

Devotions – September 22-28, 2019

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The devotions for this week are based on the Revised Common Lectionary Daily Readings. Here is what the ELCA website tells us about these readings:

“The daily readings provide a psalm and two Scripture readings for each day between Sundays. The foundational premise of this set of daily readings is their relationship to the Sunday lectionary. The readings are chosen so that the days leading up to Sunday (Thursday through Saturday) prepare for the Sunday readings. The days flowing out from Sunday (Monday through Wednesday) reflect upon the Sunday readings. No additional readings are assigned for Sundays and festivals. From the body of daily readings for each week, selections may be made for the local context. The complete Daily Lectionary is available in Evangelical Lutheran Worship, pages 1121–1153.” https://www.elca.org/Our-Work/Congregations-and-Synods/Worship/Lectionary?_ga=2.13215287.1069176590.1568287402-403494801.1547918328

One reading has been selected from each of the three possible daily readings for this week.

Sunday, September 22, 2019

Text: Luke 16:1-13, NRSV

Then Jesus said to the disciples, “There was a rich man who had a manager, and charges were brought to him that this man was squandering his property. So he summoned him and said to him, “What is this that I hear about you? Give me an account of your management, because you cannot be my manager any longer.” Then the manager said to himself, “What will I do, now that my master is taking the position away from me? I am not strong enough to dig, and I am ashamed to beg. I have decided what to do so that, when I am dismissed as manager, people may welcome me into their homes.” So, summoning his master’s debtors one by one, he asked the first, “How much do you owe my master?” He answered, “A hundred jugs of olive oil.” He said to him, “Take your bill, sit down quickly, and make it fifty.” Then he asked another, “And how much do you owe?” He replied, “A hundred containers of wheat.” He said to him, “Take your bill and make it eighty.” And his master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly; for the children of this age are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than are the children of light. And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of dishonest wealth so that when it is gone, they may welcome you into the eternal homes.

‘Whoever is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much; and whoever is dishonest in a very little is dishonest also in much. If then you have not been faithful with the dishonest wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches? And if you have not been faithful with what belongs to another, who will give you what is your own? No slave can serve two masters;

for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.'

At first glance, we may want to side with the rich man who is being wronged by his manager when this manager negotiates quite generously with those owing the rich man: reducing debts by fifty percent for one and twenty percent for another. Why does Jesus, then, side with the dishonest manager? Barbara Rossing reminds us that in the first century, the rich often gained their wealth by lending money to landowners at extremely high interest rates. This practice resulted in the wealthy amassing more land when peasants couldn't pay on time. Such usury was contrary to biblical covenantal law. In praising the dishonest manager for his shrewd actions, Jesus may be commending behavior that reverses exploitation of the vulnerable.

Let us pray: Heavenly Father, even today, the poor in our communities are exploited. We ask that you help us stand up for what is right and help provide support whenever and wherever possible so that the vulnerable are not mistreated. Amen.



Monday, September 23, 2019

Text: Psalm 12, NRSV

To the leader: according to The Sheminith. A Psalm of David.

**Help, O Lord, for there is no longer anyone who is godly;
the faithful have disappeared from humankind.
They utter lies to each other;
with flattering lips and a double heart they speak.**

**May the Lord cut off all flattering lips,
the tongue that makes great boasts,
those who say, 'With our tongues we will prevail;
our lips are our own—who is our master?'**

**'Because the poor are despoiled, because the needy groan,
I will now rise up,' says the Lord;
'I will place them in the safety for which they long.'
The promises of the Lord are promises that are pure,
silver refined in a furnace on the ground,
purified seven times.**

**You, O Lord, will protect us;
you will guard us from this generation forever.
On every side the wicked prowl,
as vileness is exalted among humankind.**

The psalmist is asking God for help because there are no longer any good people, only sinful people who use flattering words to utter lies; these wicked individuals ultimately triumph over others through their boasting. The Lord answers the psalmist by giving assurance that the poor and needy will be kept safe. And unlike the false words of the sinful, these promises of the Lord can be trusted, even in an evil world.

Let us pray: Living God, you hear our urgent prayers today as in days of old. When we need protection, we know that you hear our appeals for help, and we trust that you will keep us safe. Amen.



Tuesday, September 24, 2019

Text: 1 Corinthians 9:19-23, NRSV

For though I am free with respect to all, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I might win more of them. To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though I myself am not under the law) so that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law) so that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, so that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, so that I might by any means save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, so that I may share in its blessings.

