



Mount Olive Devotions by Pastor Glenn Monson

The Week after the Transfiguration of our Lord (February 28 – March 4, 2022)

Monday

Romans 8:1-6

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. ²For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. ³For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and to deal with sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴so that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. ⁵For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. ⁶To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.

These opening verses in the eighth chapter of St. Paul's letter to the Romans are perhaps some of the most glorious words in all of Scripture. The announcement is clear: Any who are in Christ are not doomed! Not now. Not ever! What is doomed is "sin in the flesh." Jesus dealt with sin on the Cross and made sure it was condemned for all time. That means that sin has no power over any sinner who is in Christ. Not now. Not ever. I remember when I was in junior high school there was a boy on my bus who used to bully me. He was considerably bigger than I was and I would often do anything I could to avoid him. One day on the bus ride home from school, he began picking on me, and as we got off the bus we got into a tussle. Down I went onto the concrete curb, giving me a nice gash in my scalp. My head was soon a mat of hair and blood. Funny thing was, from that day on, he never picked on me again. Christ's blood was a lot more than that. His blood stopped sin forever. Sin would never again have power over us.

Prayer

Dearest Jesus, Savior of the World, we do not fully understand how your blood condemned the sin within us, but we thank and praise you that it did. We often feel so helpless in the face of our sins. We seem to be powerless to resist them, and try to avoid them, but we cannot. Forgive us, Lord. Deliver us from the power of sin. Help us to set our minds on you and the things of the Spirit that bring us life. In your holy name we pray. AMEN.

Tuesday

I John 2:7-11, 15-17

⁷ Beloved, I am writing you no new commandment, but an old commandment that you have had from the beginning; the old commandment is the word that you have heard. ⁸ Yet I am writing you a new commandment that is true in him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining. ⁹ Whoever says, "I am in the light," while hating a brother or sister, is still in the darkness. ¹⁰ Whoever loves a brother or sister lives in the light, and in such a person there is no cause for stumbling. ¹¹ But whoever hates another believer is in the darkness, walks in the darkness, and does not know the way to go, because the darkness has brought on blindness.

¹⁵ Do not love the world or the things in the world. The love of the Father is not in those who love the world; ¹⁶ for all that is in the world—the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, the pride in riches—comes not from the Father but from the world. ¹⁷ And the world and its desire are passing away, but those who do the will of God live forever.

Many years ago now, a friend of mine I was in bible study with came up with an unforgettable way of remembering verse 16 in this passage. He thought of it this way: the desire of the flesh is the desire to *indulge*; the desire of the eyes is the desire to *possess*; and the pride in riches is the desire to *impress*. As I have thought about it over the years, this continues to make sense to me. The way of the world, which St. John says is passing away, is all about indulging, possessing, and impressing. There are many things that we are tempted to indulge in: food, drink, sex, foolish talk. There are also constant temptations to try to possess more and more of everything: a fatter bank account, a bigger house, fancier clothes, more extravagant toys. And the temptation to impress is constant, with voices everywhere encouraging us to inflate our own egos even at the expense of everyone else's. While giving in to these temptations can feel good for a moment, in the end we always end up poorer and sadder when all is said and done. Why? Because the world and its temptations are passing away, "but those who do the will of God live forever."

Prayer

Gracious God, save us from temptations. We are so easily seduced by all that makes us feel good for a moment, but finally leaves us empty. Fill us with your Spirit so that real life, life to the full, the kind of life that does not pass away, will be ours. In your holy name we pray. AMEN.

Wednesday

Now Jacob looked up and saw Esau coming, and four hundred men with him. So he divided the children among Leah and Rachel and the two maids. ² He put the maids with their children in front, then Leah with her children, and Rachel and Joseph last of all. ³ He himself went on ahead of them, bowing himself to the ground seven times, until he came near his brother. ⁴ But Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept. ⁵ When Esau looked up and saw the women and children, he said, “Who are these with you?” Jacob said, “The children whom God has graciously given your servant.” ⁶ Then the maids drew near, they and their children, and bowed down; ⁷ Leah likewise and her children drew near and bowed down; and finally Joseph and Rachel drew near, and they bowed down. ⁸ Esau said, “What do you mean by all this company that I met?” Jacob answered, “To find favor with my lord.” ⁹ But Esau said, “I have enough, my brother; keep what you have for yourself.” ¹⁰ Jacob said, “No, please; if I find favor with you, then accept my present from my hand; for truly to see your face is like seeing the face of God—since you have received me with such favor. ¹¹ Please accept my gift that is brought to you, because God has dealt graciously with me, and because I have everything I want.” So he urged him, and he took it.

The story of the two brothers, Jacob and Esau, is a long and conflicted one. Their conflict begins when they are boys, and lingers long into their adulthood. Finally, after each man has acquired much wealth and large families, they meet at the river Jabbok. Jacob is clearly fearful that his brother, Esau, is yet holding a grudge against him, and he comes to this meeting, bowing on the ground, referring to himself before Esau as “your servant.” Esau, for his part, has no interest in revenge or continued estrangement. On the contrary, he longs for reconciliation. Jacob, well aware of his own sins toward his brother, is overcome with emotion at this graciousness. He says, “Truly to see your face is like seeing the face of God – since you have received me with such favor.” This story reminds us, though we often forget it, that reconciliation is always like this; it is sweet beyond words. When we find our way to reconciliation with someone we have wronged, or with someone who has wronged us, it is always a win-win situation. Everyone is blessed, for as the psalmist says, “Though weeping may continue for the night, joy comes in the morning.”

