



Daily Meditations July 22-27, 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: Dave Boyd, Pat Gillory, Jay Nickel, Bob Reed, T.Cay Rowe, and Carroll Wilson.

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

COLLECT, PROPER 11:

Almighty God, the fountain of all wisdom, you know our necessities before we ask and our ignorance in asking: Have compassion on our weakness and mercifully give us those things which for our unworthiness we dare not, and for our blindness we cannot ask; through the worthiness of your Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God now and for ever. Amen.

Nudging Them

Monday, July 22, 2019

Mark 4:1-20

"[Jesus] taught using stories, many stories...He told [his disciples], 'You've been given insight into God's kingdom--you know how it works. But to those who can't see it yet, everything comes in stories, creating readiness, nudging them toward receptive insight'."
- vv. 2, 11

What's the best way to convey an idea or process that is totally outside the listener's experience? Relate it to something already known and understood. Stories of everyday events and relationships connect concrete experiences to abstract thoughts. Jesus, the Great Teacher, knew this and knew his disciples as well as the crowds who listened to him teach. But I would surmise that even the disciples didn't "get it" all the time. To encourage them, he affirms them as being members of his inner circle who have been "given insight" beyond what the ordinary listener would have. Jesus then shares with his disciples that the stories prepare the way for understanding among his listeners. It goes unsaid that they also prepare his disciples for understanding.

The phrase "nudging them toward receptive insight" strikes a chord in me. Jesus does not browbeat his listeners; he draws them little by little, a nudge here or there, towards acceptance and understanding. As our Lord and Master Teacher, he knows the hearts and minds of those he is teaching; he knows that some will learn faster than others and come to "receptive insight" more quickly. He also knows that some will never arrive, or perhaps their lack of

movement will not advance to the point of understanding.

The question for me is where am I on this spectrum of understanding? What does it take to "nudge [me] toward receptive insight? Well, I am sure having a desire to hear about God would be a good start. Probably attending church service or bible study will advance me. And association with people who are also seeking God should certainly create in me more insight into the mind of God.

Insight is not a static place; once you have some insight, then the horizon recedes, presenting you with more to know, more to understand. Seeking the omnipresent and all-knowing God is a lifework worthy of human effort.

The Opposite of Generosity

Tuesday, July 23, 2019

Mark 4:21-34

"Are you listening to this? Really listening? Listen carefully to what I am saying--and be wary of the shrewd advice that tells you how to get ahead in the world on your own. Giving, not getting, is the way. Generosity begets generosity. Stinginess impoverishes." - vv. 23-25

Generosity can be defined as the sincere desire to make others' lives easier and more pleasant. When something is given without an expectation of return and without duress or pressure, that also defines generosity. It doesn't matter what is being given as long as the impetus behind the action is altruistic, seeking the good of another with no self-serving motives.

Jesus here speaks to the crowds and his disciples about sharing the good news of the kingdom of God. As he is open and sharing with them, he encourages them to be open and sharing with others. Jesus also echoes many of the Hebrew prophets who spoke of the stiff-necked Hebrews' refusal to hear the words of God.

Sharing the good news of Jesus brings happiness to the sharer and stimulates the hearer to seek God...certainly a good thing. Sharing your time or your wealth or your thoughts with another with no self-serving motives usually brings deep satisfaction, a feeling of having done something worthwhile, unless you have been brainwashed into thinking that success is counted in money or possessions or control. Jesus warns us about this.

The opposite of generosity is stinginess, the unwillingness to share whether it be money, time, attention, or thoughts. The way of the world says saving up and not sharing makes you rich; Jesus says it makes you poor. I know to whom to listen.

What to do When You Experience Fear

Wednesday, July 24, 2019

Mark 4:35-41

*"Teacher, is it nothing to you that we're going down?"
Awake now, [Jesus] told the wind to pipe down and said to the sea, "Quiet! Settle down!"
The wind ran out of breath; the sea became smooth as glass. Jesus reprimanded the disciples: "Why are you such cowards? Don't you have any faith at all?" - vv. 38b-40*

Like an evil spirit called out of a demon-possessed man, the wind and waves

calm to stillness at the voice of the Creator of the Universe, the Logos that spoke it all into existence. Like the turmoil of the wind and waves, the disciples were full of fear, without understanding, and at the mercy of our natural instinct to try to preserve life and limb. Their fear and cowardice drove them in much the same way as a demon would a demon-possessed human.

Paul wrote to Timothy in 2 Timothy 1:7 that "...God gave us not a spirit of fearfulness; but of power and love and discipline." In John 14:27, Jesus tells his disciples later in his ministry to "Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid." Fear is the opposite of faith and love and discipline. Are we going to experience fear? Absolutely. What to do: Affirm your faith, trust in the love of God, and discipline yourself to keep your thoughts on the promises of God. Not easy. When Paul and Silas had been beaten and thrown into prison, I am sure they were afraid of the crowd that was clamoring for their blood. What did they do? They sang praises to God. Was the earthquake God's answer to their faith? I like to believe it was. Their generosity to their jailor caused them to stay and not run away, sharing the good news of Christ with the jailor and his family.

When troubles threaten, my challenge is to trust in God to see me through and to banish the fear and panic that try to defeat me.

