



## ***Daily Devotionals*** ***January 21-26, 2019***

*The Biblical readings are taken from the Daily Office in the Book of Common Prayer for Proper 17, Year 1 and written by the St. Stephen's Meditation Writing Team: Judy Aronow, Janice Bachardy, Pat Gillory, Frances McMaster, Jay Nickel, Bob Reed, T. Cay Rowe, and Carroll Wilson.*

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

### **COLLECT EPIPHANY 2:**

Almighty God, whose Son our Savior Jesus Christ is the light of the world: Grant that your people, illumined by your Word and Sacraments, may shine with the radiance of Christ's glory, that he may be known, worshipped, and obeyed to the ends of the earth; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

### **Speaking Truth to Power**

*Monday, January 21, 2019*

#### **Ephesians 4:1-16**

*"I, then, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to live in a manner worthy of the call you have received..."*

There are many points to be made about these 16 verses, but perhaps it is worthwhile to stop a moment and focus on the very beginning, quote above: "I...a prisoner for the Lord...". Paul is a prisoner for the Lord in Rome, the very center of his and that world's universe, the place of mighty armies and mighty rulers and mighty appetites and mighty wealth--and little Paul, a mere smidgen of a man who appears to be using at least part of his time to remind his fellow Christians in pockets there and elsewhere about how best they should live under the yoke of two despotic regimes, the one outside Paul's prison window and the one created by the Jews and competing religious or philosophical forces. Being unjustly jailed seems to concentrate the senses for the few whose messages are as timeless as those of Jesus Christ himself.

I hope we have all at some point in our studies or intellectual wanderings come across Martin Luther King Jr.'s famous letter from the Birmingham Jail, a powerful indictment not only of the public officials charged with enforcing the law of the land, but also the religious representatives of that day who went along with the powerful in the take-down of King and his supporters seeking what was only theirs under the laws of God and of the land in which they lived. Where Paul, in these first few verses of Chapter 4, exhorts his friends to turn their talents and energies toward building the church and sustaining a movement, King sings the same hymn but with an additional verse, one that we might need to consider again today because he speaks truth to power like no one else could do at the time of his

incarceration. The modern church, he warned, "is blemished and scarred by defenders of the status quo" and provides cover for the power structure to keep people down, not build them up. Not two decades before King wrote this letter out of an Alabama jail, another deeply religious Protestant, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, wrote his own letters from a prison run by the Nazis because he, like Paul before him and King after him, told the princes and principalities what they did not want to hear or believe. Paul and Bonhoeffer died at the hands of those they vilified. King's assassin--well, we don't know that much about him. We do know, though, that if one adheres to Christian principles, one runs the serious risk of ending up behind bars or, just as bad, ostracized or, worse, crucified.

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## Only Suckers

Tuesday, January 22, 2019

### Ephesians 4:17-32

*"So. I declare and testify in the Lord that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds; darkened in understanding, alienated from the life of God because of ignorance, because of the hardness of heart..."*

Starting here with verse 25, Paul begins to get specific about how to live in harmony with God's wishes and the witness of Christ's life. But, before embarking on a discussion about this set of verses and the others to follow in the Book of Ephesians, written while Paul was a prisoner in Rome, let's not fail to realize that if we do what we read we should do, then we will be, in popular vernacular, "Suckers." Only suckers would buy the idea that one should be true to the best of what one believes, not one's worst instincts. Only suckers would try to fight for the rights of innocents to aid and comfort and safety away from the tyrants of the world who would, at worst, kill them or, better but still bad, use them for political purposes. The list of the good we should do as Christians serves as a road marker to *Suckerdom*! What kind of sucker would love rather than put the screws to his fellowman? What kind of sucker would use his power to give homeless children food and shelter? What kind of sucker would say, "No!" when her government tried to send her sons off to endless wars and to build weapons capable of demolishing the entire planet? What kind of sucker would want to limit the use of fossil fuels to stop global warming? What kind of sucker even believes in such a thing?

Has Bernie Madoff written such a letter from prison? Has anyone ever been jailed after ruining the American economy in its 2008 meltdown?

As we read these passages, we might do well to recall people such as Mother Teresa and also remind ourselves of something we may have heard or read somewhere once about "the practice of corporal works of mercy." Our rector sometimes closes out our worship services by reminding us of these:

- Feed the hungry
- Give drink to the thirsty
- Clothe the naked
- Shelter the homeless
- Visit those in prison
- Comfort the sick
- Bury the dead.

Were Bonhoeffer to look out his prison window at today's Christian world, he might be tempted to add a new chapter to his work called "The Cost of Discipleship." In it, he talks about cheap grace. For those who think you're a sucker because you care about the future of your children and the planet, grace isn't cheap, and it's not completely free of charge.

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# Discipleship Implies Discipline

Wednesday, January 23, 2019

## Ephesians 5:1-4

*"Be sure of this, that no immoral or impure or greedy person, that is, an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God."*

I don't believe these words have any cachet at all in today's world. They are empty because they allude to something that few people care about any more: living a life of integrity with the idea in mind that there is a kingdom of Christ and God to inherit. The best we can seem to hope for is that people will do the right thing if they figure the pleasure outweighs the pain and there's a payoff at the end of the transaction. (Soon enough, given this nation's trajectory, people will also do the right thing because if they don't, the penalty won't be loss of wages, it will be loss of life.) I know that sound Hobbesian and pessimistic, but, go ahead, just call me a sucker, too. When I sometimes make the mistake of offering up this kind of observation, I'm *tsked, tsked*, and admonished to think better of my fellow human beings.