Paul's strategy as an evangelist places him in situations where he is able to develop relationships with others: with the Jewish people who follow the Torah laws; with Gentiles who are outside such laws; and with those having only weak faith in Christ. Paul is driven in mission to spread the good news of Jesus Christ.

Let us pray: Gracious God, strengthen us to be disciples for Jesus Christ, and teach us how we, too, can reach out and share the blessings of the gospel. Amen.



Wednesday, September 25, 2019

Text: Luke 20:45-21:4, NRSV

In the hearing of all the people he said to the disciples, ‘Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and love to be greeted with respect in the market-places, and to have the best seats in the synagogues and places of honour at banquets. They devour widows’ houses and for the sake of appearance say long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation.’

He looked up and saw rich people putting their gifts into the treasury; he also saw a poor widow put in two small copper coins. He said, ‘Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them; for all of them have contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in all she had to live on.’

The widow appears to be a faithful follower of the Lord by giving all she has to live on. But when we dig a bit deeper, we learn that it is the religious institution that requires its poor and vulnerable to give everything they have. The widow in this text will walk away with nothing because that is what is expected of her. The system, instead of caring for its most vulnerable, maintains a structure that hurts the weak and defenseless. Jesus calls out the religious leaders for their behavior and calls attention to the plight of the poor.

Let us pray: *Remind us, O Lord, that the vulnerable are all around us. Open our eyes to their unique situations so that we might follow your ways of justice. Amen.*



Thursday, September 26, 2019

Text: 2 Corinthians 8:8-15, NRSV

I do not say this as a command, but I am testing the genuineness of your love against the earnestness of others. For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich. And in this matter I am giving my advice: it is appropriate for you who began last year not only to do something but even to desire to do something— now finish doing it, so that your eagerness may be matched by completing it according to your means. For if the eagerness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has—not according to what one does not have. I do not mean that there should be relief for others and pressure on you, but it is a question of a fair balance between your present abundance and their need, so that their abundance may be for your need, in order that there may be a fair balance. As it

is written,

**‘The one who had much did not have too much,
and the one who had little did not have too little.’**

Chapters 8 and 9 in 2nd Corinthians focus on the collection of money Paul has undertaken in the Gentile regions, including Corinth, for the church in Jerusalem. The Gentiles have realized spiritual blessings from the mother church, so it is fitting that the Corinthians, in turn, give back material blessings. Jerusalem has needs, and by eagerly sharing according to their means, the Corinthians are contributing to a fair balance.

Let us pray: *Help us, Lord, to recognize the abundance you have provided, that we might eagerly share our bounty and work toward reaching out to those for whom scarcity is a way of life. Amen.*



Friday, September 27, 2019

Text: Ephesians 2:1-10, NRSV

You were dead through the trespasses and sins in which you once lived, following the course of this world, following the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work among those who are disobedient. All of us once lived among them in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of flesh and senses, and we were by nature children of wrath, like everyone else. But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness towards us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God— not the result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.

Paul summarizes the gospel of salvation for us: by grace you have been saved by faith, and this is not your own doing, but a gift from God – not the result of works, so that no one may boast. As sinners, we are saved by grace alone (*sola gratia*) through faith alone (*sola fide*) for the sake of Christ alone (*sola Christus*), a truth revealed to us in Scripture alone (*sola scriptura*). Glory be to God alone (*Soli Deo Gloria*)!

Let us pray: *We give you thanks, dear Lord, for the grace given us in the life and death and resurrection of your beloved Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.*



Saturday, September 28, 2019

Text: Psalm 146

Praise the Lord!

Praise the Lord, O my soul!

I will praise the Lord as long as I live;

I will sing praises to my God all my life long.

Do not put your trust in princes,

in mortals, in whom there is no help.

When their breath departs, they return to the earth;

on that very day their plans perish.

Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob,

whose hope is in the Lord their God,

who made heaven and earth,

the sea, and all that is in them;

who keeps faith forever;

who executes justice for the oppressed;

who gives food to the hungry.

The Lord sets the prisoners free;

the Lord opens the eyes of the blind.

The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down;

the Lord loves the righteous.

The Lord watches over the strangers;

he upholds the orphan and the widow,

but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.

The Lord will reign forever,

your God, O Zion, for all generations.

Praise the Lord!

Our Lord is trustworthy, the Creator of all good things, the one who supplies all of our human needs. Our Lord provides justice for the oppressed, cares for the poor, and sees to the needs of strangers, widows, and orphans. Our Lord is most certainly worthy of praise.

Let us pray: *Merciful God, help us to feel your abundant love, that we may stay strong in faith in order to love and serve you and our neighbors. May we daily praise the Lord. Amen.*



