



Daily Meditations

May 18-23, 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.

COLLECT, 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.

Open the Way with Stories

Monday, May 18, 2020

Matthew 13:1-16

"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." - Matthew 13:11-13 The Message

As a therapist, I sometimes illustrate points with stories. It communicates both more clearly and a little enigmatically to help people open their minds to new ideas. So does Jesus, it seems. In this reflection, I plan to ask a lot of questions with no conclusive answers. Maybe these questions help move us to receptive insight.

Jesus retreats to a boat. He may have had practical reasons, such as being better heard by the crowds. Maybe Jesus maintains his boundaries as he retreats to the boat. Perhaps he gets emotionally overwhelmed by the pressing crowds. Mark reports that Jesus felt power flow out of him (NIV, v.5:30) when a woman touched the hem of his cloak; perhaps people's neediness and touch physically drain him. In this age of COVID-19, how does closeness or distance affect your physical and emotional health?

And how do we relate to the elements of the parable?

Are we the seeds, the Good News scattered randomly on good soil and bad, expected to grow our best wherever planted?

Are we the ground? If so, how can the ground make itself more fertile?

Are we the farmer? Do we randomly spread the Good News everywhere, generously, among the receptive and unreceptive? Or is Jesus chiding us to be more strategic in our planting? Is Jesus calling us to work harder to improve and cultivate the soil before planting? Jesus suggests that is his purpose in sharing the Good News in the form of parables.

Lord, open our ears. We're trying to listen.

Stones of Our Heart

Tuesday, May 19, 2020

Matthew 13:18-23

"Study this story of the farmer planting seed." - Matthew 13:18 The Message

Jesus unpacks the parable for his disciples (and Matthew records it here for our benefit). It must be a valuable story since all three Synoptic gospels include this parable.

In answer to my questions yesterday, Jesus asserts that we fit into the story as some combination of seeds and ground. If the farmer represents Jesus, sharing the news of the Kingdom of God; if the farmer, Jesus, makes visible and present the Kingdom of God, here and now, then instead of the farmer being incompetent, Jesus must be so profligate and generous that he shares it with everyone, everywhere. If we share in Jesus' mission, if we serve as Jesus' hands and feet, making the Kingdom of Heaven visible and present here and now, then we too are called to be so generous. Are you listening? Can you hear this?

Regarding the various qualities of ground: hard, rocky, weedy, and fertile, Do we believe that we have any agency to change the nature of our lives and our souls? Can we set boundaries and avoid getting trampled? Can we cast the stones out of our hearts? Can we give up our petty worries and concerns to be ready to recognize the Kingdom around us? I hope so.

Bow to the Master

Wednesday, May 20, 2020

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." - Matthew 22:46 The Message

I once had suggested to my daughter that I could take karate classes with her as a father/daughter activity. She said she wanted to keep karate to herself. When she was in high school and had earned her black belt, she invited me to start coming to classes. I said 'no way.' I knew that given her rank, I would have to bow and say, "Hi Sensei" ("Yes, Master"). No way that I would bow to my daughter. [It's a fun family lore story to share.]

But Jesus must have found dealing with the Sadducees and Pharisees extremely tedious. In most of Matthew chapters 21 and 22, they are trying to trip Jesus up with legalistic/theological questions. They ask about paying taxes; they ask to whom a multiple widowed wife belongs in the afterlife; they

ask which is the most important commandment. They remind me of people who want to spend my time telling me how inconsistent the Bible is. Tedious. But I'm not as facile with words as Jesus. I usually can't trip them up in return, so I just share some inconsistencies I know myself. That seems to be Jesus' strategy here, too.

Father? Son? and Holy Spirit?

Thursday, May 21, 2020

Matthew 28:16-20

"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." - Matthew 28:18-19 The Message

Once in a while, I think it is worth considering what we mean by the words we habitually use. What do we mean by Father? Son? and Holy Spirit? Here are my brief stabs at answers.

Father: the creative sustaining energy that holds and unfolds in all of creation from all the living organisms, to the tiniest ineffable quantum string, to the planets, stars, galaxies, and potential parallel universes.

Son: the living manifestation of the Kingdom of Heaven, making it visible and present here and now; that manifestation of the Kingdom happened in a man named Jesus, and it happens through the body we call Church when we show welcome, healing, and love for everyone in our community.

Holy Spirit: the inspiration to recognize the presence of the Kingdom; to take action to manifest the Kingdom; to speak God's truth as we understand it; to live in blissful gratitude in the Kingdom.

Amen

Foundational Words

Friday, May 22, 2020

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." - Matthew 7:24-25

Matthew reports Jesus saying these words at the end of what we call "The Sermon on the Mount" (Matthew chapters 5,6,7). Those foundational words to which Jesus refers cover a lot of ground:

- The Beatitudes ("blessed are you when...") ([Matthew 5:1-12](#))
- You are the salt and the light of the world ([Matthew 5:13-16](#))
- Jesus' expansion and extensions of the Ten Commandments "I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them." ([Matthew 5:17-32](#))
- Say what you mean; mean what you say ([Matthew 5:33-37](#))
- Love your enemies ([Matthew 5:38-47](#))
- "Live generously and graciously toward others, the way God lives toward you." ([Matthew 5:48](#))
- Do your good deeds privately ([Matthew 6:1-4](#))
- Pray privately not for public consumption ([Matthew 6:5-6](#))
- Lord's Prayer ([Matthew 6:7-15](#))

- Practice spiritual disciplines (like fasting) privately ([Matthew 6:16-18](#))
- Give your entire attention to what God is doing God now ([Matthew 6:19-34](#))
- Golden Rule ([Matthew 7:1-12](#))

In light of this, I wonder what Jesus calls me to do in light of: my blessings; my talents and callings (salt and light); my desire to love my enemies; my discipline (or lack of) to engage myself in spiritual practices; my need to focus only on today ("give us today our daily bread"); my ability (or lack) to be present in this moment now; my awareness of how I treat others?

How about this for an example: wear a mask in public during our period of mandated physical distancing? Even though I doubt the efficacy of masks, and I don't like feeling like I'm giving in to social pressure, I recognize that my neighbors in public feel scared (and with good reason). If my wearing a mask helps them feel safer, then I do it. [And maybe it really does some good. I always keep in mind that I may be wrong.]

Preach the Gospel without Words

Saturday, May 23, 2020

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

*"Your cleansed and grateful life, not your words, will bear witness to what I have done."
- Matthew 8:4 The Message*

Words attributed to St. Francis of Assisi: "Preach the Gospel at all times. When necessary, use words." I wish that my life resulted in hope for the poor, sight for the blind, healing for the sick. I wish that my life reflected a rejection of violence in all my dealings with people. I wish God's light shined through me.

But all I have are words to communicate that ideal while I hope to get better.

Lord help me to use these words well.

How do you want your life to impact the world?

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