



Daily Meditations ***October 28 - November 2, 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 25:

*Almighty and everlasting God, increase in us the gifts of faith, hope, and charity; and, that we may obtain that which thou dost promise, make us to love what you dost command; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. **Amen.***

A Family of Believers *Monday, October 28, 2019*

Matthew 12:43-50

"For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother."

When I first read this verse from Matthew, I was shocked. It seemed like Jesus was rejecting, even disowning his mother and brothers. How could that be? Then I realized that I was reading his words in a literal way instead of looking for the underlying meaning.

Jesus came into this world to bring us God's directives about how to live a godly life, but the most basic thing he needed to convey was the supremacy of God. No human, no matter how revered, is equal to him. God is our creator and in a totally different category from his creations.

Jesus was teaching during an age when monotheism was not a widespread concept; Greeks and Romans believed in many gods. Therefore, Jesus had to hammer home this basic belief. Other human beings with similar beliefs who worship one God share a bond that creates a family of believers. What better way to emphasize the importance of organizing and dedicating one's life than by putting God first?

Jesus taught his followers in a way that challenged them to think and become engaged in the learning process through the use of parables and metaphors rather than spoon-feeding them information. This was also more helpful because he was teaching intangible matters such as morality and ethics, and this led them to discover the truth for themselves--a way that would more easily be absorbed and integrated into their belief system. This also helped them form bonds with others of similar values. Jesus may have been thinking of this when he said in effect, "Look at my relationship with

my disciples--now this is the kind of close, meaningful, caring group that is a family." The Israelites had been given this opportunity but again and again had disobeyed God and lost their way.

If we come together in a caring, compassionate way, and we obey God by following his directives to the best of our ability, we will be treated as children of God. That doesn't mean we never have problems and that life will always go smoothly. How else would we learn and grow? Being a child of God means we belong to a loving family.

The Joy of the Clock's Ticking

Tuesday, October 29, 2019

Matthew 13:1-9

"Let anyone with ears listen!"

Most of us have ears--at least I've never seen anyone who was born without them. But how we use them is another matter.

It's easy to slip into daydreaming and not pay any attention to what is actually being said. This happens easily if your ears don't function well. I wear hearing aids. Some people would be embarrassed to admit that. What a waste of time! I'm delighted to have them so I can overcome at least some of the possible deficiencies of being human. I just enjoy the corrective apparatuses such as glasses, hearing aids, and tooth fillings and go merrily on my way joyfully taking in all the beauty I see, hear, or eat each day. I am even grateful for unexpected noises such as the tick of a clock I discovered when I first got those aids--those ticks are a welcomed addition to my repertoire of possible sounds.

In my b.h.a. days (before hearing aids), I would get together with friends, and frequently would find myself mentally tuning out because hearing the discussion was tiring; it was hard work to hear what they were saying. Doing that is a short road to Dullsville.

It's easy to do that when you read the Bible if you don't dig deep enough to understand the significance of what is being said, and that's an awful waste of time. The loss is also far more than the equivalent of the number of minutes you spent in la-la-land. You have lost a chance to learn how to live a more effective and interesting life.

Shutting a door to learning is a refusal to accept Jesus as the agent of God. This caused the crisis in the Kingdom. It was a war between faith and disbelief. The Pharisees did more than reject Jesus; they decided that he was an instrument of evil representing Satan rather than God. If you do not open yourself to hear what Jesus is saying, you may not become an instrument of the devil, but you have turned your back on God and are missing a lot of blessings.

Lord, please help me hear the gift of your precious words and the essence of your directions for living a godly life. Thank you for your generosity, and I gratefully accept your offer to enrich my life.

I Know Because I Know I Know

Wednesday, October 30, 2019

Matthew 13:10-17

"But blessed are your eyes because they see and your ears because they hear."

The verses of the 13th chapter of Matthew include many parables, and Jesus' disciples asked him why he used so many of them when he was

teaching. Jesus answered them by revealing that their own ability to understand was a gift from God.

Most of the people who came to hear Jesus were illiterate, and he knew it would be helpful to illustrate his meaning by painting a verbal picture of some familiar incident from their own life experiences to help them understand his message. Some Bible readers think this was a way of keeping some listeners from understanding what he was saying. That would mean that the parables were coded messages meant to shut some people out, but that seems to me contrary to the purpose of his mission of spreading God's word. It seems to me that would be carrying the mystery of God to an unintended extreme.

My own life experience has shown me that there is a vast difference in the depth of my own understanding when I take something into contemplative meditation, in contrast to reading or hearing something from the Bible for the first time. Comparing the two is like comparing night and day. Answers received in contemplation feel like hearing the actual word of God. They are rich, complete, fulfilling, and at times comforting, even when they don't agree with what my preferences would be. This gives me the "peace of God which surpasses all understanding." This is turning inward to the well of wisdom that is available from the Christ within.

