



Mount Olive Devotions by Pastor Glenn Monson

The Sixth Week After Pentecost (July 18-22, 2022)

Monday

II Samuel 13:23-29, 37-39

²³After two full years Absalom had sheepshearers at Baal-hazor, which is near Ephraim, and Absalom invited all the king's sons. ²⁴Absalom came to the king and said, "Your servant has sheepshearers; will the king and his servants please go with your servant?" ²⁵But the king said to Absalom, "No, my son, let us not all go, or else we will be burdensome to you." He pressed him, but he would not go but gave him his blessing. ²⁶Then Absalom said, "If not, please let my brother Amnon go with us." The king said to him, "Why should he go with you?" ²⁷But Absalom pressed him until he let Amnon and all the king's sons go with him. Absalom made a feast like a king's feast. ²⁸Then Absalom commanded his servants, "Watch when Amnon's heart is merry with wine, and when I say to you, 'Strike Amnon,' then kill him. Do not be afraid; have I not myself commanded you? Be courageous and valiant." ²⁹So the servants of Absalom did to Amnon as Absalom had commanded. Then all the king's sons rose, and each mounted his mule and fled.

³⁷But Absalom fled and went to Talmai son of Ammihud, king of Geshur. David mourned for his son day after day. ³⁸Absalom, having fled to Geshur, stayed there three years. ³⁹And the heart of the king went out, yearning for Absalom, for he was now consoled over the death of Amnon.

This tale of a murder between brothers is part of a larger more tragic narrative that happens between the children of King David. Absalom, David's son, has planned this murder in response to the rape of his sister, Tamar, by his brother Amnon. It is an act of revenge. Absalom feels justified in his actions partly because his father has failed to address the issue of his sister's rape. Needless to say, this family is a mess. We sometimes assume that families of godly men and women don't have any problems. We might think that if mom and dad go to church, are good to each other, and raise their children in a loving, supportive, and God-fearing home, that all will be well. Tragically this is not always the case. In fact, in faithful families, just like all families, problems inevitably arise: sibling rivalries, jealousy, envy, resentment, and yes, even hatred. Like King David, parents grieve over such scenarios but often feel helpless to make peace. In times like these we return again to our Lord's command to forgive not just seven times, but seventy times seven. In other words, forgiveness is *always* the place to begin.

Prayer

Help us, Merciful God, whenever we are tempted to live in resentment or long-held contempt of another. Free us from believing that somehow such behavior is life-giving. Release us from our resentments and grant us the grace to forgive as we have been forgiven. In the name of Christ, we pray. AMEN.

Tuesday

Romans 11:1-6

I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means! I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin. ² God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew. Do you not know what the scripture says of Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel? ³ “Lord, they have killed your prophets, they have demolished your altars; I alone am left, and they are seeking my life.” ⁴ But what is the divine reply to him? “I have kept for myself seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal.” ⁵ So, too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace. ⁶ But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace would no longer be grace.

St. Paul is speaking here about something very personal to him. He, a Jew, is wondering if God’s new covenant through Jesus Christ has nullified the covenant God made with Israel. His conclusion? By no means! When God makes a covenant, it is *forever*. God’s covenant people are and always will be God’s covenant people. It’s just that now that covenant is expanded. And beyond that, when we are tempted to despair that God’s people will someday be wiped out, Paul reminds us of the Lord’s word to the prophet Elijah: “I have kept for myself seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal.” Baal was the name of one of the chief gods of the culture in which Israel was embedded. God was saying, “Do not fear; faithful people will always be present.” This passage assures us of two things: God’s covenant is everlasting, and God’s ability to raise up faithful people is equally everlasting. In short, in all times and places God is at work, creating life and faith, hope and peace. We can count on that.

Prayer

We thank you, Gracious God, for your everlasting faithfulness, your boundless power, and your immeasurable love. We live by your gracious hand. Grant us faith to live in your promises every day, to take joy in your work within and around us, and strength to do what you call us to. In your holy name we pray. AMEN.

Wednesday

James 4:1-6

Those conflicts and disputes among you, where do they come from? Do they not come from your cravings that are at war within you? ² You want something and do not have it, so you commit murder. And you covet something and cannot obtain it, so you engage in disputes and conflicts. You do not have because you do not ask. ³ You ask and do not receive because you ask wrongly, in order to spend what you get on your pleasures. ⁴ Adulterers! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. ⁵ Or do you suppose that the scripture speaks to no purpose? Does the spirit that God caused to dwell in us desire envy? ⁶ But God gives all the more grace; therefore it says, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”

Adultery is the metaphor that the Bible has long used for idolatry. In the Old Testament, particularly, whenever God's people wander off to worship other gods, the prophets call them adulterers: they are wandering away from their First Love, and seeking pleasure with another. Here, in the book of James, the writer compares friendship with the world to adultery. He says, in effect, that if you "get into bed" with the ways of this world, you will inevitably be breaking your marriage covenant with God. This follows other verses in the New Testament that remind us that the ways of the Spirit and the ways of the flesh are opposed to one another. This metaphor of adultery is all the more powerful because it speaks of betrayal. God is our first love. God is the one who has cared for us and supported us and stood with us all our days. When we wander off to other suitors, we are betraying the very One who has loved us all the way to the Cross.

