



Daily Meditations

March 16-21, 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:

Almighty God, you know that we have no power in ourselves to help ourselves: Keep us both outwardly in our bodies and inwardly in our souls, that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body, and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

A God Who Comes Alongside Us

Monday, March 16, 2020

Mark 5:21-43

"Do not fear, only believe." - Mark 5:36b

Jesus, Son of God and Son of Man, came to show us what God is like. This week's readings from the gospel of Mark contain no direct teachings nor inscrutable parables, but stories from Jesus' earthly walk. Perhaps by examining these events we can draw closer to our God. That seems a worthy Lenten task.

In today's reading we have two contrasting healing stories with one placed right in the middle of the other. First there is Jairus, a synagogue leader. Weren't these the people who so often opposed Jesus? Yet when his precious daughter seems to be ill unto death, Jairus comes to belief and begs Jesus to come to his house.

But wait! A crowd is pressing in on Jesus as he walks, and suddenly he stops. She dared to touch the hem of his robe, and Jesus felt the healing power go out of him. The humble woman told him the whole story. This woman, unclean under Jewish law because of her 12-year internal hemorrhage, is the one the Spirit of Jesus chose to heal. This is an example of the upside-down ways of our Lord Jesus, compassion and love transcending cultural practices and mores.

Let's put ourselves in this story to learn more about who God is. God is willing to show up for us. He comes alongside in our pain and fear. In his commentary on the passage, N.T. Wright ends this way: "He welcomes our trembling touch and responds with the central Biblical command: "Don't be afraid."

A God Who Speaks and Calls

Tuesday, March 17, 2020

Mark 6:1-13

On the Sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astounded. - Mark 6:2a

Here we have the story of Jesus rejected in his hometown of Nazareth. He carried out an extensive ministry before returning to the place where he grew up. As was his custom, Jesus went to the synagogue on the Sabbath, and he read and taught.

In Luke's version of the story, we're told that Jesus teaches from the prophet Isaiah using a beautiful passage about the Messiah's anointing to "tell the poor the good news" and "set the wounded victims free" (Isaiah 61).

Though they were astounded at his teaching, the people rejected him. His listeners were not ready for this message. The mighty warrior Messiah, or even the status quo, better fit their understanding of the way life should be. But Jesus, our Messiah, our God, wants to bring the good news and set wounded victims free.

I hope we hear this message with the ears of our hearts and see the needs around us with the eyes of our hearts because the message is meant for us as well. Let us not reject our calling to bring good news to those in need. Instead let us be astounded at Jesus' teachings and follow him.

Yes, our God is astounding, and he speaks to us and calls us.

God Has a Plan Despite the Powers That Be

Wednesday, March 18, 2020

Mark 6:14-29

King Herod heard of it, for Jesus' name had become known. - Mark 6:14

This story helps us remember that Jesus was a Middle Eastern Palestinian Jew. He walked, talked, and lived among ordinary people. But the stories of Jesus and his disciples healing the sick and casting out demons had come to the attention of the authorities.

The King Herod here is Herod Antipas, the Tetrarch of Galilee during the time of Jesus' ministry. We read of his gruesome killing of John the Baptist to satisfy a whim of his wife. I wonder why Mark places this story in the midst of such wonderful stories of healings, miracles, and provision. It may be to remind us that we're not the first generation to live in troubling political times.

St. Paul will teach the church that Christ Jesus is Lord of all things in heaven and on earth and that there is a plan for "the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth" (Ephesians 1:10). Jesus has set the plan in action, but as we wait for its completion there will be conflict and just plain old politics. That's what this story sounds like to me. But don't forget--our God has a long-range plan.

A God of Compassion

Thursday, March 19, 2020

Mark 6:20-45

As he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. - Mark 6:34

This is a familiar and comforting story to many of us. It is one where we can look backward at the people of Israel but also find ourselves in the present moment.

The disciples returned to Jesus to tell him all they had done and taught. He sees their need for rest and suggests they go away together to a desolate place. This is not to be. Many notice them and run from the towns to the destination. Jesus, seeing the crowd, has compassion on them, as they "were like sheep without a shepherd." As time passes and all become hungry, Jesus works the miracle with five loaves and two fish. In his compassion he provides for all.

Here our God is doing what he promised long ago in the book of Ezekiel. "I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out...I will feed them with good pasture" (Ezekiel 34:11, 14). We also might recall Moses as the shepherd and God's provision of manna in the wilderness. But what about us? We Christians are invited to live life as Christ's sheep, under his compassion, care, and provision. And we must let Christ's healing and creative power flow through our lives of worship, so that Christ's compassion for us becomes our compassion for those near to us and for the whole world.

A God Who Helps in Trials

Friday, March 20, 2020

Mark 6:45-56

When he saw that they were straining at the oars against an adverse wind, he came towards them early in the morning, walking on the sea. - Mark 6:48

The disciples were still perplexed about the miracle of the loaves and fishes, and now Jesus comes walking on water. He does this just as he sees them straining against the oars in an adverse wind. It is all so hard for them to grasp, yet they stick by Jesus faithfully. They seem to know he has what they need.

I'm his disciple, and yet this very day I've found myself straining against some of the oars in my life. I pray that during this Lenten season I will take heart, know Jesus is with me and not be afraid.

Here are lyrics to a simple song that can say it better than I:

*Here comes Jesus; see him walking on the water.
He'll lift you up, and he'll help you to stand.
Here comes Jesus; he's the master of the waves that roll.
Here comes Jesus; let him take your hand. - Cordelia Spitzer*

Jesus has what we need. He is what you and I need, and he loves us with an inestimable love. Let him help you pull the oars in the waves and wind of your life, and I'll try to do that too.

A God Whose Law is Love

Saturday, March 21, 2020

Mark 7:1-23

Then he called the crowd again and said to them, "Listen to me, all of you, and understand: there is nothing outside a person that by going in can defile, but the things that come out are what defile." - Mark 7:14

Today I gave a beggar a dollar. Not much, just one buck, but something I've seldom done. It seemed to fit my meditation on this scripture. Yes, the many

laws of the Hebrew people had a purpose, but in Jesus' coming the purpose was fulfilled. The people were called to see in a new way, to see with the eyes of their hearts.

In just a few chapters Jesus will tell his followers how to keep his law of love. Taken from the Old Testament (but often forgotten by the people) the number one law is love God, and a very close second is love your neighbor. In fact, as you practice loving God, you will find yourself growing in love for your neighbor. It's our neighbor who bears the Christ image and is loved by God with a love we can only imagine. Of course, beloved, this is true of you and me as well!

So in our Lenten effort to draw closer to our God through examining the life of Jesus, here's what we have found: We have a triune God who comes alongside, speaks and calls, has a plan, shows compassion, and helps in trials. His law is love!

The last verse of the Gospel of John tells us there is so much more. *"There are so many other things Jesus did. If they were all written down, each of them, one by one, I can't imagine a world big enough to hold such a library of books."* - John 21:24 *The Message*

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