



Daily Meditations

February 24-29, 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, EPIPHANY Last:

O God, who before the passion of your only begotten Son revealed his glory upon the holy mountain: Grant to us that we, beholding by faith the glory of his countenance, may be strengthened to bear our cross, and be changed into his likeness from glory to glory; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Same Mind as Christ

Monday, February 24, 2020

Philippians 2:1-13

"Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus..." - v. 5 NRSV

The Christ-hymn (vv.6-11) brings in focus the paradoxes of Christ: Though God, doesn't act like a god. Though master, acts like a slave; though immortal, died. Though the creator and ruler of the cosmos, is humiliated and crucified like a runaway slave. And the biggest paradox of all: humans who live in a world of appearances and "might makes right" should grasp and imitate this. It's no wonder that in Thessaloniki, the next town Paul visited after Philippi, opponents labeled Paul as one whose teaching turns the world upside down.

Philippi in Paul's day was much like our area: full of retired military or powerful (Roman) families placed there to maintain the Pax Romana, with few Jews (no synagogue) and an indigenous Greek population that worshipped a myriad of capricious deities. Paul could not teach them using Hebrew Scripture as most of them had no knowledge of it. These struggling Christians were trying to walk in The Way as taught by Paul but subject to their own life experiences and cultural traditions. Talk about disunity. But it appears that these Christians were united in their love for Paul and his for them, so his words are powerful, if puzzling. To encourage them, Paul reminds them in v.13 that if they obey, God will "[enable them] to will and work for His good pleasure."

It's not easy today to have the same mind as Christ. We struggle as the Philippians did to rid ourselves of pride, power-lust, jealousy, pettiness, fear, and just our own neediness. But we know that God loves a willing heart. If I obey to the best of my abilities, struggling with my limitations, God will enable me...by abasing self, God will lift me up...another paradox!

Clean Slate of Mud

Tuesday, February 25, 2020

Philippians 3:1-11

"Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ..." - vv. 7-8 NRSV

Who am I? What is it that defines my identity? Is it intellect, or possessions, or family connection, or accomplishments, or popular opinion or natural abilities? Could I, like Paul, regard myself as a clean slate of mud for Christ to imprint upon? What would that look like? Daunting questions.

I am reminded of a man I've known for the last 40 years, who grew up in a Jewish heritage but came to Christ as a young man. Eli is the humblest person I know, kind, soft-spoken, compassionate, never drawing attention to himself, never insisting on his viewpoint, only boasting about the wonderful gift of his wife and children, and the greater gift of knowing Christ. Eli always views others as better than himself, regardless of the situation. I know no details of his life except for one story of his early life when he and his brother would crouch down in the back of the car as they drove through Texas towns out of fear of persecution for their Jewish identity. And yet, for all this self-effacement, he is memorable to me and has made a huge impact on his surroundings. Paradoxically, this Christ-like man influences others, much as water wears away stone.

Ash Wednesday

Wednesday, February 26, 2020

Hebrews 12:1-14

"At the time, discipline isn't much fun. It always feels like it's going against the grain. Later, of course, it pays off handsomely, for it's the well-trained who find themselves mature in their relationship with God.

So don't sit around on your hands! No more dragging your feet! Clear the path for long-distance runners so no one will trip and fall, so no one will step in a hole and sprain an ankle. Help each other out. And run for it!" - vv. 11-13 The Message

As I examine myself and prepare to enter Lent, considering how to strengthen and improve my spiritual life, I recognize that discipline, both from God and self-imposed, is a necessary element of the solution, not only for myself but for those of my faith community. But the writer of Hebrews makes it clear that this is not a draggy, feel-sorry-for-myself time, but a time of encouragement and concern for others. So what shall I do? Most Christians point to five areas of discipline during Lent: 1) fasting and abstinence, 2) prayer, 3) Bible study, 4) corporate worship, and 5) good works.

