



Daily Meditations April 1-6, 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, 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 Lent 4:

Gracious Father, whose blessed Son Jesus Christ came down from heaven to be the true bread which gives life to the world: Evermore give us this bread, that he may live in us, and we in him; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

Physical vs. Spiritual Well Being

Monday, April 1, 2019

John 6:1-15

"The people realized that God was at work among them in what Jesus had just done. They said, 'This is the Prophet for sure, God's Prophet right here in Galilee!' Jesus saw that in their enthusiasm, they were about to grab him and make him king, so he slipped off and went back up the mountain to be by himself." - The Message vv.14-15

The great crowds that followed Jesus were hungry, not just for physical food as many were no doubt in poverty or even perhaps pilgrims trekking to Jerusalem, but also for relief from the oppression of living as a subjugated people in their own land. The prophets Micah and Isaiah had foretold the coming of a Deliverer, a Savior, a Messiah, a Prophet and Judge to save them, and they were ready...just not with the right understanding.

When Jesus, acting out of compassion for the people, provided bread and fish for them out of the boy's meager lunch, the crowds saw God sending them manna to sustain them through a wilderness, and they wanted a physical leader to follow as the Israelites had followed Moses. Understanding that the people had misunderstood this sign of power as a physical or fleshly one, Jesus withdrew. Why did Jesus withdraw? Perhaps as a human, he understood all too well how easy it is to confuse physical well-being or satiety with spiritual well-being. Or perhaps he wanted some time to elapse from this manifestation of the power of God to allow the people to think about it. or perhaps he absolutely did not want to be considered any sort of candidate for political position. Whether one of these or another reason, this set the stage for the discourse and events of the chapter that follows.

We are going to spend the entire week in the sixth chapter of John, and what a wonderful place to go deep and truly "get next to" our Lord Jesus

Christ. Not only does it contain two of his more notable miracles, but also the heart and soul of the mission he had come to fulfill for humanity's sake.

Feel the Power!

Tuesday, April 2, 2019

John 6:16-27

"Jesus answered, 'You've come looking for me not because you saw God in my actions but because I fed you, filled your stomachs--and for free. Don't waste your energy striving for perishable food like that. Work for the food that sticks with you, food that nourishes your lasting life, food the Son of Man provides. He and what he does are guaranteed by God the Father to last'." - vv. 26-27 The Message

After Jesus miraculously appears on the other side of the lake by strolling across the water out to his disciples' becalmed boat in the dead of night, the people knew that he had power over the physical elements of this world. He definitely had their attention. But here he clearly spells it out for them: "You've got it wrong; I'm not a physical leader or savior, but something even greater, and God has sent me. Those signs are just to get your attention."

It's easy for me to judge these people, looking back through the telescope of the gospel and history. But the reality is that we are no different. It's a bit of a joke that the radio preacher urges his listening audience to "put your hands on the back of the radio and feel the power!" But isn't that what we want to do? We want to see tangible proof that God approves of us in the form of earthly goods or power or well-being or satisfaction. Feel the power!

Today many prominent preachers sell a "prosperity theology: 'God wants you to prosper, to have plenty of money, to fulfill your destiny'." Does God wish the "best" for me? Yes! But just as the crowds misunderstood, so we too can misunderstand. God created us in His own image--a spirit--and his concerns for humanity have to do with the spiritual realm. I saw a poster that pointed out that if God's sign of grace on a person was physical success and well-being, the apostle Paul must not have been in God's grace. And what about Jesus himself? On the shore of Lake Tiberias in this chapter, he could have become the leader of his people, carried along on a flood tide of approval; instead, he chose to attempt to refocus them on the spiritual rather than the physical and temporal side of life. If the sign of God's approval for our lifestyle is wealth, power, and health, then Jesus was not on the approved list.

Does this mean that we cannot possess health, wealth, or power? Absolutely not! However, it comes with a warning: While possessing it, we must not put our trust in those things and neglect our spiritual needs; instead we must put our trust in God who loves us and saves us. Keep your spiritual eye trained on the truly valuable prize: eternal life with God.

He Will Not Let You Go

Wednesday, April 3, 2019

John 28-40

"Jesus said, 'I am the Bread of Life. The person who aligns with me hungers no more and thirsts no more, ever. I have told you this explicitly because even though you have seen me in action, you don't really believe me. Every person the Father gives me eventually comes running to me. And once that person is with me, I hold on and don't let go. I came down from heaven not to follow my own whim but to accomplish the will of the One who sent me'." - vv. 35-38 The

What is this hunger and thirst that is satisfied by Jesus? As I look around me at the natural world that I've learned about in science class, and as I look at human relationships, a picture forms for me characterizing this hunger and thirst.

In my rudimentary understanding of chemistry, atomic particles all have positive or negative charges that are continually seeking their fulfillment in another atom with the necessary opposite numbers before stability or satisfaction can be reached. Nature cannot abide a void: It will always be filled or completed.

