



## Daily Devotionals January 14-19, 2019

The Biblical readings are taken from the Daily Office in the Book of Common Prayer for Proper 17, Year 1 and written by the St. Stephen's Meditation Writing Team: Judy Aronow, Janice Bachardy, Pat Gillory, Frances McMaster, Jay Nickel, Bob Reed, and T. Cay Rowe.

Click on the scripture reading for each day to go directly to link.

### COLLECT EPIPHANY 1:

Father in heaven, who at the baptism of Jesus in the River Jordan proclaimed him your beloved Son and anointed him with the Holy Spirit: Grant that all who are baptized into his Name may keep the covenant they have made, and boldly confess him as Lord and Savior; who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, in glory everlasting. **Amen.**

### Impelled by the Holy Spirit Monday, January 14, 2019

#### Mark 1:1-13

*"And immediately the Spirit impelled him to go out into the wilderness."*

When were you last *impelled* by the Holy Spirit? When did you last feel that tug deep inside, sense that soft voice within, which you have come to know as the Father's Spirit speaking to you? When did you last slow down enough, quiet yourself sufficiently, and be still so that you could hear God's command?

And when did the Holy Spirit last impel you to *go out* into the wilderness? I think this crazy world we live in can certainly be a wilderness much like the one in which Jesus spent 40 days—for this world can appear barren and vast and empty of nourishment, filled with all manner of wild beasts, and redolent with evil. And here in this wilderness we, like our Savior Jesus, are tempted by Satan—Satan in the money of which we can't seem to get enough—Satan in the indifference we show to our homeless or hungry or immigrant brothers and sisters—Satan in the time we throw away to our work and do not spend with our loved ones.

Impel—to urge forward, to drive, to propel. Let's pray that God will impel us forward out of our complacency and comfort and safety and drive us out into the wilderness to be Christ to those we encounter.

### Amazing Teaching Tuesday, January 15, 2019

#### Mark 1:14-28

*"And they were amazed at his teaching; for he was teaching them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. (v. 22)*

*And they were all amazed, so that they debated among themselves saying, "What is this? A new teaching with authority!" (v. 27)*

Can you imagine what it must have been like to hear Jesus teach? I suspect his delivery would be different when teaching in the temple from when he sat on a hillside and taught his people. Perhaps in the temple his voice was strong

and resonant, and he made his points eloquently, emphatically, and with the firm and confident authority of his Father. But when I imagine him outdoors speaking to the crowds that followed him everywhere—the needy and spiritually hungry, the sick and lame whom he could not get away from—I hear his voice soft and warm, using familiar idioms as he uses simple stories to carry his message home to the hearts of his listeners. His message was new and exciting and controversial! He challenged his listeners to new ways of thinking about God, love, and salvation. He brought the "Good News," and it must have been at once perplexing and enlightening. No wonder "they were all amazed"!

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## The Necessity of Time Away

Wednesday, January 16, 2019

### Mark 1:29-45

*"And in the early morning, while it was still dark, he arose and went out and departed to a lonely place and was praying there."*

Everyone sometimes needs to withdraw—to leave behind the crowds and busyness of our full lives and move into a place of solitude and quiet where we can relax, slow down, and be still. To be able in our stillness to focus on God, to talk as well as listen, and to wait for God to talk to us.

In this passage, it is Jesus who needs to get away. Everywhere he goes, he is surrounded by people who are hungry, sick, crippled, damaged, and needy. They all need something from him. *How did he persevere day after day?* Surely, he did this often in order to maintain his ministry—feeding his soul so that he could feed others.

I like to rise in the early morning dark, for it is often the only time that I can be alone and quiet. And that time of peaceful reflection and waiting on the Lord is refreshing and revitalizing.

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## One of a Kind

Thursday, January 17, 2019

### Mark 2:1-12

*"We have never seen anything like this."*

Jesus was different from the beginning. He was God incarnate and, no—no one had ever seen the likes of him before! The first few chapters of Mark describe some of Jesus' many miracles of healing. Dogged everywhere he went by expectant crowds and suspicious detractors just waiting to catch him in some kind of civil or religious disobedience, Jesus was so moved by their needs and the desire to tend to them that he set aside his own concerns about his safety. Those demanding help, as well as the ones meaning Jesus harm, became the recipients of his compassion and witness of his power. Yes, he was one of a kind and the news spread quickly despite Jesus' efforts to keep a low profile. Often when he healed someone, motivated by intense love and compassion rather than a desire for notoriety, he would tell the healed not to speak of the experience. But off they would go, ecstatic from their encounter and tell the tale to anyone who'd listen.

*Isn't this a rather clear "snapshot" of how we today sometimes respond to God's instruction? God tells us one thing, and we go right out and do the opposite! People haven't changed much since the days of Christ's ministry. From this one simple verse we are reminded of what a miraculous, revolutionary, unexpected force Jesus was, and perhaps realizing this anew will impel us to say to one friend or one family member, "I have never seen anything like Jesus," and use this as an open door to share the truth of his ultimate act of healing—healing the rift between God and humankind.*

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## Christ's Call

Friday, January 18, 2019

### Mark 2:13-22

*"It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick; I*

*did not come to call the righteous, but sinners."*

This verse both gives me comfort and stirs up one of my personal, moral dilemmas. I often worry that I have grown complacent in receiving spiritual food and loving fellowship as well as in ministering to my church community and testifying before my fellow believers. You know, "preaching to the choir" as the saying goes.

And yet the idea of proselytizing has always seemed inappropriate to me. But if Christ came to call sinners and not the righteous...well, I know that I and many people in church are still sinners, but I feel strongly the call to move beyond the comfort and familiarity of our church family and take the message of Christ's love and redemption to those who are hurting more, who are less secure, who are more in need. St. Stephen's active outreach and ministry beyond the church buildings constantly impresses and pleases me, and I feel the need to be of that same mind, to extend myself beyond the small circle of my day-to-day world and find ways to give to others. I'm not saying it's an "us or them" situation, but that in the process of so doing, I just might get a clearer look at my own sinfulness and maybe grow just a little in righteousness.

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## Feet of Clay

Saturday, January 19, 2019

### **Mark 2:23-3:6**

*"And he entered again into a synagogue; and a man was there with a withered hand. And they were watching him to see if he would heal him on the Sabbath, in order that they might accuse him. And He said to the man with the withered hand, 'Rise and come forward!'"*

Walking willingly into the trap, Jesus knew they were waiting for a chance to catch him doing something illegal. They'd followed him about, sneaking and spying and waiting for their chance to point out his feet of clay to the people and label him a blasphemer, even a criminal. And Jesus knew this. Yet his compassion for the man who needed healing was greater than his own sense of self preservation. He believed that his path was designed by the Father and that the script of his life would play out according to that design. So he acted as he felt led, and left the results up to God.

This is yet another example of Christ's quiet courage and easy confidence as he boldly bid the man to, "Rise and come forward!" Oh, to have that same courage and confidence in my own life, to be able to follow God's lead and *leave the results to God!* How much time and energy have I wasted worrying about the outcome, fearing what might happen, rather than heeding God's quiet inward urging and know with confidence that the end result has nothing to do with me and everything to do with God's plan. So in difficult times I will say to my "withered" spirit, "Rise and come forward," and I too will be healed.

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