



Mount Olive Devotions by Pastor Glenn Monson

The 23rd Week After Pentecost (November 14 – 18, 2022)

Monday

John 10:11-16

¹¹ "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ¹² The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. ¹³ The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep. ¹⁴ I am the good shepherd. I know my own, and my own know me, ¹⁵ just as the Father knows me, and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. ¹⁶ I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.

When Jesus spoke these words he was speaking to the people about spiritual guides – teachers and members of the hierarchy charged with the spiritual care of the people. He clearly states the difference between a good shepherd and a bad one. While these words could well be directed at pastors today, I wonder if they might not also apply to elected officials. In the wake of our recent election might this description of a good shepherd serve well as the description of a faithful elected leader? A person of courage, integrity, and compassion, willing to sacrifice for the sake of the flock. Martin Luther was very clear that public officials have the same responsibilities before God as do spiritual leaders. Indeed he insisted that each person, regardless of their station in life, has the duty to see to the bodily and spiritual welfare of the community, and the ordained person and the layperson differ only in function, not in standing before God. In short, we are all keepers, one of another, and this is as true for leaders in the government as it is in the Church.

Prayer

Thank you for faithful leaders, Gracious God. Thank you for people of courage, integrity, and compassion. Thank you for leaders who have been elected who are now serving or will soon serve in important roles in our government. Protect them from wicked and dangerous voices. Give them keen ears to hear your guiding voice. Bless us all, we pray. In your holy name. AMEN.

Tuesday

Psalms 73:21-26

²¹ When my soul was embittered, when I was pricked in heart, ²² I was stupid and ignorant; I was like a brute beast toward you. ²³ Nevertheless, I am continually with you; you hold my right hand. ²⁴ You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will receive me with honor. ²⁵ Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire other than you. ²⁶ My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

The 73rd psalm is worth reading in its entirety. It is the struggle of a person who is envious of the arrogant rich. He sees their wickedness and their prosperity and wonders why God allows such as these to prosper. But at some point he realizes that wickedness and riches are a dangerous combination that lead inevitably to ruin. Finally, looking at his own situation he says, "I am blessed. Even though I am not rich, I am continually with you, O God. You guide me and honor me. You are my strength and portion forever." What the psalmist realizes is that the treasures he enjoys are *eternal*, secure for all time, while the treasures of wicked prosperity are anything but secure. The treasures God provides sustain us and lead us to joy, while ill-gotten gains only lead to misery and corruption. We do well to remember the words of St. Paul who said, "I have learned to be content with whatever I have. I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need. I can do all things through [Christ] who strengthens me." (Philippians 4:11-13)

Prayer

Thank you, God for the treasures we have in Christ. Thank you that these treasures are eternal, secure in your hands forever. Grant that whatever riches we may gain in this life, we might keep our eyes forever focused on that which is eternal, living in peace and joy all our days. In Christ's name we pray. AMEN.

Wednesday

Jonah 3:4-10

⁴Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's walk. And he cried out, "Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" ⁵And the people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast, and everyone, great and small, put on sackcloth. ⁶When the news reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. ⁷Then he had a proclamation made in Nineveh: "By the decree of the king and his nobles: No human or animal, no herd or flock, shall taste anything. They shall not feed, nor shall they drink water. ⁸Humans and animals shall be covered with sackcloth, and they shall cry mightily to God. All shall turn from their evil ways and from the violence that is in their hands. ⁹Who knows? God may relent and change his mind; he may turn from his fierce anger, so that we do not perish." ¹⁰When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed his mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them, and he did not do it.

This story about the repentance of a pagan city is a parable for any of us, who like Jonah, might assume that there are people whose corruption is so deep God could never reach them. Not so, says this parable. Yes, there are people that seem beyond help, but with God nothing is impossible. We see this sometimes in prisons where infamous criminals come to faith. We are often skeptical of such "jailhouse conversions," perhaps even, like Jonah, not willing to rejoice in such conversions or

even consider them sincere. But God's compassion and forgiveness is far beyond ours. God's word is clear, "If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just and will cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9). This is no less true for desperate criminals than for us. As Jesus said, "With God all things are possible."

