



Daily Meditations

April 20-25, 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, EASTER 2

Almighty and everlasting God, who in the Paschal mystery established the new covenant of reconciliation: Grant that all who have been reborn into the fellowship of Christ's Body may show forth in their lives what they profess by their faith; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Troubles Come

Monday, April 20, 2020

I Peter 1:1-12

"I know how great [the future in Heaven] makes you feel, even though you have to put up with every kind of aggravation in the meantime. Pure gold put in the fire comes out of it proved pure; genuine faith put through this suffering comes out proved genuine." - vv.6-7

We are not alone. Human beings throughout the millennia have found themselves, either by choice or by circumstance, in trying situations. Just like my mother used to say, "it's not what happens to you but how you deal with it that matters. Troubles come."

The Believers for whom the first Letter of Peter is intended are mostly converted Gentiles of Asia Minor who are very much at home in Greek-Roman culture.* Despite their own plethora of "mystery religions," the Romans are highly suspicious of new religions, expecting insurrections in both politics and home lives to result. Consequently, former friends, neighbors, and even family members now suspect the new followers of Jesus of immorality, sedition, and even insurrection.* The horror of this misunderstanding is the persecution and possible death that can result. Unfair, unjust untrue, and undeserved.

Peter's voice shines through this, encouraging them and us to stand firm, to not react badly, and to tighten our mental grasp of the example and promises of Jesus, who suffered just as humans do. Keep your eyes and heart on the hope that is within us.

Living in a Radical Time

Tuesday, April 21, 2020

I Peter 1:13-25

"Now that you've cleaned up your lives by following the truth, love one another as if your lives depended on it. Your new life is not like your old life. Your old birth came from mortal sperm; your new birth comes from God's living Word. Just think: a life conceived by God himself!" - vv. 22-23

Radical times produce radical changes. All of us are living in a radical time presently: isolated physically, hurting emotionally and economically, struggling to grasp recent events, perhaps even questioning our values and commitment. And yet we hear inspiring stories of self-sacrificial behavior between people who stand in stark contrast to the blatant commercialism that says, "how can this benefit me?". The light at the end of our tunnel may be a ways off yet, but I can see the silhouettes of new attitudes and recognition of our interdependence upon one another. Our lives do depend upon loving and caring for one another, and this value is inspired by God.

The Irony of Acceptance

Wednesday, April 22, 2020

I Peter 2:1-10

"But you are the ones chosen by God, chosen for the high calling of priestly work, chosen to be a holy people, God's instruments to do his work and speak out for him, to tell others of the night-and-day difference he made for you--from nothing to something, from rejected to accepted." - vv. 9-10

We have heard these words many times, resonating from Biblical readings and words of comfort. The writer of The First Letter of Peter evokes a metaphor that many of his readers would not yet understand as they were from non-Jewish backgrounds: God's emancipation of the Israelites from Egypt. God tells Moses on Mount Sinai to tell the Israelite masses essentially the same thing as Peter writes here (*Exodus 19:6*). Later, the prophet Isaiah (*Isaiah 43:20b*) uses this same language.

Just as God removed the Israelite people from the humiliation, degradation, and subjugation of the Egyptians' domination, so also God through Jesus has freed these new believers from the degradation and non-spiritual lives they previously lived.

The irony is that in accepting The Way of Christ and being accepted by God, these new converts are now rejected by their lifelong communities. This is truly a "night-and-day" experience. I am reminded of a man I know who finally recognized his addictions had overtaken his life and chose to go into recovery. Because of his changed lifestyle in which he no longer would party and drink to excess, his friends felt uncomfortable and would no longer hang out with him.

This is basically what the writer of Peter is writing to these new converts about: your culture rejects you, but God not only accepts you but chooses you! Living a life of love holds up a beacon from which the people around us take hope, consolation, and inspiration, often without our knowing.

