

Prayfaithfully

.....Daily Devotions

June 25 - July 1, 2017

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Sunday, June 25, 2017

Text: Matthew 10:24-25, 34-39

"A disciple is not above the teacher, nor a slave above the master; it is enough for the disciple to be like the teacher, and the slave like the master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household!"

"Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and one's foes will be members of one's own household. Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it."

A brief selection from today's Gospel. Uncomfortable words.

Sometimes Jesus comes to upset us. He reminds us that the "good news" of the Kingdom of God is not an assurance that *our* will shall be done. I would like God to give me a comfortable life, on my own terms, not asking me to change; it would be nice if religion were "comforting." God makes no such easy promise. What God promises is *new* life, transformed, moving in entirely new directions. A life no longer bound to selfishness and death, set free to soar. But my own goals and way of thinking are too much bound up in selfishness and death. I can't untangle that myself. Jesus can. But there may be twinges as the scab comes off. Like the old story: someone said to the caterpillar, "You can fly. But that cocoon has gotta go."

Let us pray: *Teach us, good Lord God, to serve you as you deserve, to give and not to count the cost, to fight and not to heed the wounds, to toil and not to seek for rest, to labor and not to ask for reward, except that of knowing that we do your will, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.*



Monday, June 26, 2017

Text: Matthew 10:26-33

Let's think about the rest of Sunday's Gospel:

"So have no fear of them; for nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known. What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops. Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. And even the hairs of your head are all counted."

So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows. Everyone therefore who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven; but whoever denies me before others, I also will deny before my Father in heaven.

Even the hairs on your head are all counted by God, one by one. Which is to say: you matter. As you are. Not only as you *ought* to be, though God will surely lead you in that direction. But as you are. Not only in the big, dramatic, spiritual things; but in something as earthly as the hairs on your head. You matter to God. Which sets a different light on the *challenge* with which Jesus follows these words. We sometimes fail that challenge. Peter the apostle did; when in the high priest's courtyard, they recognized him as a follower of Jesus, and he denied him. We fail, and need forgiveness. Then Jesus challenges us. Again. To follow him. Why would we dare do such a thing? Because you are even more valuable than sparrows; and even the hairs on your head are counted.

Let us pray: *Teach us, good Lord God, to fight for truth and not to heed the wounds, trusting that we do your will, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.*



Tuesday, June 27, 2017

Text: Jeremiah 20:7-13

O LORD, you have enticed me, and I was enticed; you have overpowered me, and you have prevailed. I have become a laughingstock all day long; everyone mocks me. For whenever I speak, I must cry out, I must shout, "Violence and destruction!" For the word of the LORD has become for me a reproach and derision all day long.

If I say, "I will not mention him, or speak any more in his name," then within me there is something like a burning fire shut up in my bones; I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot. For I hear many whispering: "Terror is all around! Denounce him! Let us denounce him!" All my close friends are watching for me to stumble. "Perhaps he can be enticed, and we can prevail against him, and take our revenge on him." But the LORD is with me like a dread warrior; therefore my persecutors will stumble, and they will not prevail. They will be greatly shamed, for they will not succeed. Their eternal dishonor will never be forgotten. O LORD of hosts, you test the righteous, you see the heart and the mind; let me see your retribution upon them, for to you I have committed my cause. Sing to the LORD; praise the LORD! For he has delivered the life of the needy from the hands of evildoers.

Here's the story of Jeremiah; short version. God called him as a prophet, to warn his people one last time, to call them back to faithfulness for one last time; but from the start God warned the prophet Jeremiah that nobody would listen, and the story would end in tears. And so it was.

Did Jeremiah turn against God's people, and stand apart, waiting for judgment to fall that was richly deserved? No. He stood with them. And when, in one final unfaithfulness, the people fled off into Egypt – which Jeremiah had warned them *not* to do – Jeremiah went with them... And we hear no more of him. Faithfulness, and love. Those can be hard to hold together. But that is God's call.

Let us pray: *Teach us, good Lord God, to give and not to count the cost, to labor and not to ask for reward, to love those around us when love is rejected; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.*



Wednesday, June 28, 2017

Text: Psalm 69:7-10, 16-18 (*Evangelical Lutheran Worship*)

**Surely, for your sake I have suffered reproach, and shame has covered my face.
I have become a stranger to my own kindred, an alien to my mother's children.
Zeal for your house has eaten me up; the scorn of those who scorn you has fallen upon me.
I humbled myself with fasting, but that was turned to my reproach. ...
Answer me, O LORD, for your love is kind; in your great compassion turn to me.
Hide not your face from your servant; be swift and answer me, for I am in distress.
Draw near to me and redeem me; because of my enemies deliver me.**

In the Psalm, I hear echoes of Jeremiah: here too is a faithful servant of God whose faithfulness drives away people he cares about. I also hear echoes of Sunday's Gospel. "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword." Faithfulness to God can mess up our relationships. I'm thinking that words like these can be dangerous, easy to misuse. If we become "a stranger to our kindred," it isn't necessarily that we are holy. We may just be difficult to live with. If we speak and people do not listen, it doesn't mean for sure that we are Jeremiah. We may just be self-centered. If our foes are those of our own household, it doesn't necessarily mean that we have taken up the cross. We are all fallen. Which theologians describe as being "curved in on ourselves," wrapped up in ourselves. Pretending to be holy, when we're only being selfish.

