



Mount Olive Devotions by Pastor Glenn Monson

The Third Week in Lent (March 21-25, 2022)

Monday

Psalm 105:1-6

¹ O give thanks to the LORD, call on his name, make known his deeds among the peoples.

² Sing to him, sing praises to him; tell of all his wonderful works.

³ Glory in his holy name; let the hearts of those who seek the LORD rejoice.

⁴ Seek the LORD and his strength; seek his presence continually.

⁵ Remember the wonderful works he has done, his miracles, and the judgments he has uttered,

⁶ O offspring of his servant Abraham, children of Jacob, his chosen ones.

The Apostle Paul, in his letter to the Philippians, exhorted us to rejoice always, no matter the circumstance. This psalm tells us how we can do that – by remembering “the wonderful works God has done, his miracles, and the judgments he has uttered.” These days it is easy to forget to give thanks and praise to God. What, with the war in Ukraine, pandemic fatigue, inflation, and all the other worries, just watching the news is enough to throw a person into depression. Perhaps we need to follow the psalmist’s lead and spend some time remembering the wonderful works of God, the miracles of healing and hope we have seen, and the wise words that have encouraged us and kept us afloat these days. On my better days I do something that never ceases to put me in a good mood in the morning: as I am just waking up, I lay there in the bed for a bit and start naming the people, the situations, the events, and the things I am most thankful for. Sometimes I lay there for quite a while thinking of my wife, my kids, my grandson, my church, my health, my colleagues, the opportunities before us, and on and on. I commend that practice to you.

Prayer

We praise and thank you, Gracious God, for all your goodness to us. We have seen your miracles of healing and hope. Thank you. We have been blessed by many people. Thank you. We have been encouraged, guided, and strengthened by your Word and by your Spirit. Thank you. Give us grace, each day, to live gratefully. In your holy name we pray. AMEN.

Tuesday

Numbers 14:11-18

¹¹ And the LORD said to Moses, “How long will this people despise me? And how long will they refuse to believe in me, in spite of all the signs that I have done among them? ¹² I will strike them with pestilence and disinherit them, and I will make of you a nation greater and mightier than they.”

¹³ But Moses said to the LORD, “Then the Egyptians will hear of it, for in your might you brought up this people from among them, ¹⁴ and they will tell the inhabitants of this land. They have heard that you, O LORD, are in the midst of this people; for you, O LORD, are seen face to face, and your cloud stands over them and you go in front of them, in a pillar of cloud by day and in a pillar of fire by night. ¹⁵ Now if you kill this people all at one time, then the nations who have heard about you will say, ¹⁶ ‘It is because the LORD was not able to bring this people into the land he swore to give them that he has slaughtered them in the wilderness.’ ¹⁷ And now, therefore, let the power of the LORD be great in the way that you promised when you spoke, saying,

¹⁸ ‘The LORD is slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, forgiving iniquity and transgression, but by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the parents upon the children to the third and the fourth generation.’

This passage is one of the most interesting in all of Scripture. Here we have a picture of a God who is fit to be tied, so much so that God is ready to annihilate all of Israel, and Moses is the one who talks God off the edge of the cliff. This is the kind of spirited dialogue with God that is common in the Hebrew tradition, but not so common amongst Christians. Perhaps it is long past time that we Christians follow the lead of our Hebrew siblings and allow ourselves the freedom to have some really frank conversations with God. It’s pretty clear that God can take it. So, if you are really mad at God, or really frustrated or sad, or just confused, go ahead, tell God about it. It might just be the very thing that will draw you even nearer to the God who loves you.

Prayer

God of All Life, we know that you are well aware of all our ups and downs. You have said that nothing shall ever separate us from your love. Hear us when we cry out to you, and give us grace to trust you in all our days. In your name we pray. AMEN.

Wednesday

Luke 13:22-30

²² Jesus went through one town and village after another, teaching as he made his way to Jerusalem. ²³ Someone asked him, “Lord, will only a few be saved?” He said to them, ²⁴ “Strive to enter through the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able. ²⁵ When once the owner of the house has got up and shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and to knock at the door, saying, ‘Lord, open to us,’ then in reply he will say to you, ‘I do not know where you come from.’ ²⁶ Then you will begin to say, ‘We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets.’ ²⁷ But he will say, ‘I do not know where you come from; go away from me, all you evildoers!’ ²⁸ There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrown out. ²⁹ Then people will come from east and west, from north and south, and will eat in the kingdom of God. ³⁰ Indeed, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last.”

