

Devotions – August 5-11, 2018

By Pastor Ken Ranos

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Sunday, August 5, 2018

Text: Psalm 78:21-29

- ²¹ Therefore, when the LORD heard, he was full of rage;
a fire was kindled against Jacob,
his anger mounted against Israel,
²² because they had no faith in God,
and did not trust his saving power.
²³ Yet he commanded the skies above,
and opened the doors of heaven;
²⁴ he rained down on them manna to eat,
and gave them the grain of heaven.
²⁵ Mortals ate of the bread of angels;
he sent them food in abundance.
²⁶ He caused the east wind to blow in the heavens,
and by his power he led out the south wind;
²⁷ he rained flesh upon them like dust,
winged birds like the sand of the seas;
²⁸ he let them fall within their camp,
all around their dwellings.
²⁹ And they ate and were well filled,
for he gave them what they craved.**

Every week a small group gathers at my congregation for casual discussion on the readings for the upcoming Sunday texts. This part of Psalm 78, assigned for today, recalls the story of God giving the Israelites manna and quail in the wilderness (the entire psalm is a dramatic retelling of events from the exodus out of Egypt until King David is seated on the throne). As we read the story of the giving of the manna out of Exodus in our little Bible study group, one person wondered aloud, “Huh, the people do nothing but complain to God, and yet, God still gives them what they want.”

As the parent of a one-year old boy, I suspect that this will quickly become my every day reality. He’s already taught himself how to be overly dramatic when he doesn’t get what he wants, throwing his head back and wailing to the sky, plopping down on his butt and sobbing because I told him no (it’s actually kind of cute how much energy he puts into it), then popping right back up without any tears when he gets something he wants. And yet every day my wife and I feed him, change him, play with him, make sure he doesn’t run into anything while he and the dog chase each other around the house. Every day he gets what he needs (and even what he wants much of the time) because we love him and can’t help but take care of him.

If we can do that for our one year old, how can we be surprised when God does the same for us?

Prayer: *God our parent, you guided your children through the wilderness and provided for their needs, even when they complained. When life feels like a trek across the desert, and we cry out in need, forgive our impatience and take care of us. In the name of your Son we pray. Amen.*



Monday, August 6, 2018

Text: Psalm 107:1-3, 33-43

- ¹ **O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;
for his steadfast love endures for ever.**
- ² **Let the redeemed of the LORD say so,
those he redeemed from trouble**
- ³ **and gathered in from the lands,
from the east and from the west,
from the north and from the south.**
- ³³ **He turns rivers into a desert,
springs of water into thirsty ground,**
- ³⁴ **a fruitful land into a salty waste,
because of the wickedness of its inhabitants.**
- ³⁵ **He turns a desert into pools of water,
a parched land into springs of water.**
- ³⁶ **And there he lets the hungry live,
and they establish a town to live in;**
- ³⁷ **they sow fields, and plant vineyards,
and get a fruitful yield.**
- ³⁸ **By his blessing they multiply greatly,
and he does not let their cattle decrease.**
- ³⁹ **When they are diminished and brought low
through oppression, trouble, and sorrow,**
- ⁴⁰ **he pours contempt on princes
and makes them wander in trackless wastes;**
- ⁴¹ **but he raises up the needy out of distress,
and makes their families like flocks.**
- ⁴² **The upright see it and are glad;
and all wickedness stops its mouth.**
- ⁴³ **Let those who are wise give heed to these things,
and consider the steadfast love of the LORD.**

In my office hangs a picture of Jesus kneeling and praying, presumably at the garden of the Gethsemane. It's a nice enough picture on its own, from a distance. But the closer you get, the more you realize there's more to the picture than just Jesus kneeling in the garden. When you get really close to the picture, you realize it's actually a photo collage, and the entire picture is built of little tiny photos of members of the congregation. Both the big picture and each little picture are beautiful and powerful in their own right.

I'm continually amazed that the God we worship is both a God who changes rivers into deserts, fruitful lands into salty wastes, deserts into pools of water, dry lands into springs—you know, big, mighty, powerful acts; and also has enough time and attention to settle the hungry people into a place where they have food, lifts the poor out of misery, and pours contempt on those who oppress them. There's no point at which something, or someone, is too small to be beyond God's notice and care. Just like every little photo in a photo collage is important, everyone is important to God, no matter what else is going on around us.

