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## Daily Meditations

### June 15-20, 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.*

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## COLLECT, PROPER 6

*Keep, O Lord, your household the Church in your steadfast faith and love, that through your grace we may proclaim your truth with boldness, and minister your justice with compassion; for the sake of our Savior Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.*

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## And then...thud

*Monday, June 15, 2020*

### **Matthew 17:14-21**

*"At the bottom of the mountain, they were met by a crowd of waiting people." - v.14 The Message*

Isn't this just like life? I can remember being on a women's retreat weekend, enjoying spiritual renewal and uplifting moments filled with songs, prayers, sharing, and joy, and returning to my family with nothing but love and happiness and appreciation in my heart. And then as I walked in the door, I was thronged by all my children, crying and holding onto me, the dog barking, my husband looking rattled and hangdog, all overlaid with the faint smell of scorched toast. Thud! My beautiful expectations collided with reality.

Jesus and three of his disciples have just descended from a mountaintop experience, literally. On what we refer to as the Mount of Transfiguration, Jesus communes with the great figures of Scriptural faith, Moses and Elijah, and receives God's verbal blessing and favor. I would call this the Mt. Everest mountaintop experience.

And then...thud. Jesus is immediately confronted with a shallow-minded, thrill-seeking crowd, panicky, squabbling scribes, a troubled father sincerely seeking help for this son, and frustrated and self-doubting disciples. Much more challenging than my reality collision!

Small wonder that Jesus echoes the voice of Moses (and God) when he says, "What a generation! No sense of God! No focus to your lives! How many times do I have to go over these things? How much longer do I have to put up with this?" (v. 17, echoing Deuteronomy 32:5).

My household settled down pretty fast and all the boo-boos were kissed and fixed, and after a big breath, I was fine too. Life is lived in the messy trenches of everyday life. Mountaintops give us shots of adrenalin to pick up and go on, and that's what Jesus does, too. He heals the sick boy, gives the crowd the thrill they want and turns it all into a teachable moment for his disciples. "There is nothing you [won't] be able to tackle" (v.21).

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## Songbook of Memories

Tuesday, June 16, 2020

### Matthew 17:22-27

*But as soon as they were in the house, Jesus confronted [Simon]. "Simon, what do you think? When a king levies taxes, who pays--his children or his subjects?" He answered, "His subjects." Jesus said, "Then the children get off free, right? But so we don't upset them needlessly, Go down to the lake, cast a hook, and pull in the first fish that bites. Open its mouth and you'll find a coin..." vv. 17:25b-27a*

*This is my Father's world:/Oh, let me ne'er forget/  
That though the wrong seems oft so strong,/God is the ruler yet.  
This is my Father's world,/The battle is not done:/  
Jesus who died shall be satisfied,/And earth and Heav'n be one.*

[https://library.timelesstruths.org/music/This\\_Is\\_My\\_Fathers\\_World/](https://library.timelesstruths.org/music/This_Is_My_Fathers_World/)

A wonderful man named Jack C. used to lead groups in what he called "the songbook of memories." This hymn is one I carry in my "songbook of memory" along with several others. Another old-time hymn that's in there is "Consider the Lilies, How They Grow" as well as "Seek Ye First the Kingdom of God," and countless others.

What these three have in common is the assurance that God takes care of those who love and trust him, and that's what I think is the point of Jesus' question about children or subjects. One of my teachers used to paraphrase Jesus' words saying, "Do not worry about tomorrow...let tomorrow worry about itself." Paul echoes this in Philippians 4:7 in "Be anxious for nothing..."

In our current pandemic stage of life, this presents a few challenges. God's children who have lost their livelihoods would love to go fishing and find money for the electric bill or the car payment. Jesus is not directing me to go fishing here, but instead to trust that my needs will be provided. And he also may be directing me to share the bounty of "our Father's world" with those who need a helping hand. We are all his children.

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## The Ability to Wonder and be Excited Like a Child

Wednesday, June 17, 2020

### Matthew 18:1-9

*[Jesus] said, "I'm telling you once and for all, that unless you return to square one and start over like children, you're not even going to get a look at the kingdom, let alone get in. Whoever becomes simple and elemental again, like this child, will rank high in God's*

*kingdom. What's more, when you receive the childlike on my account, it's the same as receiving me." - vv. 3-5*

I love to be around children...most of the time. Thinking about that statement, the qualities that most children possess are both exciting and fresh to us as well as familiar as old comfortable shoes: trust, joy, curiosity, playfulness, openness, faith, persistence, and the ability to wonder and be excited about our world.

But reverting to those attitudes wars against the skills we have acquired to help and protect us as we walk through this adult world. How shall we do this?

In the past three months of quarantine and limited social and business interaction, my childlike attitudes have had a much easier time of coming to the surface. Competitiveness, pride of place, the need for individual recognition, arrogance, and other adult traits have given way under the greater leveler of catastrophic epidemic to joy in the small things and the time and energy to be curious and explore or play with new ideas. I have also felt a renewed faith in our fellow humans inspired by selfless acts, trust that others will be just as protective and diligent as we are, and persistence (or perseverance) in our hope that our lives will improve and the COVID-19 virus will be controlled. Hopefully, I can hang onto some of these positive child-like outlooks when "normal" life returns.

