

Daily Meditations

May 27-June 1, 2019

The Biblical readings are taken from the Daily Office in the Book of Common Prayer for Year 1 and written by the St. Stephen's Meditation Writing Team: Judy Aronow, Dave Boyd, Pat Gillory, Jay Nickel, Bob Reed, T. Cay Rowe, Lisa Wilkinson, and Carroll Wilson.

Click on the scripture reading for each day to go directly to link.

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.

Wind-Whipped Waves

Monday, May 27, 2019

James 1:1-15

"If you don't know what you're doing, pray to the Father. He loves to help. You'll get his help, and won't be condescended to when you ask for it. Ask boldly, believably, without a second thought. People who 'worry their prayers' are like wind-whipped waves. Don't think you're going to get anything from the Master that way, adrift at sea, keeping all your options open." - vv. 5-7 The Message

For all my life, I have read these verses using the phrase "double-minded," horrified to think that a person would hold any other option but God and Jesus as their go-to in times of doubt and trouble, *BUT...when I red "keeping all your options open..."* I was stunned to think about my lack of commitment in my prayers, not asking "believably" but with all sorts of possibilities swirling in my mind. Most of these possibilities place the responsibility for the answer on me, not God: *if this...then that*. Isn't that called having a plan of action? Don't we brand individuals who have no plans with that irresponsible word *feckless*? And then I recall C.S. Lewis in one of *The Screwtape Letters*, letters purporting to be from Satan training a young demon: "Your man has been accustomed, ever since he was a boy, to having a dozen incompatible philosophies dancing about together inside his head."

Just thinking about this, I feel those "wind-whipped waves" right now, and my distraught soul reaches towards God as my anchor. The phrase "if God's will" echoes in my mind and creates a lack of certainty. *Of course* God wills that we are on the right course. As a loving father directs his child out of harm's way, sometimes even over the protests of the child, so our Father will provide an answer. I realize that I must strengthen my faith to rely on God providing the right answer at the right time and pray for wisdom to discern and accept it. How? By listening to the prompting of the Holy Spirit and trusting the God who loves us beyond anything we can imagine. Anything less is spiritual adultery.

Old Callous Knees

Tuesday, May 28, 2019

James 1:16-27

"Real religion, the kind that passes muster before God the Father, is this: Reach out to the homeless and loveless in their plight, and guard against corruption from the godless world." v. 27

The Letter of James offers so many rich insights that it's difficult to choose what to discuss, but this verse overarches all the rest as his main message to followers of the Way. As the reputed brother of Jesus and the primary leader of the Jerusalem church, even overshadowing Peter, this man came to believe that Jesus was the Son of God after the Resurrection, going on to lead the early church, and so many of the sayings collected in this book of wisdom echo the words of Jesus. Beset by economic persecutions and discrimination from the Jewish Council in Jerusalem and the ruling Romans, James reportedly spent so many hours on his knees in prayer that he was affectionately called "old callous knees."¹

Although he certainly prays for everything, the unity of the mixed Gentile/Jewish church that he is shepherding is top of the list, and the two looming problems are internal backbiting and criticism, and the lure of power and wealth. Just before this verse, James admonishes Christians to "Lead with your ears, follow up with your tongue, and let anger straggle along in the rear," in other words, listen a lot, speak some, and perhaps anger will be forgotten. Angry, judgmental speech destroys not only individuals but also churches. **Listening with love will often defuse another's emotions.**

Also, the church is always in the world, struggling to stay apart from the world. Jewish leaders are discriminating against and placing economic sanctions on the followers of the Way, making life difficult. How easy it would be to just blend back into the Jewish community and enjoy "the good life." James points out that this double-minded existence is a corruption that will destroy a person's commitment to Jesus. In the midst of a society that values economic wealth and thrives on a class system in which many are "homeless and loveless," James urges Christians to not give in, but share the wealth of our faith in Jesus and our physical wealth with those in need. What a timely message for today.

Prayer is the Key

Wednesday, May 29, 2019

James 5:13-18

"Believing-prayer will heal you, and Jesus will put you on your feet...The prayer of a person living right with God is something powerful to be reckoned with." - vv. 5:14,16

James believes with all his being that prayer is the sustainer of Christianity. From this perspective, the entire "letter" of James underscores that precept. Theologians and historians believe that *The Letter of James* we have in our Bibles is a collection of the sayings and teachings of James, probably the brother of Jesus, who led the Church in Jerusalem. Significantly, the concept of "believing-prayer" fills every page. Prayer is the key to everything: to enduring the persecutions and deprivations of everyday existence and maintaining one's Christianity (ch. 5).² "Old Callous Knees" devoted his life to prayer and believed in it intrinsically. This is powerfully demonstrated by the fact that whoever actually penned this pseudo-letter (it opens like a letter, but is not addressed to anyone, nor does it have a closing) recalls the teachings of James and writes about prayer and with such conviction.

Where does this power come from? From the wisdom of God. Where does that come from? From prayer...believing-prayer. "Wisdom is not primarily knowing the truth, although it certainly includes that; it is skill in living."¹

Recalling the first statement of *The Book of James* following the greeting:

"Consider it a sheer gift," or "Consider it pure joy," when troubles come upon you. That's just not human! This is God's perspective: suffering is temporary, Christ is coming, and God will reward us for enduring these troubles with eternal bliss.² Can I achieve this? As James says, it comes with prayer, believing-prayer, and that prayer implies implicit trust in God's promises. It comes with being clothed in Christ and having the mind of God. Jesus says that I can do this.