Prayer: Mighty God, the same power you use to set nature in motion in all of its beauty and majesty and terror you also use to care for your children, especially the poor and oppressed. Grant us wisdom to ponder these things and consider well your steadfast love. In the name of your Son, we pray. Amen.



Tuesday, August 7, 2018

Text: 1 Corinthians 12:27-31

27 Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. 28 And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers; then deeds of power, then gifts of healing, forms of assistance, forms of leadership, various kinds of tongues. 29 Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? 30 Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? 31 But strive for the greater gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way.

Bear with me here. In any *Dungeons & Dragons* party you need a good mix of characters. You need your fighter to rush in and handle your melee crowd. You need your cleric to provide healing and support. You need your wizard to deal tremendous damage from a distance. No one character can do everything and do it well. A well-rounded party prepares you for the worst circumstances.

Is it so different in the church? We need pastors, and we REALLY need deacons. We need teachers. We need worship assistants. We need craftspeople. We need artists. We need caretakers. We need pragmatics. We need dreamers. We need financially sound minds. We need reckless, missional hearts. We need all kinds of people, especially kind people. No one of us can do it all alone. Together, we'll be ready to face the worst circumstances.

I'd like to see an evil Red Dragon stand up to a church like that!

Prayer: Triune God, as you are Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one God together in divine communion, so too have you created human beings to be in communion and community with each other, distinct, yet one body in Christ. Spread your gifts through our communities and unite us with our diverse strengths. In the name of your Son, we pray. Amen.



Wednesday, August 8, 2018

Text: Mark 8:1-10

8In those days when there was again a great crowd without anything to eat, he called his disciples and said to them, ²**I have compassion for the crowd, because they have been with me now for three days and have nothing to eat. ³If I send them away hungry to their homes, they will faint on the way—and some of them have come from a great distance.**⁴**His disciples replied, ‘How can one feed these people with bread here in the desert?’ ⁵He asked them, ‘How many loaves do you have?’ They said, ‘Seven.’ ⁶Then he ordered the crowd to sit down on the ground; and he took the seven loaves, and after giving thanks he broke them and gave them to his disciples to distribute; and they distributed them to the crowd. ⁷They had also a few small fish; and after blessing them, he ordered that these too should be distributed. ⁸They ate and were filled; and they took up the broken pieces left over, seven baskets full. ⁹Now there were about four thousand people. And he sent them away. ¹⁰And immediately he got into the boat with his disciples and went to the district of Dalmanutha.**

People do crazy things when they're roped in and just can't get enough. I once got on an Amtrak train and rode 36+ hours with my cousin to go to Spokane, WA for a gathering of like-minded fans of a once-popular game series. It was crazy. We actually hadn't figured out how we were getting to our hotel once we got off the train at 1:00 am, and were it not for the kindness of a few people we met on the way, who knows what would have happened?

When Jesus feeds the crowd in the wilderness (for the second time), they've already been following him around for three days. Three days! And they didn't have any more food. It's a perfect opportunity for Jesus to show off his divine nature and start impressing some folks. But he's not out to impress. It's out of pity, and the very real fear that people would start fainting, that Jesus pulls out the stops and makes sure everyone gets fed. Like strangers on an Amtrak train looking out for two lost college students, Jesus looks at a crowd of folks in over their heads and takes action to make sure they're safe and cared for.

So go on, get in over your head! And let's see what happens next...

Prayer: God of abundance, you drew in crowds so hungry for you that they put themselves in harm's way just for a taste. Thank you for feeding them, for caring for them; and thank you for

welcoming us in our reckless voyage to grow closer to you. In the name of your Son, we pray. Amen.