Prayer

Forgive us, Gracious Lord, when we doubt the faith of others. Forgive us when we claim a measure of your grace, but refuse that grace for others. Forgive us when we believe that some sins are beyond forgiving and some people are beyond saving. Give us generous hearts, willing that none be lost, but all come to know the truth of the Gospel. In the name of Christ, we pray. AMEN.

Thursday

Luke 22:31-33, 54-62

³¹ "Simon, Simon, listen! Satan has demanded to sift all of you like wheat, ³² but I have prayed for you that your own faith may not fail, and you, when once you have turned back, strengthen your brothers." ³³ And he said to him, "Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death!" ³⁴ Jesus said, "I tell you, Peter, the cock will not crow this day until you have denied three times that you know me."

⁵⁴ Then they seized him and led him away, bringing him into the high priest's house. But Peter was following at a distance. ⁵⁵ When they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat down together, Peter sat among them. ⁵⁶ Then a female servant, seeing him in the firelight, stared at him and said, "This man also was with him." ⁵⁷ But he denied it, saying, "Woman, I do not know him." ⁵⁸ A little later someone else, on seeing him, said, "You also are one of them." But Peter said, "Man, I am not!" ⁵⁹ Then about an hour later still another kept insisting, "Surely this man also was with him, for he is a Galilean." ⁶⁰ But Peter said, "Man, I do not know what you are talking about!" At that moment, while he was still speaking, the cock crowed. ⁶¹ The Lord turned and looked at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said to him, "Before the cock crows today, you will deny me three times." ⁶² And he went out and wept bitterly.

What must Peter have felt like when the Lord turned and looked at him? Can you imagine the shame and guilt he felt after his betrayal? Here, he had boasted that he was ready to go to prison and death for Jesus, but when push came to shove, he could no more stand up for Jesus than a blade of grass can stand up to the wind. He toppled like the house of cards he was. Peter's story is a familiar one, of course. It is one we fear we could easily replicate. Would we be willing to stand up to persecution and threat for the sake of our confession of Christ if it came to that? We don't know. Most of us have never had to confront that scenario. There are times, however, when our faithfulness to Christ is challenged in common ways. We make choices every day about how we shall spend our time and money, who our friends will be, where our loyalties will lie, and what kind of culture we will embrace. We do well to look at the face of Jesus and remember that he calls us to confess him in all times and places, no matter the cost.

Prayer

We are not courageous disciples, O God. We are so much like Peter, wanting to be faithful, but faltering at the first threat. Give us courage. Give us faith. Grant us a measure of your Spirit so that when we are called upon to confess your name, we might do it boldly, trusting in your abiding presence. In the name of Christ, we pray. AMEN.

Friday

Romans 8:31-39

³¹ What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? ³² He who did not withhold his own Son but gave him up for all of us, how will he not with him also give us everything else? ³³ Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. ³⁴ Who is to condemn? It is Christ who died, or rather, who was raised, who is also at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us. ³⁵ Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will affliction or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or peril or sword? ³⁶ As it is written,

"For your sake we are being killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered."

³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than victorious through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

There are few passages in the Bible more comforting than these grand words of St. Paul: "Nothing in all creation is able to separate us from God's love!" What a promise. Yes, we suffer at times. Yet we are loved by God. Yes, we are threatened by forces around us at times. Yet we are held by God. Yes, we are accused falsely, betrayed, and even slandered because of our fidelity to Christ. Yet, we are never abandoned by God. Even spiritual forces, things beyond us in every way, are no threat to us, because we are victorious through Christ who loves us. In these tumultuous days, when partisan politics, pandemics, the war in Ukraine, famine in Somalia, and hurricanes in Florida fill the headlines, we sometimes wonder how much more we can endure. Yet, through it all, we know that God's love is firm. We are held in God's embrace. Christ's death on the Cross seals it. *Nothing* can separate us from God's love.

Prayer

We praise you, Loving God, for your infinite love, your eternal embrace, and your never-ending faithfulness. When we are weak in faith, strengthen us. When we suffer, come to our aid. When we are discouraged, build us up. We live by your grace. Walk with us each day, we pray. In Christ's name. AMEN.