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## **The Most Powerful Advocates in the Universe** *Thursday, June 18, 2020*

### **Matthew 18:10-20**

*Watch that you don't treat a single one of these childlike believers arrogantly. You realize, don't you, that their personal angels are constantly in touch with my father in heaven?" - v. 10*

Jesus presents the reader with one of those essential paradoxes of Christianity: if you are humble and lowly in this world, you will be exalted in the world to come. Whoever would be first will be last. If you are disenfranchised or disrespected in the family of believers because you are without status, wealth, or strength, you have the most powerful advocates in the universe on your case. Especially in our highly commercialized, status-driven society, it is difficult to not overvalue the gleaming, self-confident person over the reticent, drab, or even poor one.

Jesus presents us with an image of God our Father in his throne room surrounded by the "angels of the face," those who are in constant face-to-face contact with Him. And these angels are the advocates for the "little ones," the humble but sincere followers of Jesus. What a way to even up the power! This makes me think that other more self-assertive followers of Jesus either do not have dedicated angels or those angels are way off on the periphery, out of sight from God. If each human has an angel, I want mine to be close to God.

We as followers of Christ must guard ourselves that we do not put earthly standards or rankings on our fellow believers, exalting the rich and arrogantly dismissing the poor in wealth, spirit, or status.

This is a big order.

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## **The Chocolate Fingerprints of Forgiveness** *Friday, June 19, 2020*

## **Matthew 18:21-35**

*"The king summoned the man and said, 'You evil servant! I forgave your entire debt when you begged me for mercy. Shouldn't you be compelled to be merciful to your fellow servant who asked for mercy?' The king was furious and put the screws to the man until he paid back his entire debt. And that's exactly what my Father in heaven is going to do to each one of you who doesn't forgive unconditionally anyone who asks for mercy." - vv. 32-35*

How many 1000 times have I prayed the words Jesus uttered in what we call "the Lord's Prayer," asking that God forgive my sins as I forgive those who sin against me? The forgiveness there is identical to that of verse 35 above: I must forgive...and keep on forgiving...as long as I have life. Forgiveness is an attitude, a mixture of fellow feeling...compassion or understanding, and mercy. And it's the gift that keeps on giving.

Joyce was a librarian I knew 30 years ago who grew up in a poverty-stricken town during the Great Depression. She was one of five daughters, the next-to-youngest I believe. Money was scarce, but on Christmas Day, each girl got her very own Hershey bar. What delight!

Joyce loved chocolate and vowed to make it last for a month at least, breaking off a half of each delicious rectangle every day and then carefully wrapping the rest in aluminum foil and hiding it away.

Her scheme was going great...until about 14 days in, she went to her foil-wrapped treasure and found half of what had been left gone! Rage! She ran screaming to her mother who summoned all the girls in. After some talk, the youngest sister admitted that she had eaten Joyce's candy...she only wanted a little piece...and in great tears she blubbered out that she was sorry. Joyce wanted to flounce away, tell her she would never-ever-ever be forgiven, and generally enjoy her rage-filled high horse. *But*, her mother spoke gently to Joyce, reminding her of many things but mostly how much she loved her little sis. Finally, Joyce was able to say, "I forgive you."

Joyce told me that, that, however, was not the end of the matter because for months, maybe even years afterward, Joyce's eyes would land on her little sister, and rage would engulf her again over her lost Hershey bar. Joyce had to forgive over and over and over again until finally she was able to move on.

Forgiveness is a constant adjusting of our attitude, a continual forgiving, just as God is continually forgiving us.

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## **Into the Largeness of Marriage We Go**

*Saturday, June 20, 2020*

### **Matthew 19:1-12**

*But Jesus said, "Not everyone is mature enough to live a married life. It requires a certain aptitude and grace. Marriage isn't for everyone...But if you are capable of growing into the largeness of marriage, do it." - vv, 11, 12b*

I don't know about you, but I find these daunting words. Most of us nowadays approach marriage from an entirely different beginning point. Perhaps had I read Jesus' words in Dr. Peterson's *The Message* before I ever married, I might have doubted myself as capable of this "aptitude."

Those of us who have managed to stay married for a number of years recognize the deep truth that Jesus utters: Successful marriages are those in

which the partners give up selfishness and immaturity in order to create something much bigger than just the two of them. And it is difficult. Like forgiveness, it is not a "one-time fixes it" kind of thing, but something that must be done over and over.

Once I saw a demonstration of strength using a scale. Each person in the group was invited to press on this scale with as much power as could be mustered, and a reading was taken. Some people were very strong. Then we were invited to speculate what would be the number for the combined strength of two or three of us. Just math, right? Wrong!

We were all amazed that when you combine the strengths of two people, the number is greater than the total of the two. The speaker was introducing us to the idea of synergy, defined as the interaction or cooperation of two or more organizations, substances, or other agents to produce a combined effect greater than the sum of their separate effects.

I've heard some married couples say that they are better together than apart. Jesus describes it so much more eloquently as "growing into the largeness of marriage." I really like the word "largeness" here; it opens ever-expanding vistas in front of my mind's eye of possibilities. But I really value the word "growing" because I dream of myself (and my mate) continually maturing and reaching toward the ideal of marital peace and harmony. There's hope.

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