



Daily Meditations June 24-29, 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, Dave Boyd, 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.

PROPER 7:

Lord, make us have perpetual love and reverence for your holy Name, for you never fail to help us govern those whom you have set upon the sure foundation of your loving-kindness through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God for ever and ever. Amen.

Dangerous Criminals Escape!

Monday, June 24, 2019

Acts 5:12-26

"Then someone arrived and announced, 'Look, the men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people!'" - Acts 5:25

Somehow this scene makes me want to laugh. I want to say sarcastically, "Ha, ha, ha! The joke's on you. You schemed to imprison these "dangerous" men, and when angels released them, they didn't run like escaped criminals but simply went to the temple and performed their God-given task of teaching." I wonder if those powerful men, the Sadducees, who ordered the imprisonment, noticed this peacefulness? Even the guards did not treat the escapees roughly because they feared being stoned by the people. This lack of violence was similar to the police delaying their arrest of Jesus because they feared the people.¹ It never occurred to those Sadducees that the power of God was involved in these events. They could have learned from this and prevented future problems.

If the Sadducees could have avoided problems by seeing this as a lesson, I should ask myself what this incident means to me. I came up with several thoughts. How often have I worried about things that never happened and not realized this was a case of answered prayer? When I have received God's beneficence, have I always given thanks? When I have encountered a challenge, have I asked myself what I learned from the experience? How many miracles do I have to receive before it dawns on me that God is at work in my life?

¹ The New Interpreter's Study Bible, Abingdon Press, Nashville, Tenn., footnotes, p. 1965

Consider Your Goal

Tuesday, June 25, 2019

Acts 5:27-42

"As they left the council, they rejoiced that they were considered worthy to suffer dishonor for the sake of the name. And every day in the temple and at home did not cease to teach and proclaim Jesus as the messiah." - Acts 5:31-42

"You shouldn't feel that way; you really are a good person," we kept trying to convince her while our group supervisor sat back and waited for us to realize what we were doing. Each time we tried to convince this woman that she was okay, she responded with denial. We were unwittingly reinforcing her negative self-image. We were neophyte counselors learning how to be group leaders, and we were inadvertently fanning the flames of the very fire we wanted to extinguish. The lesson was a valuable one.

The Hebrews were achieving similar results when they persecuted the followers of Jesus after the crucifixion, and they didn't realize what they were doing. The more they persecuted the early Christians, the more determined they became to spread the word and to face persecution bravely as Jesus had done.

If I had lived in those days and had heard Jesus speak the Truth and felt in my heart of hearts that he was sent by God, I would have been furious at being told I could not acknowledge and worship him. I find it hard to imagine that I would have been brave enough to stand up for my belief that Jesus was the messiah and face the threat of persecution. Taking that a step further, I hope I would have had the wisdom not to condemn someone else for not believing the same thing that I do -- even when I believe they are mistaken.

A Man of Good Standing

Wednesday, June 26, 2019

Acts 6:1-15

"Therefore, friends, select from among yourselves seven men of good standing, full of Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint to this task, while we, for our part, will devote ourselves to prayer and to serving the work." - Acts 6:3

The followers of Jesus had come together to live communally because of their common interests. These disparate people shared their grief over losing Jesus, were willing to share resources and try to live as Jesus had taught, but that wasn't easy. Lifelong living patterns and expectations that were unique to their individual backgrounds caused them to bump rough edges. It was also difficult to resolve problems when a variety of languages were spoken. Some of them spoke Hebrew while others Aramaic or Greek.

Stephen was not one of the Apostles, but he was among the seven selected to help run the commune and work out difficulties that arose among the people. However, Luke describes Stephen as full of grace and power, and wrote that he performed great wonders and signs and he and Philip evidently became active in the group who tended to ministry and teaching the word. He encountered rough edges to be handled in this duty also. He became embroiled in an argument with some men who were not open to receiving what Stephen was saying. These men secretly plotted against him and accused him of speaking blasphemous words against Moses and God. Stephen was brought before the council, and he pled his case with disastrous results.

Luke reports, however, that the council looked intently at Stephen, and they saw that his face was like the face of an angel, a description that

brings to mind the face of Moses after encountering God at Mt. Sinai and the face of Jesus at the transfiguration. This seems to have made no difference to the council, but Luke has made it clear in his writing that Stephen was a very special person and the Lord was speaking through him.

Stephen at Trial

Thursday, June 27, 2019

Acts 6:15-7:16

"Then the high priest asked him, 'Are these things so?'" - Acts 7:1

Stephen chose to argue his case by using the form of a historical summary. When I realized what he was doing, I reacted negatively. I thought that a shorter version would have held their interest better and packed more of a punch. I had to remind myself that this was prior to PR days and the fast pace of modern life, and Stephen knew his audience. After reading Stephen's words, I saw how this style allowed him to pull out and convincingly present patterns that had evolved over long periods of time. I also learned that the historical summary was a fairly common way of presentation used by the Jews at that time.¹ One thing that you see when reading these stories in the Bible is that things that seem disastrous may bring about desirable changes when viewed from a higher or more distant perspective. I haven't climbed many mountains in my life, but I did climb a big hill once, and I remember that when I reached the top I looked back and was able to trace my path. What had been a difficult place when I was negotiating it didn't seem bad from that point, and by hanging in there I had actually made it to the top. God has a higher point of view and a longer range of vision than we humans; this ought to give us faith.

1 The Eerdmans Bible Commentary, Grand Rapids, Michigan, p. 980

Helpers Can Be Misunderstood

Friday, June 28, 2019

Acts 7:17-29

"He supposed that his kinsfolk would understand that God through him was rescuing them, but they did not understand." - Acts 7:25

When Stephen was recounting the story of Moses, he mentioned a time when Moses had tried to be helpful to one of his kinsmen and was misunderstood. Moses had wanted to be helpful, but he was more in touch with God's wishes than the man who rebuffed him.

Moses was later rejected when he was leading his people during the Exodus. Stephen was drawing a parallel between Moses and Jesus. Jesus too was trying to help his people but was rejected when they called for his execution, yet both men were also reconcilers.

The similarity that strikes me is the amazing ability of both Stephen and Jesus to speak so brilliantly while in a hostile setting with their very lives at risk. But I am forgetting that God was taking care of that.

When the Going Gets Tough

Saturday, June 29, 2019

Acts 7:30-43

"Our ancestors were unwilling to obey him; instead, they pushed him aside, and

in their hearts they turned back to Egypt..." - Acts 7:30

How easy it is to give up when things get really tough and go back to the very thing you wanted so badly to leave. Stephen is pointing out how the Israelites have repeatedly rejected the very person who has been sent to rescue them because they are unwilling to stick it out until they reached their goal. If we have faith in God hearing our prayers, we are given the strength to endure; in fact, it is in the worst of times when we can feel the closest to God.

Several years ago I spent my time in a hospital waiting room watching and waiting for news from doctors or for precious moments when I could briefly visit with my husband in ICU. Sometimes other people who were in a similar situation would bond with me in short-lived relationships formed when defenses were non-existent and our souls met to give one another comfort. How we knew each other I don't know but somehow our pain pooled into one another's hearts, and we found comfort and strength by sharing that same agonizing space.

I'm sure that at the time I wished I could return to a time before this had happened, but it will remain in my memory as a time highlighted by the presence of God -- within myself and present within others I met.

When Stephen was killed, he wasn't cowering and wishing he had never gotten involved with this mess. He faced his own death interacting with God while praying for the well-being of others.

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