Part of human nature is curiosity, and knowledge stimulates our curiosity. When you know a little, you usually want to know a lot. This can become an insatiable need to fill that hole of ignorance. As we grown up, we long for another human being to love and unite with to satisfy that sense of incompleteness. After God created us in his own image, our spirits have continually sought to be reunited with our Creator, much as a child longs for her/his parent. These are real things, albeit intangible, just like what Jesus is talking about. The seeking after knowledge of God and his will for us becomes a driving force that brings us running to Jesus because he is the bread of life, he offers the answers we seek, he fills that void within us that drives us.

Jesus points out that not everyone is called to him, which is interesting since we are all created in God's image. It makes me wonder if something else has filled that void within those people that prevents them from coming to him, some idol or some ideology. Not only is it encouraging that once you are united with Jesus, he will not let you go. You might let go, but he will not. Just like the Heavenly Father, Jesus is faithful.

Nobody Thrills Me Like You Do

Thursday, April 4, 2019

John 6:41-51

"Don't bicker among yourselves over me. You're not in charge here. The Father who sent me is in charge. He draws people to me--that's the only way you'll ever come. Only then do I do my work, putting people together, setting them on their feet, ready for the End." - v. 44 The Message

One way that God draws us to Jesus is through music, and as I was thinking about these scriptures, an old Dennis Jernigan gospel hymn insinuated itself into my consciousness.

I'd like to say, Lord, from the start, "Thank You for breaking through my heart! Thank you for tearing ev'ry chain apart." When I was lost You made a way. You turned the darkest night into day. You are my joy and Lord I'd like to say that...(Chorus:) Nobody fills my heart like Jesus. Nobody thrills me like You do. O, nobody fills my heart like Jesus. Nobody, Lord, but You. Nobody but You!

<https://www.elyrics.net/read/d/dennis-jernigan-lyrics/nobody-fills-my-heart-like-jesus-lyrics.html>

What Feeds and Renews Us

Friday, April 5, 2019

John 6:52-59

"Only insofar as you eat and drink flesh and blood, the flesh and blood of the Son

of Man, do you have life within you. The one who brings a hearty appetite to this eating and drinking has eternal life and will be fit and ready for the Final Day. My flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. By eating my flesh and drinking my blood you enter into me and I into you. In the same way that the fully alive Father sent me here and I live because of him, so the one who makes a meal of me lives because of me. This is the Bread from heaven. Your ancestors ate bread, and later died. Who eats this Bread will live always." - vv. 53-58 The Message

In this discourse, Jesus unites for all time his purpose on coming to earth and his deeply personal sacrifice with our celebration of salvation. It also ties together our physical need for regular sustenance to maintain good health with the equally necessary regular spiritual sustenance to maintain our "fit[ness]...for the Final Day." Moreover, the benefit from physical food lasts only a short time, while the spiritual food will bring eternal benefits.

What a powerful and inescapable metaphor! Without sustenance, we cannot function either physically or mentally. Not only does physical food satisfy our hunger, it also fuels the energies we need to grow, learn, be productive, and feel healthy emotions. No human is exempt from this. In the same way, our need for spiritual food is inescapable: We must have it to grow, learn, be productive, and feel healthy emotions.

As we celebrate Eucharist weekly, I have often reflected on a line from *The Book of Common Prayer* that expresses the wish that we not come to the table for "solace only" but also for "renewal." But the wafer and the cup are not what feeds and renews me; instead, it is the weekly communion with Jesus through his other persona, the Word. This brings renewal and sustenance: new thought patterns, new intentionality, new emotions, and an examined life.

Hard Teaching

Saturday, April 6, 2019

John 6:60-71

"[Jesus said to his disciples:] "The spirit can make life. Sheer muscle and willpower don't make anything happen. Every word I've spoken to you is a Spirit-word, and so it is life-making. But some of you are resisting, refusing to have any part in this...This is why I told you earlier that no one is capable of coming to me on his own. You get to me only as a gift from the Father." - vv. 63-65 The Message

Many years ago, I had a wonderful neighbor named Kathy. Her garden was the envy of the neighborhood, producing bumper crops of everything she planted. Her volunteer hours in the town surpassed everyone else's. Her boys were always scrubbed, on time, pleasant, and part of many activities. Her husband knew he could expect a clean house, home-baked bread, and nutritious home-grown vegetables with meals. And Kathy loved to give gifts, to share her bounty.

But, Kathy could not receive gifts.

No matter how many "tons" of green beans, jams and jellies, loaves of bread, good books to read, etc., she lovingly shared with me, she could never accept any small gift in return without immediately gifting me with something else. Such a problem, you say? Her industrious and self-sufficient outlook would not permit her to accept anything that she did not somehow "earn."

Kathy was/is a product of our "pull yourself up by your bootstraps," self-sufficient American culture, and she did it magnificently. But everything had to be earned, worked for, compensated, tallied, accounted for. An outstanding citizen!

I used to think that if I were in the crowds following Jesus, I would have

never rejected him. But we read of instance after instance of that very thing happening, such as in this passage. The "hard teaching" that people couldn't accept? God sent Jesus to be the sacrifice for our sins...freely and willingly given, a gift of grace, no strings attached, no works required...all they had to do was to accept it.

Then, as now, many cannot accept this. Why not? It would seem that God's gift would be easy to receive...but apparently not. Somehow the Father has to call them; perhaps this call is to be able to put self-importance and achievement aside and allow God to work in our hearts.

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