



Daily Meditations

December 30, 2019 through January 04, 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, CHRISTMAS I:

Almighty God, who hast poured upon us the new light of thine incarnate Word: Grant that the same light, enkindled in our hearts, may shine forth in our lives; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

Grab Hold of that Lifeline

Monday, December 30, 2019

John 5:1-15

"One man had been an invalid there [at the healing pool called Bethesda] for 38 years. When Jesus saw him stretched out by the pool and knew how long he had been there, he said, 'Do you want to get well?'" - v. 5-6 *The Message*

Context and delivery are everything in situations. Jesus is at a small pool by one of the city's gates. Clustered around the pool, huddled in "alcoves" or doorways or leaning against walls are invalids or sick people--lots of them--and possibly some of them were really sick and possibly some of them had chosen the invalid lifestyle. We don't know this, but we are observers of human nature.

Why this man? Why this question? And why does Jesus tell him later in the story not to go back to "the sinning life or something worse might happen?"

Thirty-eight years is a long time to be an invalid. A lifetime, really. Had this man given up hope? His statement that he has no one to help him into the pool when the waters are "stirred" by purportedly angelic healing tells us he was alone and viewed himself as helpless.

In our darkest hours when we feel alone, desolate, and helpless from cares of this world, Jesus is there, but we must invite him in. Jesus never healed a person who didn't participate in the healing except a couple of dead children and Lazarus, and those families implored him to do so. Jesus threw this man a lifeline, but he had to grab hold. So, must we. Let go of our loneliness and

isolation, our depressed helplessness, our fear and dread, and hold onto the lifeline from God.

The Magicians of Jesus' Day

Tuesday, December 31, 2019

John 4:46-54

"When [the court official] heard that Jesus had come from Judea to Galilee, he went and asked that he come down and heal his son, who was on the brink of death. Jesus put him off. 'Unless you people are dazzled by a miracle, you refuse to believe.' But the court official wouldn't be put off. 'Come down! It's life or death for my son.' Jesus simply replied, 'Go home. Your son lives'." - v. 47-50

I am entertained by magicians dazzling us with seeming impossibilities. The more spectacular ones entail creating a certain level of anticipation or even anxiety in the audience and often use flashing lights, music, or even fireworks...all smoke and mirrors. Magicians were around in Jesus' day also. We read in Scripture about a couple of them. But Jesus was not one of them, deceiving our senses in order to elevate themselves.

As a parent, I identify with the court official who had the good sense to go to the "great physician." I have no doubt his son was seriously ill, perhaps even to death. I do not think that the statement about dazzling with miracles was necessarily directed at the court official, but perhaps at those who followed him. This poor, distraught father approached the Creator of the universe as if he were an ordinary healer, beseeching Jesus to come to the boy.

The magnitude of this miracle, saving a child from death and healing him, is underplayed by the manner in which Jesus did it: no smoke and mirrors or fanfares or flashing lights, no abracadabra--just "Go home...your son lives."

I can imagine the conflicting emotions that raged in the father's breast as he hurried home, and then the dawning realization as he heard the good news that Jesus had healed his child. We have no record if this man became a follower of Jesus or not. However, I am certain he never forgot this miraculous healing of his son.

Where Humanity and Divinity Intersect

Wednesday, January 01, 2020

Matthew 1:18-25

"The birth of Jesus took place like this..." v. 18 The Message

The passage bursts with so many possibilities that I long to touch, so I think this will be a "stream-of-consciousness" meditation. Hang on.

First thoughts: 1) obviously written by a man. Just the facts, oriented towards honoring the noble Jewish character of Joseph. Love that Joseph was "chagrined, but noble, determined...Mary would not be disgraced." Obviously, Joseph has a sensitive and compassionate nature.

2) Further, Joseph listened to his dream. Reminds me of Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat. Does God speak to me in dreams? Joseph bar-Isaac saved the Jews from starvation by listening to his dreams. This Joseph must have thought about this deeply before he acted. What a brave man!

3) "This would bring the prophet's embryonic sermon to full term." (verse 22) Huh? "All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the prophet." (NRSV) Oh! The prophet planted the seed but most likely could not foresee the outcome, and here it is...embryonic, a stub-my-toe word in this context.

4) Joseph is quite a guy. "He did exactly what God's Angel commanded in the dream." What a huge step of faith and trust! By naming the child, Joseph accepted the child, and obviously accepted Mary as the marriage was consummated after Jesus' birth. Footnote in NRSV points out that the Hebrew word *almah* should be translated young woman not virgin.

I love this passage! Humanity and divinity intersect!

Deliverer, Savior, Messiah, Prophet, Judge *Thursday, January 2, 2020*

John 6:1-14

"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." - v. 14-15 The Message

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 hungry people, provided bread and fish to them out of a 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 fleshy 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 the events that follow.

Something Even Greater *Friday, January 3, 2020*

John 6:15-27

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." - v. 26-27 The Message

After Jesus miraculously appears on the other side of the lake by strolling out across the water to his disciples' becalmed boat in the dead of the 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 floodtide 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.

New Year, New Mantra

Saturday, January 04, 2020

John 9:1-12, 35-38

Walking down the street, Jesus saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned: this man or his parents, causing him to be born blind?" Jesus said, "You're asking the wrong question. You're looking for someone to blame. There is no such cause-effect here. Look instead for what God can do." - v. 1-3 The Message

As I begin this new year, I hope to make Jesus' words be my mantra. "Look instead for what God can do." Am I expecting dreams like Joseph had, or miraculously dazzling signs, an angel or epiphany? I hope not. Instead, I want to listen for that quiet "still voice" of the Holy Spirit, prompting me to lift up my neighbor, to call that lonely person, to feed that child, to do good without any expectation of return, and not just think about it but do it. Also, I hope to not continually look for the human answer of cause and effect to explain my deficiencies and misfortunes nor those of people I encounter, but instead look for what good can happen as a result. For such a few words, this is a big undertaking.

As Tiny Tim says in Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*, "God bless us everyone!"

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