When someone asks me why I believe in God, I say, "I know because I know I know," and that is just another way of saying "faith." It isn't an answer provided by scientific research, and no formula proves it accurate, but it is the Truth for me.

Receive the Gift of Life

Thursday, October 31, 2019

Matthew 13:18-23

"But as for what was sown on good sod, this is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another 60, and in another 30."

My morning dog-walk begins with a trip down the front steps and having just read Jesus' explanation of the parable of the sower, I quickly noticed an acorn from a nearby oak tree lying exposed and vulnerable on the top step. I thought, "Oops! You'll never make it to Freedom; you won't be able to fulfill your purpose."

An acorn is a perfect symbol for God's gift of potential that lies imbedded within his creations. The seed holds the recipe for an oak tree. I am a city creature, and seeds haven't played an important role in my life. I've never thought in terms of soil consistency. Oaks to me have always meant huge, graceful beauty that offer precious shade in torrid summer months. Jesus reminds me that the gift of life needs to be received, nourished, and appreciated to flourish. That cold, hard concrete condemns the acorn to failure as a seed and guarantees its fate to be fodder for the first squirrel that passes by.

Three little oak tree sprouts poked out of the crushed granite path leading up to those steps last spring; I had to clear the path by removing them. After reading Matthew, I'll invite all the acorns that fall off the path and onto the soil to grow profusely, and I'll watch to keep cedars from crowding them out. Sorry about that, Mr. Squirrel.

Distinguishing the Weeds from the Wheat

Friday, November 1, 2019

Matthew 13:24-30

"Let both of them grow together until the harvest; and at harvest I will tell the reapers, Collect the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat to my barn."

Weeds are hard to distinguish from wheat when they first come up, and mistakes would be inevitable. Some of the wheat would be lost along with the weeds. Sorting out the good from the bad is done more effectively when the identity becomes clear.

Jesus was speaking to crowds of people when he used this parable to illustrate how God's kingdom would grow good seed as opposed to the weeds that were sown by Satan. All parables can mean more than one thing, and this one rang a bell of a more individual nature for me. Before retirement I was a mental health professional, and my work was dedicated to pulling out the weeds that impaired the wellbeing of the individuals who sought help.

The weeds in their lives had often been caused by encounters early in life with evil circumstances or inept and sometimes evil parents. My reaction to this parable was concern about getting rid of what appears to be a weed and mistakenly getting rid of valuable wheat. The helping profession addresses the problem of distinguishing weeds and bundling them up for disposal while saving the wheat.

I remembered that when I was in the first grade a troublemaker constantly disrupted the class. Each school day was spent with the teacher trying to get this boy to quit misbehaving. She probably thought of him as the Devil's child, and he was certainly regarded by the rest of us as definitely a weed. As an adult, however, that same energy of his had somehow become redirected into a prosperous career, and he was a leader in his field. That "looks-like-a-weed-boy" turned out to be wheat.

As a counselor I came to realize that people can change in amazing ways. I also realized that the unconditional love a good counselor can give his client is the most valuable part of therapy. It helps the individual "disidentify" with the evil aspects and choose to develop a Higher Self. Jesus came to us to teach us how to live a godly life, and his ability to heal demonstrated the validity of his message.

The same directives from God that create good individuals can apply to nations. A government obsessed with greed and lust for power and wanting to have it all instead of enough invites rebellion. Jesus would consider that as being possessed by the Devil. That is just another way of having ears that do not hear and eyes that do not see.

What Yeast Can Do

Saturday, November 2, 2019

Matthew 13:31-35

Jesus told the crowds of all these doings in parable; without a parable he told them nothing.

Jesus explained his use of parables to his followers. Footnotes in The New Interpreter's Study Bible tell us that the word "parable" means "to throw alongside," and that a parable "underlines its comparative and revelatory function." (1) Jesus would tell an allegory similar to what he was teaching, and the listeners became engaged in their thought process as they came to understand by comparison what Jesus was teaching. It was necessary to push through the barriers of doubt in order to become believers. Those who were unable to achieve this did not become his followers.

One factor present in these first books of the Bible was an attempt to validate Jesus by claiming he was sent by God and was bearing God's

message. Jesus was said to be the long-awaited messiah who prophets had predicted would save the Israelites from the unjust Roman rule. Ties to the Old Testament were an important tool in convincing listeners to accept him.

We as present-day Christians have a hard time imagining how difficult it was in those early days when Christianity was taking shape. It's tough for me to think in terms of the PR work involved. So much of what we hear today demands listening with a very critical ear because of exaggerations, untruths, and political promises that fall by the wayside once an election is over; we have become cynical. For Christians, however, belief in Jesus is a different matter. I don't bake my own bread, but I know what yeast can do, and I commend those early followers. They provided the yeast of the movement even when they couldn't have been able to imagine how widespread Christianity would become in days to come.

Lord, never let the barriers of doubt block the pathway to that inner altar where I meet with you.

(1) The New Interpreter's Study Bible, Abingdon Press, p. 1769

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