"Give them time," I'm told, "and they will see the light; they will find their way; they will change; it will all get better." Instead, I mourn the loss of discipleship and the discipline that implies. And, I confess this, too: I sometimes find myself hoping for the Vengeful God to make just a small cameo appearance in this ridiculous roadshow of wanton rapacity.

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## Out of Context

Thursday, January 24, 2019

## Ephesians 5:15-33

*"Wives should be subordinate to their husbands as to the Lord."*

*Holy Samolie!* Here we are skating around one of the most treacherous minefields in all of the Bible. Well, we need to look at this sentence head-on, but only in context. Ephesians 5:15 sets that context. It says, "Be subordinate to one another out of reverence for Christ." Then, the next sentence is about wives. And THEN, Paul goes on and on, not about submission, which is not the same as subordination, a mistake in meaning we often hear being made, but about what he means about the relationship men and women should have.

I am going to repeat the next several explanatory verses here, because some of you may not actually have read the scripture at hand and need the refresher. Here are the verses following the one that makes your hair stand on end: "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ loved the church and handed himself over for her to sanctify her, cleansing her by the bath of water with the word, that he might present to himself the church splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. So also husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one hates his own flesh but rather nourishes and cherishes it, even as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. 'For this reason a man shall leave [his] father and [his] mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become as one flesh'."

And then Paul kind of sees that he's gone a little overboard and writes:

**"This is a great mystery, but I speak in reference to Christ and the church. In any case, each one of you should love his wife as himself, and the wife should respect her husband."** Which is, you must admit, going somewhere different than where we seemed to be heading at the outset. I think people who want to keep women down, who want to pay

them less, who want to keep them barefoot and pregnant and uneducated and out of power, love that second line in Chapter 5, and, boy, do they love to quote it over a few beers when they're campaigning for another good old boy to get into the statehouse. Paul is not justifying the abuse or misuse of women by their husbands or anyone else. And to think so is to be willfully ignorant and/or just plain old mean.

I sure wish Paul had just kept this to himself.

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## Same Master in Heaven

Friday, January 25, 2019

### Ephesians 6:1-9

*"Slaves, be obedient to your human masters with fear and trembling..."*

If mischief has been the main result of the second sentence of Chapter 5 of Ephesians, this section has proved to be disastrous for entire peoples. Slavery was so prevalent in the Roman Empire and throughout the known world at the time of Paul that he certainly had to address it, not knowing that whatever he wrote would be picked up in the 1850s and 1860s to justify the contemptible and abhorrent institution of slavery that existed in the United States. Paul, then, was most definitely not laying out a justification for the continuation of slavery. He was not agreeing with its continuation and condoning its spread. He knew all too well what it was like to be a slave because that's who he preached to, ate with, and in whose homes he slept as he crisscrossed the known world at that time. If it must exist, he is saying, then it must be handled without cruelty and terrorism. The key phrase in this whole passage is the very last, when he admonishes masters to remember that both the slaves and the masters will have a MASTER in Heaven, "and with him there is no partiality."

Having said all that about that particular passage, I would be remiss if I did not emphasize that slavery still exists in our world today, and the subject of human trafficking of girls and boys and men and women even here in Central Texas is an issue that we cannot ignore and law enforcement and people of faith must confront and handle. To the enslaved there must be freedom and assistance; to the slaveholder there must be punishment. Justice must prevail, and as a Christian community perhaps it's time to discuss how this issue can be made to bubble up through our common consciousness so that we can be instruments of that justice.

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## What Happened to the Baby Boomers?!

Saturday, January 26, 2019

### Ephesians 6:10-24

*"Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might."*

Paul is finally truly ticked off here. He's had it. He's laid out what Christians are called to be, and now he lays out what they are called to do. And it's not to turn the other cheek or wag fingers or look away. Again, allow me the privilege to quote from the text: "Put on the armor of God so that you may be able to stand firm against the tactics of the devil. For our struggle is not with flesh and blood but with the principalities, with the powers, with the world rulers of the present darkness, with the evil spirits in the heaven." Gird yourself. Hold your ground. Fight for what's right. Do not be tempted by cheap grace!

I was having a meal with my oldest daughter and her husband in Pearland one evening earlier this year, and we were talking, as usual, about the political situation, and my daughter finally just couldn't hold it in any longer:

"What happened to your generation? You started off so well, and you have screwed absolutely everything up and left it for your granddaughters to clean up!"

I was not surprised by her question. I have wondered the same thing. What happened to the Baby Boomers? Like many others my age (I am 71) I went to elementary school every day with a quarter for lunch and a verse from the Bible memorized so I could say it at roll call. We students sang the Doxology before we sat down for lunch. We had only fish on Fridays! Then we were sickened by the black-and-white images of dogs ravaging real human beings in Birmingham and Selma. We loved Mr. Rogers and Captain Kangaroo and Mr. Green Jeans, none of whom had a mean bone in their bodies. We sang "Blowin' in the Wind" and "Where Have All the Flowers Gone" and "Peace Train" and "This is Your Land" and "For What it's Worth 1967," which is also when some of us had our Summer of Love. And the government loved us and paid for our college educations, if we went to state schools, and to Vietnam until we said, "Hell No! We Won't Go!" And then it all evaporated. It all went away. And in its place...well, here we are where some of us have drunk the Kool-Aid, some have done our best to serve, and some of us are suckers and some of us are not, and still, I think, we have not treated our children well. And for that, some day we will have to come up with a reason.

When it's my turn to stand before the Lord, I fervently hope, not for justice, but for mercy.

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