



## ***Daily Meditations*** ***November 11-16, 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 27:**

*O God, whose blessed Son came into the world that he might destroy the works of the devil and make us children of God and heirs of eternal life: Grant that, having this hope, we may purify ourselves as he is pure; that, when he comes again with power and great glory, we may be made like him in his eternal and glorious kingdom; where he lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. **Amen.***

### **Legal Worship vs. Worship from the Heart** *Monday, November 11, 2019*

#### **Matthew 15:1-20**

*"But what comes out of the mouth gets its start in the heart. It's from the heart that we vomit up evil arguments, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, lies, and cussing. That's what pollutes. Eating or not eating certain foods, washing or not washing your hands--that's neither here nor there." - vv.18-20 The Message*

When Jesus speaks, it all seems so simple: Love God; love your neighbor; keep yourself pure. But even when Moses brought down just Ten Commandments from the fiery and mystical Mt. Sinai, the Jews "required" legal clarification, and so was birthed the Law of Moses, and later the Talmud and the Mishnah, rabbinical commentaries offered to clarify Moses' Law. These Pharisees with whom Jesus interacts are challenging Jesus' actions based on this legalized and often hairsplitting understanding of what God expects from them.

Jesus' teaching upsets that applecart. He calls into sharp contrast legalistic worship versus worship from the heart. He spells it out for us when he uses Isaiah's words, "They just use [God] as a cover for teaching whatever suits their fancy" (v.9).

I like this word *intentionality*. It implies that whatever I do, I do it with all my being...my thoughts, my body, my will, my resources. Applied to Jesus' scathing rebuke of legalistic living, living God's way implies total buy-in...holding myself accountable for bringing all that I am to my worship of God, my love for my fellow humans, and my efforts to remain unsullied by the very world we live in. It's no tougher now than it was in Jesus' day; it's just more personal.

## Dogs or Puppies

Tuesday, November 12, 2019

### Matthew 15:21-28

*He said, "It's not right to take bread out of children's mouths and throw it to dogs." [The Canaanite woman] was quick: "You're right, Master, but beggar dogs do get to get scraps from the master's table." Jesus gave in. "Oh woman, your faith is something else. What you want is what you get!" Right then her daughter became well." vv. 26-28*

Culturally, this interchange disturbs us, which underscores the pitfalls of interpreting literature from other cultures in light of our own societal and modern mores. In our egalitarian outlook, Jesus' initial refusal to help this woman confuses us, and his metaphorical reference to the Jews as "children" and Gentiles as "dogs" confounds us as we have just been reading of his persecution by the Jewish leaders, and we know how Gentiles figure hugely in the future of the Church.

Given the "black and white" reading of this passage, I wonder if I would feel more comfortable with a reading that goes more to the intention or "heart" of the passage. (*Disclaimer: This is **not** a translation but a rephrasing for my personal interest.*) What if it read like this:

Jesus says, "Presently I am here to bring the Jews back to God. The Gentiles' time has not come." The Canaanite woman replies, "We are waiting for that moment, prepared to receive any grace that you can spare." Jesus answers, "This is true faith in God, without being religiously aligned. Your daughter is healed."

My comfort zone with this reading is wide, and I do not believe it does violence to the meaning of the passage. Additionally, in my readings preparing for this meditation, I discovered that many Biblical scholars believe the pejorative word "dogs" here would be better translated as "puppies." Acknowledging cultural and societal norms is a critical step towards understanding.

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## Growing to Motivating

Wednesday, November 13, 2019

### Matthew 15:29-39

*"I hurt for these people. For three days now they have been with me, and now they have nothing to eat. I can't send them away without a meal--they'd probably collapse on the road." v. 32*

Jesus feels our pain and understands our needs. After healing untold numbers of afflicted people for three days, he knows they are hungry and weak. He also knows that the faith and understanding of his disciples needed sustenance, despite the fact that everyone present knew "that God was blazingly alive among them" (v. 31).

The miracle of feeding so many with so little amazes us; what should amaze us is the transformation of a motley bunch of Galileans from all stations of life into faith-filled disciples. Limited by their narrow and entirely human views of the world, the disciples are chided by Jesus in various situations as "faint hearted" (v 14:31), "willfully stupid" (v. 15:16), and "runt believers" (v. 16:8). I would probably be right there in comprehension with them, amazed but barely comprehending the miracle of God come to humanity.

I used to sing a song titled "The World's Bible" by Annie Flint, in which the first line is "Christ has no hands but our hands..." The song emphasizes that

Jesus' works are carried out by Christians motivated by faith. I see the disciples' faith as growing, both through Jesus' teachings and his daily works, but it has not reached the motivating stage yet. In the previous story of the Canaanite woman, her faith motivates her to persist in seeking Jesus' healing for her daughter, and Jesus marvels at her faith.

Lesson after lesson is presented to the disciples and by extension to us, but they are slow to learn. How many lessons do I need?

