



## Daily Meditations September 16-21, 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, 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, PROPER 19:

*Grant us, O Lord, to trust in you with all our hearts, for, as you always resist the proud who confide in their own strength, so you never forsake those who make their boast of your mercy; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

### Work as a Team

Monday, September 16, 2019

#### 1 Corinthians 1:1-19

*"You must get along with each other. You must learn to be considerate of one another, cultivating a life in common...you're fighting among yourselves!...I ask you, Has the Messiah been chopped up in little pieces so that we can each have a relic all our own?" vv. 10-11, 13*

Texans' passion for football is back, now that fall approaches, and with it the rivalries, both friendly and not-so-friendly, that power many fans. It's a game...but also more than a game. Those young men (mostly) who drive action back and forth across the field all must be dedicated to one purpose, act with one mind, and loyally protect and support the team as a single organism. When that occurs, this concentration of human will become a beautiful thing to watch. Basketball legend Phil Jackson put it succinctly: "The strength of the team is each individual member. The strength of each member is the team." Each player's abilities and gifts are enhanced by the synergy of the group, provided they are united in purpose.

Paul writes to the fledgling Corinthian Christians to get rid of the petty rivalries and work as a team. The single unifying thought for these Christians as well as for us is Christ Crucified, not the ideological or theological differences that might make us distinct from one another but the amazing fact that Christ has redeemed us.

While individual players on a team might be recognized for some outstanding effort, the team altogether is the entity that succeeds, that reaches the goal. So, it is with us who are in Christ: we cannot succeed in our Christian walk unless we go together.

# Paul's Pointy Finger

Tuesday, September 17, 2019

## 1 Corinthians 1:20-31

*"Take a good look, friends, at who you were when you got called into this life. I don't see many of 'the best and the brightest' among you, not many influential, not many from high society families. Isn't it obvious that God chose men and women that the culture overlooks and exploits and abuses, chose these 'nobodies' to expose the hollow pretensions of the 'somebodies'? That makes it quite clear that none of you can get by with blowing your own horn before God." - vv. 26-29"*

I love to read these texts in Eugene Peterson's *The Message* because, rephrased from the stately but distant texts of the RSV or ASRV, I cannot squirm away from the pointy finger Paul is aiming at me. For the same reason, I admire the American poet Emily Dickinson, whose quiet and uneventful life produced a wealth of thoughts about life and the human condition. She and Paul appear to be writing about much the same idea here:

*I'm nobody! Who are you?  
Are you nobody, too?  
Then there's a pair of us--don't tell!  
They'd banish us, you know.*

*How dreary to be somebody!  
How public, like a frog  
To tell your name the livelong day  
To an admiring bog!*

*Emily Dickinson*

Paul ends this reading passage with, "That's why we have the saying, 'If you're going to blow a horn, blow a trumpet for God'." - v. 31

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# As Outdated as Corsets or Spats

Wednesday, September 18, 2019

## 1 Corinthians 2:1-13

*"God's wisdom is something mysterious that goes deep into the interior of his purposes. We don't find it lying around on the surface. It's not the newest Message, but more like the oldest -- what God determined as the way to bring out the best in us, long before we ever arrived on the scene." - v. 7*

Absurd. Foolish. Those are the words Paul uses in these early parts of his love letter to the struggling Christians in Corinth to describe how the "wise" of the world view God's Message. And Corinth, like most Greek cities of the day, was a hotbed of ideas and philosophies. "Philosophers," the wise men of the day, earned their daily bread by standing on street corners and expounding new ideas. (Today we'd see them as something between advertising men and street hawkers.) A few of their ideas are still around, but they are mostly buried in all the tech-noise of sensationalism and social media, and most are as outdated as corsets or spats.

As humans, we recognize one another by physical looks, our faces, our height, even our clothing style; God recognizes us by our spirits, and when He "calls" us, it is in a deep way that is incomprehensible to the world, even seemingly absurd or foolish. I don't presume to know how this works, but I do know that faith in God's plan provides me with a way to live my life with peace and even joy, unlike human-invented ideologies or "new" ideas. Where did my faith spring from? Somehow among all the clamor of the world, my spirit heard the voice of Jesus as he revealed God's wisdom.