Prayer

Gracious and Loving God, your reconciliation with us through Christ is sweet indeed. Our separation from you is over, our sins are forgiven, and we are able to start again. Give us courage to seek reconciliation with all with whom we are estranged, whether by our hand or theirs. As we have been forgiven, so let us forgive. In your precious name we pray. AMEN.

Thursday

I Samuel 24:1-10

When Saul returned from following the Philistines, he was told, "David is in the wilderness of Engedi." ² Then Saul took three thousand chosen men out of all Israel, and went to look for David and his men in the direction of the Rocks of the Wild Goats. ³ He came to the sheepfolds beside the road, where there was a cave; and Saul went in to relieve himself. Now David and his men were sitting in the innermost parts of the cave. ⁴ The men of David said to him, "Here is the day of which the LORD said to you, 'I will give your enemy into your hand, and you shall do to him as it seems good to you.'" Then David went and stealthily cut off a corner of Saul's cloak. ⁵ Afterward David was stricken to the heart because he had cut off a corner of Saul's cloak. ⁶ He said to his men, "The LORD forbid that I should do this thing to my lord, the LORD's anointed, to raise my hand against him; for he is the LORD's anointed." ⁷ So David scolded his men severely and did not permit them to attack Saul. Then Saul got up and left the cave, and went on his way. ⁸ Afterwards David also rose up and went out of the cave and called after Saul, "My lord the king!" When Saul looked behind him, David bowed with his face to the ground, and did obeisance. ⁹ David said to Saul, "Why do you listen to the words of those who say, 'David seeks to do you harm'?" ¹⁰ This very day your eyes have seen how the LORD gave you into my hand in the cave; and some urged me to kill you, but I spared you. I said, 'I will not raise my hand against my lord; for he is the LORD's anointed.'

This story from Israel's history is taken from that period when King Saul was furiously hunting for David, who had been anointed as the next king of Israel. Saul, intensely jealous of David, was bent on killing him, and searched for him furiously. David, however, did not respond in kind. In this passage his own men urge David to kill Saul when he can, but he refuses, even feeling remorse at the humiliation he caused Saul. He knew that he had been anointed king of Israel, but he refused to disobey God's law, "You shall not kill," in order to claim the promised throne. David is an example for us whenever we are tempted to take matters into our own hands in regards to our own promotion. Perhaps we have been told we will receive a promotion at work, or an honor at school, or some distinction in the community. While it may be tempting to "enhance" the timing of this good fortune through wrongdoing and unfair play, this story reminds us that this is not the way of God. As the psalmist reminds us, "Not from the east or from the west and not from the wilderness comes lifting up; but it is God who executes judgment, putting down one and lifting up another." (Psalm 75).

Prayer

Give us faith and patience, Almighty God, to await your blessing. In whatever state we find ourselves, help us to be faithful and humble. Keep us from temptations to put down others or cause their failure. Instead, lead us to support all those in authority and to trust that in our own time, you will bless us. In the name of Jesus we pray. AMEN.

Friday

Luke 17:1-4

Jesus said to his disciples, “Occasions for stumbling are bound to come, but woe to anyone by whom they come! ² It would be better for you if a millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea than for you to cause one of these little ones to stumble. ³ Be on your guard! If another disciple sins, you must rebuke the offender, and if there is repentance, you must forgive. ⁴ And if the same person sins against you seven times a day, and turns back to you seven times and says, ‘I repent,’ you must forgive.”

Ash Wednesday, which we observed this week, begins the season of Lent, a season of repentance. In Lent we are particularly mindful of the suffering and death of Christ, and how Christ’s sacrifice leads to our forgiveness. In this brief passage, we are reminded that Christ’s willingness to forgive is also meant to be an example for us. Here, Jesus says, “If a person sins against you seven times a day, and turns back to you seven times and says, ‘I repent’ you must forgive.” In effect, what Jesus is saying is “Your forgiveness must have no limits.” This is hard for us to believe. “Certainly there must be limits!” we insist. “Certainly if a person just keeps sinning against me, over and over, there comes a point when I must refuse to reconcile!” “No,” says Jesus. “No, there is no limit, because there was no limit when I forgave you.” Lest we understand this passage to encourage abuse of women or children or employees or any without power, we must understand that forgiveness can be given even while we refuse to allow those who sin against us to continue. The two are not incompatible. More than once have I seen an abused spouse say to the abuser, “I forgive you, but I will no longer allow you to hurt me,” and he or she ends the relationship. Yes, this is a tough saying, and yet as always, forgiveness is the way of life.

Prayer

Lord of all life, grant us faith and courage in the face of those who sin against us. Fill us with your Spirit so that we might forgive as we have been forgiven, and yet live as you would have us live. Protect all who are victims of abuse. Bring to repentance all abusers. Grant to all your grace and pardon. In the Name of Christ we pray. AMEN