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## Daily Meditations

### November 30 - December 5, 2020

The Biblical readings are taken from the Daily Office in the Book of Common Prayer for Year 2 and written by the St. Stephen's Meditation Writing Team: Dave Boyd, Becky Denton, Pat Gillory, Traci Maxwell, Jay Nickel, Bob Reed, T.Cay Rowe, and Carroll Wilson.

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

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## COLLECT, Advent 1

*Almighty God, give us grace to cast away the works of darkness, and put on the armor of light, now in the time of this mortal life in which your Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge the living and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.*

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## One Humble Galilean

### Monday, November 30, 2020

#### Luke 20:1-8

*One day he was teaching the people in the Temple, proclaiming the Message. The high priests, religion scholars, and leaders confronted him and demanded, "Show us your credentials. Who authorized you to speak and act like this?" - vv. 1-2*

It matters to whom you choose to listen. What you choose to let sink into your mind matters. In our world of incredibly fast technology and the subordination of ideas to monetary interest, the idea of one man, one humble Galilean, standing in the religious center of the Jewish world may not sound like a challenge to the powers-that-be, but it is, obviously. Both factions of the ruling Jews come rushing to where Jesus is teaching because their voices are the ones they want the people to hear...not his.

Looking back through the long lens of history and the Bible, many of us today think of the Jews as a united entity during Jesus' time, but the reality is they were what one scholar calls "a people divided by religion."\* The Sadducees (high priests) and the Pharisees (religion scholars) here present a united front against what they view as a threat to their power hierarchy, but in reality they were "a house divided against itself" until the national catastrophe of the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in 70 CE. We know of five major sects who warred one against the other during Jesus' day. Had they all united and followed God's law the way in which it was intended (i.e., what Jesus was teaching), history might have taken a different turn for the Jewish homeland.

Looking into the hearts and intents of these Temple dignitaries, Jesus understands the threat and answers it, placing his challengers securely on the

horns of a dilemma through his questions about where John the baptizer got his authority and the leaders' reaction to it. Jesus says time and again that he has not come to destroy the Law of Moses but to fulfill it, and in this instance, the self-promoting hierarchy and power structures that these leaders represent are exactly his targets. Interestingly, the everyday people in the Temple seem to know exactly where Jesus gets his authority and are listening to his words like parched travelers drinking life-giving water. This is the heart that I want to have.

^Luke, K. "Society Divided by Religion.: The Jewish World of Jesus' Time." *Biblehashyam*. 1(1975): 195-209. Quoted in Bell, A. A. *Exploring the New Testament World*. (1998): 31.

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## Showdown

Tuesday, December 1, 2020

### Luke 20:9-18

*But Jesus didn't back down.*

*"Why, then, do you think it was written: That stone the masons threw out—It's now the cornerstone!? Anyone falling over that stone will break every bone in his body; if the stone falls on anyone, it will be a total smash-up."*

*The religion scholars and high priests wanted to lynch him on the spot, but they were intimidated by public opinion. They knew the story was about them." - vv. 17-19*

Just imagine the high drama of this scene! Even told second-hand, as we assume the writer of *The Gospel of Luke* was doing, this showdown between Jesus and the Temple hierarchy crackles with emotion. Sometimes in my need for solace and comfort I forget that Jesus tells us that he did not come to bring peace in the world. He is certainly stirring up some trouble right here, but it's like the late famous lawmaker John Lewis called it, it's "good trouble," trouble that needs to be stirred up. Jesus calls the Jewish leaders to account for their errant and corrupt management of God's vineyard, the Jewish faith, and they do not like it.

While recognizing that in the story about the vineyard, God is the owner and the Jewish rulers are the corrupt vineyard keepers, I doubt that they recognize Jesus as the owner's son who is murdered, moreover that this Jesus that they want to kill is the very creator of the world. They had been the big fish in a small pond and were meeting a challenge to their authority in the form of the most powerful White whale ever, but, in the way of humans, they are focusing on what they perceive as a personal threat rather than an existential one. Pride and self-interest are blinding them to what Jesus is truly saying: cleanse, purify, and return to following the heart of God rather than the sham he accuses them of, nothing but an outward show of the honoring God's Law.

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## Show Me Your Coins

Wednesday, December 2, 2020

### Luke 20:19-26

*...they sent spies who posed as honest inquirers..."Tell us: is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not?" [Jesus] knew they were laying for him and said, "Show me a coin. Now, this engraving, who does it look like and what does it say?" vv. 20, 22, 24*

I have to admit that once this didn't seem like a very important episode in Jesus' teaching to me, but I have since learned from a learned man that it reveals the inherent hypocrisy of the Jewish power hierarchy in the highest degree, the ones who sent these pawns posing as honest inquirers. More than likely this occurs in the Temple environment, so the people who were asking the questions are Jewish. I learned that when Jews enter the temple environs, the moneychangers were there to take all of the coins of the land and turn them into a special Jewish coinage that was only good in the Temple. And then when they left, they could change anything not spent back. So these people who show Jesus the coins in

their pockets are not supposed to have them. In fact, in Jewish law it was considered blasphemy to have coin of the land in your pocket in the Temple.

