



Mount Olive Devotions by Pastor Glenn Monson

The Tenth Week After Pentecost (August 15 – 19, 2022)

Monday

Psalm 66:5-12

⁵ Come and see what God has done: he is awesome in his deeds among mortals.

⁶ He turned the sea into dry land; they passed through the river on foot.

There we rejoiced in him,⁷ who rules by his might forever, whose eyes keep watch on the nations— let the rebellious not exalt themselves.

⁸ Bless our God, O peoples; let the sound of his praise be heard,

⁹ who has kept us among the living and has not let our feet slip.

¹⁰ For you, O God, have tested us; you have tried us as silver is tried.

¹¹ You brought us into the net; you laid burdens on our backs; ¹² you let people ride over our heads; we went through fire and through water; yet you have brought us out to a spacious place.

Psalm 66 is certainly a communal song of praise, but notice what the writer includes. It includes not only praise for God's mighty act of deliverance at the Red Sea (vs. 6) and God's rescue from slavery (vs. 12c), but also the times of testing and the burdens that God's people have borne. In other words, these words of praise do not come from the mouths of those unaccustomed to suffering and trials, but quite the opposite; these words come from those who have been tested greatly. This is important to remember lest we think that words of praise can only be spoken by those whose life has been easy. No, God's people have always experienced times of trial, and always will, even as we also have experienced God's deliverance and healing. So let the ancient people of God be our teachers this day as we look back at those times of deliverance and, even amidst suffering, give praise to God, knowing that God's faithfulness is sure.

Prayer

We praise you amidst our suffering, Lord Christ. We know that you also knew suffering in your lifetime and especially as you died. Keep us near you in difficult times, and strengthen our faith that in all times we might praise you. In your name we lovingly pray. AMEN.

Tuesday

Romans 7:14-25a

¹⁴ For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold into slavery under sin. ¹⁵ I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. ¹⁶ Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good. ¹⁷ But in fact it is no longer I who do it but sin that dwells within me. ¹⁸ For I know that the good does not dwell within me, that is, in my flesh. For the desire to do the good lies close at hand, but not the ability. ¹⁹ For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. ²⁰ Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it but sin

that dwells within me. ²¹ So I find it to be a law that, when I want to do what is good, evil lies close at hand. ²² For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, ²³ but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. ²⁴ Wretched person that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? ²⁵ Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!

This passage from St. Paul's letter to the Romans is perhaps the greatest piece ever written on what Luther called "bondage to sin." Luther understood that the human condition includes brokenness, a brokenness which we are powerless to fix ourselves. We are simply held by a power too great for ourselves. We might desire to be righteous, but the actual accomplishment of that eludes us. We need a power greater than ourselves to break out of this bondage, and that power belongs to Christ. Christ then is the One who comes and breaks the power of sin and gives us the freedom to live in love. Needless to say, even in this freedom we do not always choose love, but we now have a choice. And, lest we forget, whenever we choose the ways of sin, God stands ready to forgive. Such is the way of the Christian life.

Prayer

Thank you, Jesus, for coming to us in our brokenness and saving us from the ways of sin that bind us. We wish to do good, but so often we do not do it. Forgive us, Lord. Fill us with your Spirit, so that day by day we might grow in our desire and ability to follow in your ways. In your precious name we pray. AMEN.

Wednesday

II Corinthians 8:1-7

We want you to know, brothers and sisters, about the grace of God that has been granted to the churches of Macedonia, ² for during a severe ordeal of affliction their abundant joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. ³ For, as I can testify, they voluntarily gave according to their means and even beyond their means, ⁴ begging us earnestly for the favor of partnering in this ministry to the saints, ⁵ and not as we expected. Instead, they gave themselves first to the Lord and, by the will of God, to us, ⁶ so that we might urge Titus that, as he had already made a beginning, so he should also complete this generous undertaking among you. ⁷ Now as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in utmost eagerness, and in your love for us—so we want you to excel also in this generous undertaking.