The apostle Paul wrote to the Christians in Rome "Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. **If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.**" (*Romans 12:16-18*) And after that: trust God.

Let us pray: *Teach us, good Lord God, to serve you as you deserve, and not to mistake our own sinful hearts for your loving voice; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.*



Thursday, June 29, 2017 *Peter and Paul, Apostles*

Text: Galatians 2:11-16

**But when Cephas (*Peter*) came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood self-condemned; for until certain people came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But after they came, he drew back and kept himself separate for fear of the circumcision faction. And the other Jews joined him in this hypocrisy, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy.
But when I saw that they were not acting consistently with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, "If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?" We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; yet we know that a person is justified not by the works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ. And we have come to believe in Christ Jesus, so that we might be justified by faith in Christ, and not by doing the works of the law, because no one will be justified by the works of the law.**

(Further readings for this day: Acts 12:1-11, Psalm 87:1-3, 5-7, 2 Timothy 4:6-8, 17-18, John 21:15-19)

Today our church calendar reminds us of two apostles, Peter and Paul. The dirty little secret of these two great leaders of the early Church is that they argued with each other. Bitterly. With words like "hypocrisy." Nor

was it over little quibbles at the edge of faith. It was this: are we saved and transformed by the work of God, or by following a set of rules? And yet: we remember them both as apostles. We honor them both as saints. Sounds just like home.

Is it possible to be faithful, and be wrong? Sure is. We've seen it done. And Jesus Christ is still the risen Lord. His kingdom cannot be turned back. Our hope depends on *him*.

Let us pray: *Almighty God, we praise you that your blessed apostles Peter and Paul glorified you by their martyrdoms. Grant that your church throughout the world may always be instructed by their teaching and example, be knit together in unity by your Spirit, and ever stand firm upon the one foundation who is Jesus Christ our Lord, for he lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.*



Friday, June 30, 2017

Text: Romans 6:1b-11

Should we continue in sin in order that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin go on living in it?

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.

We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. For whoever has died is freed from sin. But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. The death he died, he died to sin, once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Let's come back to last Sunday's readings. In Paul's letter to the Christians at Rome we come to that caterpillar's cocoon again. If we're to fly, there's part of us that will need to be left behind. Dead and buried. I would find this far more difficult than I could ever think of trying, except that (as always) in the end it depends on God. Well, that's no surprise. I didn't do much about being born either. (Except, they tell me, complain.) If it's life, real life, then it comes *to us*, as a gift of God, and isn't our accomplishment.

Paul the apostle tells us that when you and I were baptized, by the power of God the grip of our old self was broken. It is now *possible* to be transformed toward new life.

It would be really nice if this were *instant*. One moment, a sinner; and the next a saint. But it isn't. We'll live every hour of our lives as sinner and saint together. Think of that butterfly wriggling out of its cocoon; or a baby bird, chipping away at the shell, and blinking at the sunlight. Martin Luther put it this way: our old, self-centered self was drowned in baptism. But that old troublemaker sure can swim.

Let us pray: *Teach us, good Lord God, to toil and not to seek for rest, until at last we learn to do your will; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.*



Saturday, July 1, 2017

Text: Matthew 10:40-42

"Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. Whoever welcomes a prophet in the name of a prophet will receive a prophet's reward; and whoever welcomes a righteous person in the name of a righteous person will receive the reward of the righteous; and whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple-- truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward."

Let's end the week by looking ahead, to tomorrow's Gospel. There's a surprise in it.

We've heard it before; an old hymn says "the cup of water given for you still holds the freshness of your grace." The surprise is, the Gospel never says it's *Christians* doing these good things. "Whoever welcomes *you*." The "little ones" are often you and me.

These last weeks have been frightening, with terrorist attacks in London, Manchester, and outside Washington. They have also been marked by acts of mercy; singers, ordinary people, Muslims, Christians, people of no known faith at all, coming together in compassion. Not because we have taught them. But because God moves in places we don't know. And Jesus has announced it: "None of these will lose their reward."

I have no idea how this works. And I am sure salvation is and always will be by the grace of God, and not by even these good works. This doesn't change.

But God is moving. His kingdom comes, and his will *shall* be done. With us. Without us. In spite of us even, if that is how it has to be. It's been said of the Bible, "I've looked at the back of the book. Love wins."

Let us pray: *O God, you direct our lives by your grace, and your words of justice and mercy reshape the world. Mold us into a people who welcome your word and serve one another, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.*

*Scripture texts for these devotions are taken from the New Revised Standard Version.
Prayers are taken or adapted from Evangelical Lutheran Worship.*

