



Daily Meditations **May 20-25, 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 5:

*Almighty God, whom truly to know is everlasting life: Grant us so perfectly to know your Son Jesus Christ to be the way, the truth, and the life, that we may steadfastly follow his steps in the way that leads to eternal life; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. **Amen.***

Acts of Grace

Monday, May 20, 2019

Luke 7:36-50

"But he said to the woman, 'Your faith has saved you; go in peace'."

Jesus has been invited to dine at the home of a Pharisee, and the festivities are interrupted by a woman known about town as a sinner. She comes in with a flask of ointment and bathes the feet of Jesus and anoints them with the oil and then kisses them, and he accepts this gift to the dismay of the Pharisee. While the Pharisee and other witnesses admonish Jesus because of the woman's reputation, Jesus clearly understands that he is the recipient of an act of pure grace. He did not ask for this; but he accepted it for what it was, and it was probably all she had to give. In return, she asked nothing.

That's what acts of grace are ultimately about: doing someone a good deed with no expectation of receiving something in return. Many of our lives, you and me, have been filled with acts of grace, and some of these acts have provided us with blessings beyond measure, certainly beyond the relief Jesus felt from his foot massage. I'm not speaking here of God's grace. I'm speaking of simple, perhaps crucial, actions taken by another that, maybe, even changed the course of our lives. Especially if we live in America, especially if we have made it to some ripe old age with all our faculties intact and perhaps have a little money in the bank to supplement retirement funds, we have been graced simply by being born here. *As we watch other nations go up in flames or populations put under the jackboot of dictators, is it enough for us to bask in our good fortune? Or do we have a larger duty to pay it forward or respond in some way that acknowledges we did not and could not do it all by ourselves?* Thanks be to God, certainly; but thanks, too, to all those who helped us along the way.

Nothing to Do with the Seed

Tuesday, May 21, 2019

Luke 8:1-15

"But as for the seed that fell on rich soil, they are the ones who, when they have heard the word, embrace it with a generous and good heart, and bear fruit through perseverance."

This is the parable of the sower, and what he reaps from rocky ground, ground covered with thistles and weeds and then from the good earth. The seed of faith and obedience grows and thrives in the good soil, that is, the seed of faith becomes full of life. *But why?*

I can never read the parable of the sower without thinking about two situations that occurred in the 20th century. One was the Dust Bowl of the 1930s when the howling winds and poor farming methods collided at a point in time also plagued by national financial disaster. Even if farmers planted in good dirt, they saw their crops wither as the scorching dust blew through, sometimes with hurricane force and thousands left Texas and Oklahoma when they could no longer fight nature and the bankers. The second situation was the ironically bad decision made by the family of Lyndon B. Johnson when they moved into the Hill Country around Johnson City and tried to farm on topsoil that was an inch deep and strewn with rocks.

The question I ponder as I read through these verses for the umpteenth time in my life has nothing to do with the seed. It has everything to do with the soil. *What makes soil good, capable of nurturing fine plants that produce fine yields?* In some environments, soil is just good because of an accidental alignment with the stars of agriculture, and in others, soil is good because of science and chemistry and keen farming practices. *I wonder if it isn't true that the soil to which Jesus refers is not the result of awareness about the importance of good families, good schools, good government, and the human commitment to making those elements available to all--to every child, to every woman, to every man in our human family?*

Missing Something

Wednesday, May 22, 2019

Luke 8:16-25

"To anyone who has, more will be given, and from the one who has not, even what he seems to have will be taken away."

What a great line for the Joel Osteens of the world, the charlatans who preach that the rich deserve ever more because they are already rich and have gotten rich because that's what Jesus promised in Luke 8:18. These people love to pull texts out of context to justify their skewed and heretical propositions about the nature of Jesus Christ. Clearly, after reading through the remainder of the Gospels, this is not the key take-away! Just before this verse is this one: "Take care, then, how you hear." Indeed. The admonitions about the accumulation of wealth pour out of Jesus like wedding wine flows from one of the jugs of water he tinkered with at his mother's behest. Consider the Sermon on the Mount. Consider the very serious judgments that come from Jesus' own mouth about to whom much is given much is expected. Consider the comments that it will be easier for a rich man to pass through the eye of a needle than enter the kingdom of heaven.