This passage is one of the first examples we have in the New Testament of benevolence being commanded. St. Paul is writing to the believers in Corinth and he is lifting up the churches of Macedonia, who though very poor, gave generously for the needs of the Church in Jerusalem. It turns out that there was a famine in Jerusalem and so on one of Paul's trips abroad he passed the plate for the starving saints of Jerusalem. Notice what Paul lifts up: "they gave themselves *first* to the Lord

and, by the will of God, to us.” He is reminding the Corinthians that giving an offering, even a small one, requires one to *first* give oneself to the Lord. Indeed, it is this giving of oneself that is most important to God. Many of us regularly give an offering to the work of the Church. We often do this gladly without coercion of any kind. But if we lack joy in this giving, perhaps we can learn from the Corinthians, and spend some time giving *ourselves* to the Lord first. This may well be where joy is found.

Prayer

Grant us joy in our giving, Gracious Lord. Grant us the desire to be generous, especially when we are faced with siblings in Christ who lack basic necessities. Help our congregation be joyful and generous, so that all may have what they need for life. We ask this in Jesus’ name. AMEN.

Thursday

Luke 9:1-6

Then Jesus called the twelve together and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases, ² and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal the sick. ³ He said to them, “Take nothing for your journey: no staff, nor bag, nor bread, nor money—not even an extra tunic. ⁴ Whatever house you enter, stay there, and leave from there. ⁵ Wherever they do not welcome you, as you are leaving that town shake the dust off your feet as a testimony against them.” ⁶ So they departed and went through the villages, bringing the good news and curing diseases everywhere.

This command of Jesus to his disciples seems unthinkable to us in the modern Western world. We are so accustomed to individualism that we are aghast to think that Jesus would command his disciples to go out taking nothing for their journey: “no staff, nor bag, nor bread, nor money – not even an extra tunic.” What Jesus is reflecting here is a different understanding of life, where every person is dependent on everyone else. This we see even today in non-Western cultures. I remember a friend of mine from Sudan telling me that there are no homeless people in their culture. Even if a family already has a houseful, if a member of the community is without shelter it is the obligation of the community to take them in. He told me that though he and his wife had 8 children, a man without a home had been living with them for several weeks. This is the kind of culture that Jesus is reflecting here. He is saying to his disciples, “God will provide for you through the community of faith. Do not fear. God’s people will provide.” We, who so often fail to recognize our mutual dependence on one another could learn much from this.

Prayer

Thank you for the community of faith, Lord Jesus. Thank you for the way you use us to support those who bring the gospel to the world. Grant us generous hearts so that the work of the gospel might go forth with vigor. We ask this in your holy name. AMEN.

Friday

Acts 19:23-27

About that time no little disturbance broke out concerning the Way. ²⁴ A man named Demetrius, a silversmith who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought no little business to the artisans. ²⁵ These he gathered together, with the workers of the same trade, and said, “Men, you know that we get our wealth from this business. ²⁶ You also see and hear that not only in Ephesus but in almost the whole of Asia this Paul has persuaded and drawn away a considerable number of people by saying that gods made with hands are not gods. ²⁷ And there is danger not only that this trade of ours may come into disrepute but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis will be scorned, and she will be deprived of her majesty that brought all Asia and the world to worship her.”

There is an old saying, known to preachers, that there is a difference between preaching and “meddling.” I’m not sure where this comes from, but I know what it means. It means that preachers are welcome to preach anything as long as it doesn’t threaten the livelihood or lifestyle of those to whom it is addressed. This is what the apostle Paul ran into in Ephesus. He was preaching that the household idols fashioned by a silversmith named Demetrius were not actually gods, but only dumb idols. That meant that they weren’t worth purchasing, and therefore Demetrius and every other artisan like him were in danger of losing their business. Seeing this, they stirred up the crowd into a frenzied mob, hoping to run Paul and his companions out of town. Sometimes we are like the Ephesians, blinded to the fact that our “idols” are not worth worshipping either. Let us pray that if and when the day comes that a preacher’s words convict us of our need to leave our idols behind, we might be open to this call, repent, and walk in the way of truth.

Prayer

Forgive us for our idolatry, Lord of all. We know that there are no gods but you, Holy One, and yet we often find ourselves trusting the gods we can see and touch more than you. Forgive our wandering ways and lead us into the way of life. In your holy name we pray. AMEN.