Thursday, August 9, 2018

Text: Romans 15:1-6

1We who are strong ought to put up with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves. **2**Each of us must please our neighbor for the good purpose of building up the neighbor. **3**For Christ did not please himself; but, as it is written, ‘The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me.’ **4**For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, so that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope. **5**May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another, in accordance with Christ Jesus, **6**so that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

At the camp my family and I attend every year there is a boy who has developmental disabilities. One summer he’d had a particularly rough year in school being bullied and was more withdrawn than usual. So on their own, the other young kids at camp concocted a plan. They signed themselves and him up for a sports tournament. The kids went out of their way to make sure that no matter what, he wouldn’t be knocked out. They jumped in front of the ball. If it touched him, they made up an excuse for why he was still in. One by one the other kids were knocked out. Adults gathered around, in awe of what was happening. And when the dust settled, the boy was the only one left—he had won the game. The other kids jumped back in with wild cheers and lifted him up on their shoulders. Every adult was crying. The boy smiled wider than he had all week, and there was no question at all that he was loved. He was valued. He was a child of God surrounded by his siblings in Christ who cared for him.

“Each of us must please our neighbor for the good purpose of building up the neighbor.”
(Romans 15:2).

Prayer: God of the downtrodden, you lift up the lowly and cast down the proud. Give us the strength to lift up on our shoulders those around us who need to know what it feels like to be loved. In the name of your Son, we pray. Amen.



Friday, August 10, 2018

Text: Galatians 6:1-10

6My friends, if anyone is detected in a transgression, you who have received the Spirit should restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness. Take care that you yourselves are not

tempted. ²Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ. ³For if those who are nothing think they are something, they deceive themselves. ⁴All must test their own work; then that work, rather than their neighbor's work, will become a cause for pride. ⁵For all must carry their own loads. ⁶ Those who are taught the word must share in all good things with their teacher. ⁷ Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for you reap whatever you sow. ⁸If you sow to your own flesh, you will reap corruption from the flesh; but if you sow to the Spirit, you will reap eternal life from the Spirit. ⁹So let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up. ¹⁰So then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all, and especially for those of the family of faith.

I used to lead backpacking trips in Ohio's Zaleski State Forest when I was in college and seminary. When you go out backpacking and intend to spend the nights in a tent, you had to be careful what and how you packed. You had to make sure to bring enough supplies to last the entire weekend. And you had to make sure not to pack too much, since everything you packed had to be carried on your back.

Just before we left, the group would gather and divvy up the common supplies, like the food. The goal was to make sure no one bore too much extra weight. And if, on the trail, someone couldn't continue to carry their entire pack, the rest of the group would lighten the load and take on the extra weight between themselves. We bore each other's burdens as well as our own so that we all could make it to the end of the weekend.

"So then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all, and especially for those of the family of faith." (Galatians 6:10)

Prayer: *Gracious God, you restore those who have fallen to life and wholeness by the forgiveness of sin. Lift us up, so we may in our turn lift others up. In the name of your Son, we pray. Amen.*



Saturday, August 11, 2018

Text: Matthew 7:7-11

7 'Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. ⁸For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. ⁹Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for bread, will give a stone? ¹⁰Or if the child asks for a fish, will give a snake? ¹¹If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him!

When I was in grade school, I remember being taught how to pray by my teachers. Well, actually, that's not quite true. I remember being taught how NOT to pray. I was taught that I had to be very careful with my prayers because if I didn't pray correctly, or asked God for something

inappropriate (like a new bike, for example) God would be angry with me. Not only would that prayer not get answered, but I jeopardized my standing with God, who may decide not to answer my other prayers to get back at me for asking for such a stupid thing.

This crippled my personal prayer life for decades. I decided that between risking God being angry with prayers or not praying at all outside of Sunday morning, the safest option was to not risk God's wrath and just not pray. I truly believed that if I asked God for bread, I'd receive a stone; or a fish, and I'd receive a snake.

But to quote an old Progressive commercial: "That's not how this works. That's not how any of this works." The Psalms are full of examples of people praying to God, demanding from God, being downright insulting to God, boldly making their needs and desires known to God. There are good reasons to fear God's power, but prayer isn't one of those reasons. The Psalms show us how to pray to God in our best times—psalms of praise and thanksgiving—and how to pray to God in our worst of times—psalms of lament, of deep anguish, anger and sorrow. God is big. God can take it. And nothing is out of bounds.

So don't be afraid. Pray boldly. Pray loudly. Pray faithfully.

Prayer: *God of heaven and earth, you eagerly wait for our prayers, for us to open our hearts to you. Show compassion on your children, and provide for our needs, whether we are bold enough to ask or not. In the name of your Son, we pray. Amen.*

