



Daily Meditations from Saint Stephen's Episcopal Church

May 14-19, 2012

The Biblical readings are taken from the Daily Office in the Book of Common Prayer for Year 2 and written by the Saint Stephen's Meditation Writing Team: Rebecca Ballard, Quinn Leidecker, Traci Maxwell, Mary Anne McGee, Frances McMaster, Jay Nickel, Bob Reed, T.Cay Rowe and Tim Thompson.

To view the devotionals on Saint Stephen's Church website [click here](#).
Click on the scripture reading for each day to go directly to biblegateway.com.

Daily meditations for the week of May 14-19, 2012

The Biblical readings are taken from the Daily Office in the Book of Common Prayer for Year 2.

Collect for Easter 6: *O God, you have prepared for those who love you such good things as surpass our understanding: Pour into our hearts such love towards you, that we, loving you in all things and above all things, may obtain your promises, which exceed all that we can desire; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

Monday, May 14

[Matthew 13:1-16](#)

He replied, "You've been given insight into God's kingdom. You know how it works. Not everybody has this gift, this insight; it hasn't been given to them. Whenever someone has a ready heart for this, the insights and understandings flow freely. But if there is no readiness, any trace of receptivity soon disappears. That's why I tell stories: to create readiness, to nudge the people toward receptive insight."

I had to go to give my dad, who is in a nursing home and has dementia, some very sad family news. Because he has a hard time identifying people who are not present, I took pictures of our family throughout the years and brought him along into the story I wove about the family and the family member who was sick. Only after he knew who we were talking about did I give him the news. He sobbed and was very saddened, but shared his conviction that our loved ones who go before us will exist in heaven as perfected beings like we ourselves will one day. He understood.

Having the readiness to understand something necessarily precedes knowing it, and that readiness seems to nearly always be part grace and part open heart. I hope we find ways to tell our story of the Kingdom of God in such a way as to

foster the opening of hearts, to create desire for God's Love in the lives we touch, and to be ready ourselves for new insights like the ones brought to us in the person, teaching, and sacrifice of Jesus.

Tuesday, May 15

[Matthew 13:18-23](#)

"Study this story of the farmer planting seed. When anyone hears news of the kingdom and doesn't take it in, it just remains on the surface, and so the Evil One comes along and plucks it right out of that person's heart. This is the seed the farmer scatters on the road. The seed cast in the gravel - this is the person who hears and instantly responds with enthusiasm. But there is no soil of character, and so when the emotions wear off and some difficulty arrives, there is nothing to show for it. The seed cast in the weeds is the person who hears the kingdom news, but weeds of worry and illusions about getting more and wanting everything under the sun strangle what was heard, and nothing comes of it. The seed cast on good earth is the person who hears and takes in the News, and then produces a harvest beyond his wildest dreams."

Anyone who has ever grown a garden or farmed knows this parable to its very heart. Nutritional content of the soil, weather, pests, and competing vegetation are only a few of the variables in successful horticulture and agriculture, and our spiritual health is no less subject to the vagaries and grace in our lives.

I've always appreciated that Jesus didn't leave anyone behind when he told this story, that he followed the uncomplicated parable with this even more careful and clear deconstruction of its meaning, understandable to everyone.

When we are daily tasked with the job of representing God's Kingdom to the world, do we take as much care in its sharing as we do in our vegetable gardens? Do we prepare the mission field? Whenever possible remove conflicts and distractions? Continue to nurture beyond the sowing of the seed?

May we be as insistent on a successful and bountiful harvest in our churches and lives as in our gardens. May our testimonies be as prosperous and true, our hearts as strong and full of love.

Wednesday, May 16

[Matthew 22:41-46](#)

That stumped them, literalists that they were. Unwilling to risk losing face again in one of these public verbal exchanges, they quit asking questions for good.

When our children asked us one Sunday, after Sunday School, if the whole story of Noah's Ark really happened, we were reminded of our own childhood fascination and confusion over that epochal tale. In the churches in which we were reared, the absolute answer was an unequivocal "Yes!" No other possibilities really existed in the certainty of those churches' theologies in which everything in the scriptures is absolutely literal and factual.

