over the deaths of these little ones and the two adults who were also killed. “Hear our voices, Lord!” we cry. “Hear our cries, Lord, that something be done to end this madness that plagues our nation.” The collective power of people of faith is strong. Perhaps the “great power to redeem” that the psalmist speaks of here is ours to claim. Perhaps God’s steadfast love for the world is the rock on which we stand as we cry out for an end to the powers of this world that perpetuate this violence.

Prayer

Lord God, come to our aid. Give us courage to confront the evil before us. Keep us from despair or indifference. Give strength to us all as we resolve to put an end to the systems that perpetuate violence in our land. We ask this in the strong name of Christ Jesus, our Lord. AMEN.

Thursday

Ezekiel 3:16-19

¹⁶At the end of seven days, the word of the LORD came to me: ¹⁷Mortal, I have made you a sentinel for the house of Israel; whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall give them warning from me. ¹⁸When I say to the wicked, “You shall surely die,” and you give them no warning and do not speak to warn the wicked from their wicked way in order to save their lives, those wicked persons shall die for their iniquity, but their blood I will require at your hand. ¹⁹But if you warn the wicked and they do not turn from their wickedness or from their wicked way, they shall die for their iniquity, but you will have saved your life.

This passage is a tough one. The prophet Ezekiel is being given an order here to bring a word of warning to the wicked. Do you know how tough that is? We don't usually want to warn the wicked about their impending doom; we would just as soon see them get what's coming to them. But the Lord says here, “Warn the wicked about the consequences of wickedness.” In other words, “Care about them. Love them as I do. Do not wish them ill.” I remember when I was a kid, taking wicked pleasure in seeing my siblings punished for their misdeeds. I thought, “It's about time they got what they have long had coming!” I had little compassion for them, but instead gloated in the fact that someone else was getting what I thought they deserved. God asks us to be better than that. God asks us to love as we have been loved.

Prayer

Forgive us, Lord, for our hard hearts. Forgive us for our unforgiving spirits. Forgive us for wishing ill to people that we don't like. Fill us with your spirit that we might find our way to the grace and mercy that you have shown us in Christ, in whose name we pray. AMEN.

Friday

Luke 9:18-24

¹⁸ Once when Jesus was praying alone, with only the disciples near him, he asked them, “Who do the crowds say that I am?” ¹⁹ They answered, “John the Baptist; but others, Elijah; and still others, that one of the ancient prophets has arisen.” ²⁰ Then he said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter answered, “The Messiah of God.” ²¹ He sternly ordered and commanded them not to tell anyone, ²² saying, “The Son of Man must undergo great suffering and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and scribes and be killed and on the third day be raised.”

²³ Then he said to them all, “If any wish to come after me, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. ²⁴ For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will save it.

This classic passage is a reminder that following Christ is not designed to bring fame and fortune to us. Yes, there are those who follow Christ who have become famous and wealthy, but the two are not related. Following Christ always has to do with “losing our life”. Following Christ is about listening for what Christ is calling us to and heeding that call, no matter the cost. The first disciples were sure that following Christ would mean being given places of honor and glory in his new kingdom on earth. They envisioned all sorts of honors and power coming their way. They soon found out that that would not be the case. What they were guaranteed, instead, was a way of life that brought blessing to others and all sorts of ups and downs to them. It is the same with us. Christ says, “Follow me, for in that is life, even life to the full.”

Prayer

We are your disciples, Lord. We are those who have decided to follow you. Help us to be faithful in this following. Help us to decide each day to give up our life. We know that the abundant life comes in following you. Grant us such life. In your precious name we pray. AMEN.