Scared to Death of Death

Thursday, May 30, 2019

Hebrews 2:5-18

"Since the children are made of flesh and blood, it's logical that the Savior took on flesh and blood in order to rescue them by his death. By embracing death, taking it into himself, he destroyed the Devil's hold on death and freed all who cower through life scared to death of death." - vv. 14-15

I never thought of being "scared to death of death," or in the words of the New Revised Standard Version, in "slavery to death," but we are, aren't we? We live until we die; our plans are always contingent upon continuing to draw breath and pump blood. We plan ahead with the thought that we will be present to execute the plan, but the possibility of life being shortened always looms. Some people refuse to acknowledge they will face the physical end of life; they avoid all thought of such an event and live their lives in a denial of physicality. A friend of ours who at 80 years old and still participating in the Iron Man Triathlon (run-swim-bike) now restricts his diet severely, removing from it all inflammatory-causing foods (there are many!) and working out daily, of course.

Looking at Dave from the outside, I would say he's in denial of his physicality, except I know one other fact about him: He believes in Christ's promises that we will live in eternity with him. Not only is Dave not "cower[ing] through life scared to death of death," he is living every day in full confidence of his resurrection with Christ and doing all he can to preserve this current existence with his family and friends as long as possible before he is called home. But he is not afraid of death.

Although I am not inspired by the exercise and diet, Dave's confidence in Christ encourages and uplifts me, even inspires me to deepen my belief. The writer of Hebrews presents Christ in human form leading the way, "embracing death" and freeing us all to look forward to eternal life united with God.

Perfect Sacrifice

Friday, May 31, 2019

Hebrews 4:14-5:6

"Every high priest selected to represent men and women before God and offer sacrifices for their sins should be able to deal greatly with their failings, since he knows what it's like from his own experience. But that also means that he has to offer sacrifices for his own sins as well as the people's." - vv. 1-2

Yom Kippur. The Day of Atonement. Still the most holy day for practicing Jews. On that day, the high priest of Israel offers up perfect sacrifices for all the people, after first having offered sacrifices to atone for his own sins. Every part of this ceremony must be "perfect," complete, and not marred with sin or blemish in any way.

The writer of Hebrews constructs an amazing comparison of Jesus to the high priest. Jesus is human; therefore, he understands the failings and shortcomings of human beings and is thus enabled to plead our case for forgiveness to God. Jesus understands our own temptations because he has undergone them himself. However, Jesus did not yield to those temptations, so has no sin to atone for, making him "perfected" and able to offer the sacrifice for the people.

The amazing part to me is that Jesus is that sacrifice. So as high priest, fully human, he is able to offer up to God, of whom he is part, an acceptable, "perfected" sacrifice, which is himself...God in his perfection. In my human experience, impossible! But, to God, all things are possible. Thanks be to God for taking care of us weak and wayward human beings!

Holy Men of Old

Saturday, June 1, 2019

Hebrews 5:7-14

"Then, having arrived at the full stature of his maturity and having been announced by God as high priest in the order of Melchizedek, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who believably obey him." - vv. 8-10

The writer of *The Letter of the Hebrews* draws on Jewish constructs of passages from the Hebrew Scriptures in this reference to Melchizedek. References in Genesis and Psalms are the only mentions of this shadowy figure, but the concept of Melchizedek carries great import to the Jewish mind.

From Scripture, Melchizedek was the king of Salem, often interpreted as the "king of peace" (shalom), a Canaanite priest who offered bread and wine with a blessing to Abraham, and to whom Abraham gave a tithe (a tenth) of his possessions. Why is this significant? This mysterious interchange points to Melchizedek being much greater than Abraham in spirituality, even though he existed outside of the Hebrew lineage since Abraham was the Father of the Jewish lineage. The bread and wine offering as well as the blessing associate him in Christian minds with Jesus at the "last supper." The "tithe" that Abraham offers resonates with the Mosaic law that every Jew will give a tenth of their possessions to the priest(s). Thus, typology, the interpretation of actions or events in light of a previous action or event in order to see a pattern, is strong, connecting Melchizedek to both the Mosaic priesthood and Jesus.

To me, one of the most interesting ideas about Melchizedek is that he was obviously in touch with God, even though he lives in Canaan while Abraham traverses from Iran/Iraq to Canaan. The phrase "holy men of old" suggests itself to me, pointing out that God communicated with people outside of the Jewish nation, such as Noah. As a child, I would pester my parents about those people in deepest "darkest" Africa (to quote popular books of the time) who had never heard of Jesus. Were they "godless?" Could they be saved? Melchizedek offers the idea that people who seek God will find him, wherever they live and whatever their circumstances. God is love, and God is everywhere.

¹ Peterson, Eugene H. *The Message: The New Testament, Psalms and Proverbs*. Colorado Springs, CO : Alive Communications, 1995. 481.

² Davids, Peter H. "James, The Letter of." Metzger, Bruce and Michael Coogan, Eds. *The Oxford Illustrated Companion to the Bible*. New York: Tess Press, 2003. 124-125.

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