Jesus told his disciples, "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." - John 6:44

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## **There's Hope for All of Us** *Thursday, September 19, 2019*

### **1 Corinthians 2:14-3:15**

*"The unspiritual self, just as it is by nature, can't receive the gifts of God's Spirit. There's no capacity for them. They seem like so much silliness. Spirit can be known only by spirit -- God's Spirit and our spirits in open communion." - v. 2:14*

In this passage, Paul calls the followers of Christ in Corinth "infantile," which implies that they can grow up in spirituality. There's hope for all of us! Just as we must teach a child how to behave in social situations, how to be responsible how to be productive, we must school our unruly and selfish "natural" natures to live our lives attuned to the spiritual. It doesn't come easily: Our drive to gratify the desires of our physical nature is a powerful force. We joke, "The devil made me do it!" but that "devil" is the natural self who wants what it sees. The balance as I see it is between what do I need physically to live in this world without too much discomfort and what my spirit requires of me to be in communion with God.

In his letter to the church in Galatia, Paul furthers this idea by listing the fruits of the Spirit, which do not come all at once but build up gradually one upon the other:

*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control..." - Galatians 5:22-23*

How unfortunate that self-control comes last! That's the wisdom of this world. On second thought, if self-control came first, I personally would be able to take credit for my own transformation. That's the "absurd and foolish" wisdom of God. Jesus calls us faith sustains us, and the Spirit enables us.

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## **Temple of God** *Friday, September 20, 2019*

### **1 Corinthians 3:16-23**

*"You realize, don't you, that you are the temple of God, and God himself is present in you? No one will get by with vandalizing God's temple, you can be sure of that." - v.16*

Just before this passage, Paul wrote to the Corinthians to "[t]ake particular care in picking out your building material" as you construct a worthy temple for God to dwell in. Paul's obvious reference is to Solomon constructing the First Temple in Jerusalem, and how he selected only the best, the purest, and the finest quality building materials according to God's instruction.

For all my life, I've heard this "Temple of God" passage as an exhortation to refrain from physical sins such as pollution by drug or alcohol dependence or sexual acts. However, I now have a slightly different perspective.

All of the first three chapters of I Corinthians address the theology and the attitudes the Corinthian Christians hold. In no uncertain terms, Paul tells them that (1) they must get along with each other, (2) they must be united under one leader, who is Christ, (3) they must resist the temptation to buy into the world's ideas about self-importance, (4) they must hold fast to God's seemingly simple wisdom and not follow human ideologies or wisdom, and (5) they must

grow in their Christianity. This last admonition segues into Paul comparing the building of a congregation of Christians to planting a garden or building a house and finally into building a worthy Temple in which God will dwell.

While I certainly do not reject the concept that we should maintain our physical bodies in such a way that God can reside in us, I believe Paul's message here is more about the attitudes and beliefs that make us worthy dwellings for God. What I am taking away is that we must honor and support our fellow Christians, not think too highly of ourselves, hold fast to the Message of Jesus Christ and him crucified, and by doing so, seek to grow as Christians, becoming more spiritually minded all our lives. When I consider these items, I am reminded of the Ten Commandments: the first four say to love God with all my heart and the final six say to love my neighbor as myself.

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## No Differences

Saturday, September 21, 2019

### 1 Corinthians 4:1-7

*"For who do you know that really knows you, knows your heart? And even if they did, is there anything they would discover in you that you could take credit for? Isn't everything you have and everything you are sheer gifts from God? So, what's the point of all this comparing and competing?" - v. 7*

*What?!* You mean that I cannot enjoy Jeopardy, Wheel of Fortune, basketball, or football games, *The Voice*, gymnastics, the Olympics? No, of course not! Paul is addressing the problem of some Corinthian Christians who are "lording it over" some others, based on who first shared the gospel with them or some imagined preeminence of theological understanding. The games we indulge in have as their purpose entertainment; the competition Paul addresses could have eternal ramifications.

Instead, Paul says that whatever good things are in these Christians' lives are direct blessings of God and certainly not due to their self-worth or talents or who they know. Paul makes this point time and time again in his writings, underscoring that in Christ there are no differences between us, neither East nor West, black, brown nor white, male nor female, slave nor free. I think we are still working on assimilating this teaching.

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