There has been endless speculation down through the ages as to who finally will enter the kingdom of heaven. Some say the group will be surprisingly small. (An unsettling thought.) Some say it will be vast, beyond imagination. (Better!) One thing Jesus makes clear here is that there will be some surprises, for “some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last.” In the Gospel of John, Jesus speaks about eternal life as something that starts right now, not just after we die. He says that those who know him have life *right now*, and that to know him is to know life, now and into eternity. I like that. This view of things takes our eyes off “the sweet by and by” and puts our focus on the here and now, and what we can do to make this world more like the kingdom. Recently I heard a rabbi say that the brokenness of the world is an indication that God wants us to be busy fixing it. In other words, we are called to do all we can to bring the kingdom of God to fruition right now. And that’s a lot better use of our time than worrying about who’s in and who’s out.

Prayer

Gracious Lord, forgive us for ever claiming to know your mind or judgement. Forgive us for our tendency to view others as somehow unfit for your kingdom while declaring ourselves undoubtedly fit. Give us humility and an authentic desire to be a blessing to others, this day and every day. In your precious name we pray. AMEN.

Thursday

Daniel 3:13-18

¹³ Then Nebuchadnezzar in furious rage commanded that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego be brought in; so they brought those men before the king. ¹⁴ Nebuchadnezzar said to them, "Is it true, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods and you do not worship the golden statue that I have set up? ¹⁵ Now if you are ready when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, drum, and entire musical ensemble to fall down and worship the statue that I have made, well and good. But if you do not worship, you shall immediately be thrown into a furnace of blazing fire, and who is the god that will deliver you out of my hands?"

¹⁶ Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to present a defense to you in this matter. ¹⁷ If our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire and out of your hand, O king, let him deliver us. ¹⁸ But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods and we will not worship the golden statue that you have set up."

If you have never read the 3rd chapter of the book of Daniel, you need to; it's a dramatic story. In the above excerpt these 3 heroic Israelites refuse to bow down to the golden image that has been set up for veneration, even though they are faced with death if they do not. What is most remarkable is their testimony. They don't claim that their God will save them. They don't even ask God to save them. They simply say, "We will not serve other gods." Somehow that commandment to have no other gods is deep in their bones and they will not violate it, even if it means their life. This boldness is truly a remarkable thing. I can only understand it as a faith that the Spirit gives to those in such a situation. I don't think you can conjure up such a faith yourself. Could I do such a thing? Not without God's help. I have no illusion that somehow, come "hell or high water", I have a faith that will hold firm. But I do know that God can supply such a faith, should I need it. I am thankful for that.

Prayer

Give us an audacious faith, O God. Give us the ability to stay true to you and your Word even in the hour of tribulation. We are people of a feeble faith, sometimes wandering away from you at the slightest suggestion of difficulty. Come to us and strengthen us, Gracious God. In your precious name we pray. AMEN.

Friday

Romans 2:1-6

Therefore you have no excuse, whoever you are, when you judge others; for in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, are doing the very same things. ²You say, "We know that God's judgment on those who do such things is in accordance with truth." ³Do you imagine, whoever you are, that when you judge those who do such things and yet do them yourself, you will escape the judgment of God? ⁴Or do you despise the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience? Do you not realize that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? ⁵But by your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath, when God's righteous judgment will be revealed. ⁶For he will repay according to each one's deeds.

We store up lots of things these days. If you are like me, you have stuff in your garage that you haven't touched since you moved it there. Or you might have an attic or a cubby that has all of those treasures that you just can't part with. I have an endless assortment of golf hats that I have never worn – I have no idea why I keep them. Someday, maybe I will part with them – or not! One of the things we are advised against storing up is God's wrath. St. Paul says that when we are judgmental of others, the judgment we inflict on others is not credited to those we despise, but it is credited to *our* account. In other words, our wrath comes back to us and is stored in our garage! Yikes! In view of this, it's undoubtedly best to avoid storing up *any* amount of God's wrath. How do we do that? Simply by being gracious, forgiving, and forbearing with others. That's the best way to keep from storing up God's wrath.

Prayer

Forgive us, Gracious Lord, when we judge others. We are so tempted to put others down so that we can feel good about ourselves. What foolishness this is. Your mercy is endlessly available to all. Your love is immeasurable. There is no one who is outside your grace. Grant us humble and open hearts always, we pray. In Jesus' name. AMEN.