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## Slime in the Ice Machine

Thursday, November 14, 2019

### Matthew 16:1-12

*"Haven't you realized yet that bread isn't the problem? The problem is yeast, Pharisee-Sadducee yeast." Then they got it that he wasn't concerned about eating, but teaching -- the Pharisee-Sadducee kind of teaching." - vv. 11-12*

I have a love-hate relationship with yeast: I love yeast breads and the mushrooms in my salad and the "good" yeasts that keep my biome functioning, but hate the mold yeast in the air that makes me sick or causes infections. It's all around us, more than 1500 species of this amazing single-celled fungi that plays a huge role in research into human biology because its single cell is similar to every cell in the human body in that each carries its genetic makeup in the nucleus.

Metaphorically, yeast symbolizing the destructive effects of looking back to the comforts of Egypt was removed from the Israelite camp before they followed Moses off into the desert towards the Promised Land. Yeast has no part in the Passover feast; therefore, at the Last Supper, which was a Jewish Passover feast, the bread was unleavened--without yeast. Our Eucharist bread traditionally has no yeast in it. Yeast has a way of growing uncontrollably: a small cell can turn into a monstrous, multi-celled organism. Consider mold in the bathtub! (Or if you are from Houston: slime in the ice machine!)

Jesus offers the bread of life--teaching about walking with God in our lives. He is concerned in this passage about the Pharisee-Sadducee yeast of dissent and criticism, how it will multiply and grow uncontrollably through the Jewish communities. Jesus knows it will happen; here I believe he is just warning his disciples to be alert for it.

As Shakespeare through Friar Laurence points out, "Within the infant rind of this small flower/Poison hath residence, and medicine power" (*Romeo and Juliet* II, 3, 1081-2). Rightly used, yeast is beneficial to humanity; out-of-control it causes harm.

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## He Says Everything that Matters

Friday, November 15, 2019

### Matthew 16:13-20

*Simon Peter said, "You're the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of the living God." Jesus came back, "God bless you, Simon, son of Jonah! You didn't get that answer out of books nor from teachers. My Father in heaven, God himself, let you in on this secret of who I really am." vv. 16-17*

In his brief affirmation, Simon Peter says everything that matters! First, he is addressing Jesus of Nazareth, a man like himself but totally unlike himself, a man to whom he has been listening for months, perhaps years; a man who has done miraculous things unlike any other Simon Peter has ever seen.

Second, Simon identifies Jesus as "the Christ." Fr. Richard Rohr\* writes that "Everything visible, without exception, is the outpouring of God. What else could it really be? 'Christ' is a word for the Primordial Template ('Logos') through whom 'all things came into being, and not one thing had its being except through him' (John 1:3)." God poured himself into our universe; everything is permeated, saturated with God. Rohr calls this "the first incarnation."\* The Gospel According to John describes this event as the "...true light...was coming into the world," (John 1:9), in other words, the active and ongoing creation of our universe and the infusion of Christ into everything. For Simon Peter, a simple fisherman from Galilee, not versed in philosophical discourse, to see this, truly his heart must have been opened.

Simon then identifies Jesus as "The Messiah," placing him as in the line of David and a leader to restore the fortunes of the Israelite people and lead them into better days. Most Jews of the period would have identified the messiah as a political figure; however, Jesus again and again resisted this narrowness of definition, opting instead for "deliverer or savior of his people." Finally, Simon calls Jesus "the Son of God." Romans 8:14 says, "For all who are led by the spirit of God are sons of God." Jesus has the cosmic world view, and God's spirit leads him, even calling him out of our "Christ-soaked world."\* Rohr calls the birth of Jesus "the second incarnation," when "...God's presence was poured into a single human being so that humanity and divinity can be seen to be operating as one in him--and therefore in us!"\*

Thus, Simon's affirmations take us from the Creation scenes of Genesis 1 through the Jewish epoch, culminating with the Universal cosmology connecting back to Genesis. Truly God must have revealed this to Simon.

*\*Rohr, Richard. Christ is not Jesus' Last Name. The Universal Christ. New York: Penguin Random House LLC, 2019.*

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## No Idea How God Works

Saturday, November 16, 2019

### **Matthew 16:21-28**

*YOU'RE NOT IN THE DRIVER'S SEAT - The Message (heading)*

*But Jesus didn't swerve. "Peter, get out of my way. Satan, get lost. You have no idea how God works." - v. 23*

How quickly we lose our cosmic vision when human issues intrude. Simon Peter had just affirmed the most enlightened acknowledgment of Jesus' divinity, but when Jesus tells them that he will be tortured and will die, the small human view takes over again. The horror of what Jesus is telling them overwhelms the disciples. I can visualize them standing there gobsmacked, casting about for how to persuade Jesus that he has it all wrong. Notice that the passage says "Jesus didn't swerve." He met his disciples toe to toe, the only acknowledgement of their view being to identify it as an obstruction thrown up by Satan.

The mystery of God's ways confuses and tantalizes us, but Jesus nailed it: "You have no idea how God works."

So how should I walk? Keep my eyes on Jesus. Bring intentionality to my daily life. Make each act of my daily life a form of worship, loving God, loving my fellow man. Rejoice that our Christ-infused world accepts us as the humans we are. And remember: We are not in control!

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