For Such a Time as This

Thursday, April 23, 2020

I Peter 2:11-25

"This is the kind of life you have been invited into, the kind of life Christ lived. He suffered everything that came his way so that you would know that it could be done, and also know how to do it, step by step." - v. 21

In the 1650s, the penumbra of plague slowly began eclipsing Europe. Italy fell first, soon Spain, then Germany, then Holland. From across the slender cell wall of the Channel, England watched and trembled, then cautiously relaxed--for about a decade, some divine will seemed to be shielding the country. But the world was already worshipping at the altar of commerce and the forces of globalization had already been set into motion--with England's economy relying heavily on trade, its ports bustled with ships carrying silk and tea and sugar from all discovered frontiers of the globe. Rats boarded ships, fleas boarded the rats, bacteria--an almost-kingdom of unicellular organisms yet to be coronated, for the cell itself was yet to be discovered--boarded the fleas, which took to human flesh as soon as they debarked." (Maria Popova. <https://www.brainpickings.org/>)

In the blog referenced above, Popova writes about the great scientist Sir Isaac Newton, who as a young student was sent home from Cambridge into isolation for the entire plague year of 1664. But what a year! Without fuss he set up his own study area and began investigating mathematical and scientific questions of interest to him. At some point, the apple dropped, and the physical law of gravity was birthed.

Mordecai said to his niece Queen Esther when faced with the destruction of the Jews in captivity: "Perhaps you were born for such a time as this" (*Esther 4:14*). Joseph said to his brothers as they cowered before this ruler of Egypt that they had wronged, "Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good in order to preserve a numerous people, as he is doing today" (*Genesis 50:20*). In isolation and meditation, Newton deconstructed a law of the universe.

People today are sewing masks for 100s of others at home, calling isolated seniors just to provide them with a little frivolous social interaction, giving money to food banks, delivering supplies to people without transportation, serving on the frontlines against this COVID-19 pandemic in the hospitals and police stations and firehouses and other essential places. Christ's sacrifice was universal but reverberates through history. Our sacrifices make long-reaching ripples in our troubled time, but vastly important to lives that are touched. For such a time as this...

The Second Part

Friday, April 24, 2020

I Peter 3:13-4:6

"Since Jesus went through everything you're going through and more, learn to think like him. Think of your sufferings as a weaning from that old sinful habit of always expecting to get your own way. Then you'll be able to live out your own days free to pursue what God wants instead of being tyrannized day by day by what you want." - vv. 1-2

What does God want? It's pretty simple to say although more challenging to live up to. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your might, and

with all your soul, and love your neighbor as yourself. Jesus reiterated Deuteronomy 6:5 and added a second part to it.

When we love God, we see his hand all around us: our blue island home suspended in the cosmos, full of powerful forces and stunning beauty. His being infuses his creation. We grasp that his love for us is boundless, even to the point of allowing his Son Jesus to take the sins of mankind upon himself. The theodicy that troubles us is that with God being all love, all mercy, and all justice, why do bad things happen to good people? We cannot reconcile that the same Creator who loves us also created forces of nature and scientific laws as well as giving free will to human beings that sometimes perpetrate horrific violence upon us. The Scripture says that the rain falls on the good as well as the bad. Humankind is given the choice how to accept it.

In the same way, we are given the choice to love one another as we love ourselves. Self-preservation is one of the most basic forms of loving ourselves. Seeking the well-being of others in all ways fulfills the neighborly love exhortation.

This is what encompasses thinking with the mind of Christ.

Troubles, the Bumps in the Road

Saturday, April 25, 2020

I Peter 4:7-19

"So, if you find life difficult because you are doing what God said, take it in stride. Trust him. He knows what he's doing, and he'll keep on doing it." - v. 19

"Happiness is when what you think, what you say, and what you do are in harmony." This quote by Mahatma Gandhi touches on the peace that comes from focusing your mind on what is your life goal and then aligning your speech and actions with that life goal. Small wonder that this small man from faraway India is viewed with such veneration by all mankind.

Peter says similarly that if your mind, voice, and actions are in the right place in relation to your belief in God, then the troubles that arise from that belief are just bumps in the road.

I believe time is an invention of human beings, and that God sees all--my past, present, future--all at once. Therefore, as we endure trials, troubles, persecutions, unfairness, or even death, God sees our entire lives. What I hope he sees in mine is one who loves him, one who struggles to love my neighbor, one who continually seeks to align my belief in God with speech and actions, and one who fails but doesn't give up and picks up the struggle again and again. He is faithful, so I believe his promises are eternal.

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