Our kids were amazingly receptive to the idea that a story could be filled with

truth without being factual, and we had a great family conversation and teachable moment in the ensuing discussion about knowing the difference.

Jesus knew those with whom he spoke and knew their hearts were hardened, and not prepared to accept the good news he was bringing, so maybe he was just playing a bit of a game with these Pharisees. Perhaps, though, he exemplifies for us here the open-hearted teacher who will engage anyone, anytime, anywhere, about anything important. As always, he is the Good Example.

Thursday, May 17

[Matthew 28:16-20](#)

Jesus, undeterred, went right ahead and gave his charge: "God authorized and commanded me to commission you: Go out and train everyone you meet, far and near, in this way of life, marking them by baptism in the threefold name: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Then instruct them in the practice of all I have commanded you. I'll be with you as you do this, day after day after day, right up to the end of the age."

In our church, we commission people for ministries of an amazing variety. Whether building baptismal chests, knitting prayer shawls, taking communion to shut-ins, reading the prayers, serving at the altar, or serving God in the church in many other ways, we take the time to send them to their mission with our purposeful blessings.

It's important to mark those who are Christ's own, to dedicate them to the Lord's service even when we are taking that commission on for them, as we do in infant baptisms. God has mighty things awaiting us and is ready to send us out to do the work he gives us at every age, in every phase of life, every single place we live.

That Jesus promises we will never be alone is a pretty wonderful commitment, when you think about it. Knowing firsthand our propensity to feel alone sometimes, he took this first opportunity after his resurrection to remind us, as he reminds us every day: we're in this together. Forever. Thanks be to God!

Friday, May 18

[Matthew 7:22-27](#)

"These words I speak to you are not incidental additions to your life, homeowner improvements to your standard of living. They are foundational words, words to build a life on. If you work these words into your life, you are like a smart carpenter who built his house on solid rock. Rain poured down, the river flooded, a tornado hit - but nothing moved that house. It was fixed to the rock. But if you just use my words in Bible studies and don't work them into your life, you are like a stupid carpenter who built his house on the sandy beach. When a storm rolled in and the waves came up, it collapsed like a house of cards."

Most of you can probably sing this children's song with me. It is one of the first songs I remember learning in a family that sang nearly all the time, and it carries

one of those truth teachings of Jesus that is so very important.

Jesus really tried hard to teach his followers that magic words and good deeds simply won't make them holy; that requires a fundamental restructuring of our natural propensity to self interest. Our lives sometime seem to be a steady struggle between Nature and Grace, and Jesus is there with us throughout that journey.

Jesus reminds us here that the tsunamis of life will simply wash us away without the strength of a stalwart foundation. It is wise, yes, to build our underpinnings on the rock that is Christ, but, perhaps more important is the undeniable truth that being able to do that is only possible because of the greatest gift: the grace of our Lord.

Saturday, May 19

[Matthew 7:28-8:4](#)

Then a leper appeared and went to his knees before Jesus, praying, "Master, if you want to, you can heal my body." Jesus reached out and touched him, saying, "I want to. Be clean."

To celebrate her college graduation, we paid off our daughter's student loans. While we wanted her to learn responsibility for her money, it was our natural desire to want her to start her life after college without the burden of those loans. She would never have asked, and certainly did not expect it, but it was a gift we wanted her to have.

The image of God as Parent stirs mixed emotions in people. Experience with our human fathers and mothers is widely varied, highly individual, and not all necessarily good, although nearly everyone understands at least the cultural archetype of loving parents.

Our perceptions of God the Creator, God the Redeemer, and God the Sustainer embody all the best traits of parental nurturing, protecting, providing, guiding, loving, and teaching, and of course, much more. The terms Mother God and Father God come easily to my lips and they are concepts meaningful to my heart. As a parent, I find it easy to believe that God wants to heal me, wants to give me everything I need, wants to love and hold, and save me.