Prayer

Forgive us, Lord, for our wanderings. Forgive us for our penchant to leave behind all that is life-giving for that which promises only momentary satisfaction. Forgive us for betraying you in thought, word, and deed, and, at times, giving no second thought to it. We stand in need of your mercy. Have mercy on us, and draw us again close to you, that we may dwell in your embrace forevermore. In the name of Christ, we pray. AMEN.

Thursday

Galatians 3:1-5

You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly exhibited as crucified! ²The only thing I want to learn from you is this: Did you receive the Spirit by doing the works of the law or by believing what you heard? ³Are you so foolish? Having started with the Spirit, are you now ending with the flesh? ⁴Did you experience so much for nothing?—if it really was for nothing. ⁵Well then, does God supply you with the Spirit and work miracles among you by your doing the works of the law or by your believing what you heard?

We hear in this passage the central question of the Apostle Paul's theology: Is salvation by works or by faith? He is chastising the Galatians because they have apparently been duped into believing that it is because *they have been so faithful* in observing God's laws that they are loved by God. God has, to be crass, *paid them* for their service. To have this transactional view of God is a common temptation for us all. In our very language about heaven we often talk about rewards. The jokes that center on St. Peter's gate are all about this. Here's one: A preacher and a lawyer ended up together at the pearly gates where St. Peter greeted them with the words, "Welcome. Let me show you to your heavenly home." Walking down the lane St. Peter noted a small cottage in the wood and said to the preacher, "Here you go, Rev. Welcome to your heavenly home." "Very nice," said the preacher, "but what about him?" "Oh, don't worry about him," said St. Peter, "We have a mansion for him on the other side of town." "How's that fair?" said the preacher. "Well, it's like this," said St. Peter. "Guys like you are a dime a dozen around here, but we've *never* had a lawyer." This funny story is soaked through and through with a transactional view of God; our activity gets rewarded. St. Paul

reminds us that this is *not* God's way. God's way is the way of love, not the way of the marketplace. We receive far more from God than we could ever hope to earn. That's called Grace.

Prayer

Thank you, God of all Life, that your grace is endless and your love inexhaustible. Help us to live, believing in your love and grace, knowing that it all depends on you, not us. In your holy name, we pray. AMEN.

Friday

Psalm 22:25-31

²⁵ From you comes my praise in the great congregation;
my vows I will pay before those who fear him.

²⁶ The poor shall eat and be satisfied; those who seek him shall praise the LORD.
May your hearts live forever!

²⁷ All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the LORD,
and all the families of the nations shall worship before him.

²⁸ For dominion belongs to the LORD, and he rules over the nations.

²⁹ To him, indeed, shall all who sleep in the earth bow down;
before him shall bow all who go down to the dust, and I shall live for him.

³⁰ Posterity will serve him; future generations will be told about the Lord

³¹ and proclaim his deliverance to a people yet unborn, saying that he has done it.

Psalm 22 is a lament psalm; it is a cry for deliverance. It is striking, therefore, that this psalm ends with praise. Why is that? Because in the course of the psalm, the cries for deliverance are heard and answered, and the one in distress is given help. What is also striking is the extent to which this praise is spoken. First the writer says that "the great congregation" (i.e. the worshipping community) will praise God. Then it is the poor who will praise God, and then "all the families of the nations" join in. But the writer doesn't stop there: even "all who sleep in the earth" shall bow down. This means that those already dead will rise and praise God. And finally future generations and even "people yet unborn" will rise and praise God. Why? Because God is faithful today, tomorrow, and even beyond time. What this assures us is that God's faithfulness never ends. As St. Paul reminds us elsewhere, "Whether we live or whether we die we are the Lord's." And we might add, "And whether we live or whether we die we will praise the Lord," for God's faithfulness endures forever. Alleluia!

Prayer

We praise you for your faithfulness, Almighty and Gracious God. We praise you for your power and love. We praise you for your wisdom and compassion. Give us faith every day to live in trust of you. And as we near our final days, reminds us that even in death, we will praise you. In Christ's name we pray. AMEN.