To be honest, I can't really figure out why this particular highlighted sentence is placed in this place in the Gospel of Luke as a direct quote. I'm

missing something, and I'm uncertain what it is. Excuse me while I sit awhile and think about this. Please join me.

Who Performs Miracles?

Thursday, May 23, 2019

Luke 8:35-37

"Those who witnessed it told them how the possessed man had been saved."

Yet another miracle is related here. It concerns a man possessed by demons. Jesus drives the demons out, and the man becomes normal. Everyone who sees the process is astonished. Everyone who hears about it has another reaction: "The entire population of the region of the Gerasenes asked Jesus to leave them because they were seized with great fear."

My goodness: *What?* Here Jesus has taken a man who had to have been the scourge of his region, a wacko of the first order raving and running through the streets naked and filthy, and miraculously made him like everyone else, although someone less afraid than all the others. This is not the only time that, when faced with some inexplicable act by Jesus or one of his disciples, people set their hair on fire (not literally) and run screaming into the desert. To me, these are examples of an axiom later espoused by some wise student of human nature: No good deed goes unpunished.

We hear these days about many miraculous events. These dubiously named occurrences seems to be a staple of the evening news. I am of at least two minds about miracles. One: I doubt the existence of divine miracles in these days and times, period. If miracles were available, and you were God, why wouldn't you be delivering them to the people stuck in Mexico trying to flee the violence of their own countries and stymied by the politics of race at the border? Why not give people like Mother Theresa a little boost now and then? Why not stop the massacre in Yemen? Why not bring peace between the Israelis and Palestinians? Second, if the sick are to be healed, the hungry fed, the wrongly jailed freed, the refugees housed and loved, and God's not in that business, then how is that supposed to happen? If miracles are to occur, are we, you and I, making them happen? Why not?

A Deep and Abiding Love

Friday, May 24, 2019

Luke 8:40-56

"A man named Jarius, an official of the synagogue, came forward. He fell at the feet of Jesus and begged him to come to his house, because he had an only daughter, about 12 years old, and she was dying."

Actually, as Jesus tried to make his way to the house, the girl died. At her bedside, Jesus brings her back to life. "Her parents were astounded, and he instructed them to tell no one what had happened." Okay there is a for-sure head-slapper. Jesus does a miracle, and he has done many publicly, and he does not want the world to know about it. *Why not?* I mean, after all, in the next chapter of Luke he has his disciples go out and perform miracles and signs in front of everyone. *They're to evangelize! Why not make some light shine on this moment of resurrection of a child?* Because I believe, that's not what this story is about. This story is not about Jesus making a public point to prove he is who he says he is. This story--and maybe many others--is about Jesus doing something out of nothing more than compassion, a deep and abiding love for his fellow human beings, a sign not of his divinity but of his personhood.

Doggie Bags for All

Saturday, May 25, 2019

Luke 9:1-17

"He said to them, 'Give them some food yourselves'."

In this first part of the ninth chapter of Luke, we have the feeding of the 5,000 who have followed Jesus to Bethsaida after the return of the disciples. There isn't enough food to go around, but the amount grows to, in fact, feed everyone with doggie bags for all! Here is a key point to consider: Jesus does not feed the 5,000. He tells the disciples to do that. Churning around for insight on this event, I ran across a very nicely done commentary by a man named Mark Woods. I can't improve on his insight, so let me share it here with you at some length.

"When Jesus multiplies the loaves and fishes, though, instead of handing them round himself he gives them to his disciples to serve. They are commanded to give, and then they are given the resources to give. The nourishment they are enabled to provide is inexhaustible, because its source is God himself.

"So this story is very challenging. Jesus did not feed the 5,000; instead, he made it possible for his disciples to do so. It is the same today. As St. Teresa of Avila said: 'Christ has no body now but yours. No hands, no feet on earth but yours. Yours are the eyes through which he looks compassion on this world. Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good. Yours are the hands through which he blesses all the world. Yours are the hands, yours are the feet, yours are the eyes, you are his body. Christ has no body now on earth but yours'."

There is the divine lesson. Shall we accept it and own it. *Or shall we run away in fear like the Gerasenes?*

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