So these questioners didn't bother to follow the Temple rules, even though they were posing as people who were there to worship and honor God.

What does this say about the leaders who sent these men to Jesus? Well, obviously there is an element of hypocrisy here that I would have never caught onto had I not learned this fact.

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## **I will Never Leave You** *Thursday, December 3, 2020*

### **Luke 20:27-40**

*"God isn't the God of dead men, but of the living. To him all are alive." - v. 38*

In this time of uncertainty and turmoil, we have all had to face the imminent possibility of loss of life, our own, someone dear to us, or just staggering millions worldwide. While this has always been true, it's much more "in our face" right now. Our short human memories hold thoughts of those who have passed for a time, but they begin to fade. Even humans who have accomplished amazing feats or done incredible good (or bad) are often only remembered for their actions, not themselves.

So what cheers me when this existential fear of nonhuman existence strikes me? "I will never leave you or forsake you." God tells us this over and over. Our creator fashioned beings who will be with him forever, and Jesus says we will be alive. Earlier in the passage for today Jesus answers the question about human marriage in the next life with "All intimacies and ecstasies will then be with God." We will no longer think or long for human relationships; God will fulfill our ever need.

My father died momentarily during a surgery, and he returned from that experience a man with a new perspective: Love. God is love. All we have to do is love one another and love God. My father became a much more peaceful man. How do I hope to be remembered? "She loved."

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## **Do You Feel the Pinch?** *Friday, December 4, 2020*

### **Luke 20:41-21:4**

*Just then he looked up and saw the rich people dropping offerings in the collection plate. Then he saw a poor widow put in two pennies. He said, "The plain truth is that this widow has given by far the largest offering today. All these others made offerings that they'll never miss; she gave extravagantly what she couldn't afford—she gave her all!" vv. 21:1-4*

Each one of this week's short episodes in Jesus' life deals with authority—misuse of, abuse of, who has it, who will have it, and who gives it. In the pericope we read today, the Jewish scholars ask Jesus a frivolous question, one they have discussed and one for which they already have ready answers. Jesus goes right to the heart of the problem: it's not what you know, it's what you do.

Jesus looks into these Pharisees' hearts and sees insincerity and self-aggrandizement, and I'm sure he is disgusted. He doesn't even bother to answer their question. Then he sees the heart of this God-loving widow. What a contrast: important folks who risk nothing and powerless folks who risk everything. For us in the middle, this points out a path: if we are not feeling some kind of pinch, whether it's pennies, effort, or talent, it's not enough. Even in the writing and sharing of these brief meditations, if I am not pushing myself to say something meaningful, then my effort is meaningless. Even with that

said, God loves a cheerful giver, so let us present our gifts with joy.

## Don't Worry About the End of the World

Saturday, December 5, 2020

### Luke 21:5-19

*[Jesus] went on, "Nation will fight nation and ruler fight ruler over and over. Huge earthquakes will occur in various places. There will be famines. You'll think at times that the very sky is falling...Make up your mind right now not to worry about it." - vv.10-11, 14*

Right now we're all watching a lot more television than we used to. At the moment, the obsession around our house is YouTube. Oh my! You can find anything on YouTube: useful stuff, frivolous stuff, scary stuff, history, and lots and lots of garbage!

Last night we found a program that talked about mysterious disappearances in Alaska. As I was listening while preparing supper, the flagrant manipulations of small pieces of truth mingled with reality-tv-type drama created a thin construct of mystery and danger...just what the producer wanted. To what purpose? To obtain viewers, of course. Well, they had us for a while, but it soon became laughable.

For all of my life I have heard of the end of the world coming. Over and over I have seen books touted, movies written and produced, preachers preaching, and even read newspaper accounts of cults who have believed it so intensely that they have either killed themselves or done other extravagant gestures, wanting to be ready for the end of the world.

As Jesus says multiple times, don't worry about it. It is not for us to know when the end of the world is coming. Turmoil is nothing new, and there will always be charlatans who claim to have private and special knowledge, primarily to sell books or promote their films. My trust is in God, not men.

So as we struggle to control this pandemic, endure this political upheaval, and face fears and dilemmas, let's not despair. Let's put your trust in God and love one another and stay safe.

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