1. We've all seen news photos of people undergoing starvation...that's not fasting and abstinence! Instead, the guidelines "keep it smaller and keep it simpler" applies. In order for it to be discipline, however, whatever I choose has to matter to me...not mustard greens, which I cannot stomach, but chocolate, which is delightful! Or perhaps lunch will go on the altar since I have no major health restrictions that limit me. But my resolve is that whatever I choose, I must *not* allow myself to go around whining about my decision; this is my self-discipline and my sacrifice to God.
2. Prayer is an easy one. "To you all hearts are open and no secrets are hid." To the constant conversation with Our Father, I may add more thanksgiving or another specific and deliberate prayer time.
3. "The man who removes a mountain begins by carrying away small stones." Our great Southern writer William Faulkner understood the accumulated power of small steps. So it is with Bible reading and study; reading and

- absorbing some small piece every day leads to deeper understanding.
4. In worshipping together, we strengthen one another, we see others striving to run the race, to become more spiritual, and to receive encouragement. Whenever my Christian group comes together, I will try to be there completely in both body and spirit.
 5. Good works? So many opportunities abound that I can pick and choose...or I can do those that are placed in front of me. Crisis Bread Basket, clothing donation, hospitality, calling or visiting a shut in, or praying for the living or the dead, comforting the sorrowful, forgiving one another...the list is long and ever-growing.

A British friend often tells me when I make some small error to "Buck up now! Promise me you'll try to do better!" Here's my chance to really do better, to practice discipline and joyously "run for it!"

Belly god

Thursday, February 27, 2020

Philippians 3:12-21

"Stick with me, friends. Keep track of those you see running the same course, headed for this same goal. There are many out there taking other paths, choosing other goals, and trying to get you to go along with them. I've warned you of them many times; sadly, I'm having to do it again All they want is easy street. They hate Christ's Cross. But easy street is a dead-end street. Those who live there make their bellies their gods; belches are their praise; all they can think of is their appetites." - vv. 17-19 The Message

My belly can be my god? Disgusting! An image of Buddha happily smiling and rubbing his belly springs into my mind. But...is "my belly" or sensual pleasure my god? Do I live for pleasure in what I eat, what I do, where I go, what I wear, how I spend my money? Does everything have to fit my schedule? My personality? My cultural identity? (This is getting too close for comfort.)

As Americans, rich beyond the scope of understanding for a huge portion of earth's inhabitants, we have so many choices, and we are taught to pick and choose to reflect our personal tastes. Nothing wrong with that...unless our personal taste, wants, and desires form the totality of our decision-making processes. Our Christian beliefs should provide structure, direction, and even restraint to our decisions and choices. Upon examination, do I find that Christ is my guiding light, or my belly? Perhaps that's what Lent is all about.

How to Replace Gnawing Worry

Friday, February 28, 2020

Philippians 4:1-9

"Don't fret or worry. Instead of worrying, pray. Let petitions and praises shape your worries into prayers, letting God know your concerns. Before you know it, a sense of God's wholeness, everything coming together for good, will come and settle you down. It's wonderful what happens when Christ displaces worry at the center of your life." - vv. 6-7 The Message

This passage is a favorite of many Christians, including me. It's hard to comprehend that Paul wrote this from some prison cell after suffering so many tortures, humiliations, and hardships, but this very fact makes Paul a wonderful example of how placing trust in God's promises and our Savior leads to a life of joy and peace. Is this possible for an ordinary Christian like me, one who didn't see Jesus on the Road to Damascus? I believe it is because Paul gives me a handle on this: don't fret--pray! Replace the gnawing, debilitating sin of worry in my heart with the joy and certainty of Jesus Christ. Then God's peace, the sense of his wholeness, will settle on me, and I will be restored.

Keep Running

Saturday, February 29, 2020

Philippians 4:10-20

"...for I have learned to be content with whatever I have. I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me." - vv. 11b-13 NRSV

As I enter into the Lenten season of spiritual awakening and strengthening, this will be my mantra. Christ is enough. Contentment is not my natural state of being, so I expect to struggle, but I will fortify myself with Bible study, prayer, reaching out to help others, and having *koininia* or fellowship with other Christians. Encouragement to continue also comes from "the great cloud of witnesses" (Hebrews 12:1) who are cheering me on from heaven. This is no quiet stroll along The Way but an all-out race, but milestones along the course help me to see that my inner landscape is quite different from what it used to be, so I feel encouraged. I just need to keep my eyes on the goal and keep running, confident that Christ is with me, and I can hold fast to my faith. Hold fast and keep running!

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