What Does Fear Do?

Thursday, July 25, 2019

Mark 5:1-20

"As Jesus got out of the boat, a madman from the cemetery came up to him...Night and day he roamed through the graves and the hills, screaming out and slashing himself with sharp stones. When he saw Jesus a long way off, he ran and bowed in worship before him--then bellowed in protest, 'What business do you have, Jesus, Son of the High God, messing with me? I swear to God, don't give me a hard time!'" - vv. 2, 3, 5-7

How many movies or TV shows have I watched in which the callow, young outlaw or lawbreaker threatens the law-enforcer with words and attitudes just like this! Despite the bravado, this "mob" of demons in the poor man was frightened to death of Jesus, and all this brave talk was just that, because notice in verse 3 that they "bowed in worship before him." These evil spirits recognized the Creator of the worlds, the Son of God, all-human and all-spirit, all-at-once. They knew that Jesus could destroy them with a word.

But Jesus knew that the fear and chaos with those demons would take them to destruction without him doing any more than banishing them out of this poor man and into a herd of pigs. Fear caused the disciples to wake Jesus during a physical storm; fear caused the demons to plead with Jesus not to destroy them; and the resultant chaos of their fear drove the pigs mad enough to force them headlong down a cliff and into destruction.

What does fear do to me? Fear paralyzes me; fear causes my mind to run in endless rat-mazes of worry and frustration; fear causes me to lash out at those who attempt to help me; fear causes me to cower from confrontation; fear causes me to stockpile earthly possessions...and so on; the list is endless. Most of all, fear contradicts my faith. The demons knew Jesus was the Son of God, and this story reveals their solid knowledge in his eternal nature. They did not need faith...they had knowledge. My faith rests upon the witness of early followers of Jesus and my confidence in my calling to be a child of God, producing a certainty within me that gives me courage. I'd like to say to fear, with the callow bravado of the demons in this story, "What business do you have, Fear, messing with me?!"

Ultimate Disease of Death

Friday, July 26, 2019

Mark 5:21-43

"Jesus said to her, 'Daughter, you took a risk of faith, and now you're healed and whole. Live well, live blessed! Be healed of your plague'." - v. 34

Just think how much faith it took for the woman who had bled without stopping for years to approach a strange man, Jesus, and have confidence that even the touch of his clothing would heal her? I'm sure she had to overcome a great deal of fear to approach him, reach out, and just grasp the hem of his garment, but it worked! Not only was she instantly healed, she also received the above blessing from Jesus. Her healing was great, but the healing of Jairus' daughter from the ultimate disease of death was even greater.

Granted, the daughter expressed no faith to our knowledge, but her father Jairus did. We do not know whether Jairus knew Jesus personally or whether he had just heard about Jesus' power over illness, but whichever it was, faith and hope in the possibility of Jesus' healing his daughter drove him to come and ask for help. It must have taken a while for Jesus to get there, because when he finally arrived, the daughter had died, and verse 38 states that "[Peter, James, John, and Jesus along with Jairus] entered the leader's house and pushed their way through the gossips looking for a story and the neighbors bringing in casseroles." Death had taken the little girl...or so it seemed.

The neighbors and gossips were quite sarcastic with Jesus, so Jesus cleared the house, only allowing Jairus and Jesus' disciples to stay. I can only think that Jesus surrounded himself with men of faith in his power at this difficult moment.

When Jesus brought the child back to life, all present were filled with joy, but Jesus told them not to tell anyone what had occurred. Strangely, this reminds me of Mark 4:25, which in The Message is translated as "Giving, not getting, is the way. Generosity begets generosity. Stinginess impoverishes" but in the NIV it reads, "Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them."

Those who had faith in Jesus were strengthened by his healing of the child, while those who scoffed and mocked him were convinced that nothing happened, and even the possibility of faith in Jesus is diminished. The seed has to fall on ground that will receive it.

Scatter Seeds of the Kingdom

Saturday, July 27, 2019

Mark 6:1-13

"Then they [the Twelve that Jesus sent out in pairs] were on the road. They preached with joyful urgency that life can be radically different; right and left they sent the demons packing; they brought wellness to the sick, anointing their bodies, healing their spirits." - vv.12-13

In Mark 4 another parable or story that Jesus used to teach was about the small seed thrown into a field that sprouts, grows, and comes to fruition all without the planter having anything to do with it, even producing a giant tree that the birds can roost in. So, he sends out his Twelve chosen disciples to scatter seeds of the Kingdom. He told them to take nothing much with

them..."You are the equipment" (8) and if not welcomed, then "Shrug your shoulders and be on your way" (11).

Yes, their message was "that life can be radically different," but I also think the message was they themselves! Here were ordinary young Galileans, infused by "joyful urgency" and positive energies that heal all the common woes of humankind. What's not to like about that?

These missionaries preached a doctrine of hope and faith, that life was more than just the drudgery and oppression the Hebrews were undergoing under the Pax Romana and even under the dominance of the hairsplitting Jewish sects. They preached that God loves and cares for them, and that a more spiritual approach to God was the correct path to the Father. We must worship God in spirit and in truth. It's the same message we have today. And our hearts are the same kinds of ground that Jesus described in his parable.

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