



Daily Meditations

July 13-18, 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, PROPER 10

O Lord, mercifully receive the prayers of your people who call upon you, and grant that they may know and understand what things they ought to do, and also may have grace and power faithfully to accomplish them; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Writer's Note: *I write these meditations in the wake of weeks of protest about police violence; in the wake of some criminal violence coupled with those protests; in the wake of a dawning awareness and acknowledgement, by some, of the sin of White Supremacy; in the wake of redefining the word "racism," not as personal animus against people of different skin tones and cultures, but rather, as structural systems, policies, and beliefs that benefit one race over another; in the wake of starting to recognize the "racism" in our criminal justice and policing systems, in our economic systems, in our political systems, and in our historical silence and denial about these systems.*

I write these meditations to my fellow parishioners at St. Stephen's Episcopal Church in Wimberley, Texas. In my experience there for the last 19 years, very few people with whom we worship descended from people from Africa. Hence, my general language using "we" and "us" refers to my very specific congregation.

In this light, I reflect on what Paul's teaching in these chapters of Romans may have to say to us today.

Salvation to All

Monday, July 13, 2020

Romans 11:1-12

"Did God reject his people? By no means!" - NIV, Romans 11:1

The chapters of Romans in our readings this week occur near the end of Paul's

letter, after he has completed the theological exposition of his theology of Salvation through Faith Alone. According to James Edwards' introduction to the book of Romans (NIV, 2003, pp.2008-2009), here is very brief outline of Paul's theology:

- All humanity is guilty of sin, both Jews and Gentiles [whites and blacks]
- Salvation cannot be attained apart from Grace [God's gifts freely given]
- The atoning sacrifice of Christ is a freely given gift, through faith, from God
- The consequence of our justification through faith is a life of peace and confidence before God
- While still subject to sin, Paul exhorts us believers to allow the fruits of the Spirit to manifest in our daily lives.

In the readings today and tomorrow, Paul is branching off into an esoteric discussion of the availability of Salvation to the Jews who had rejected God's call, and the availability of Salvation to the Gentiles when the Jews had been the special elect.

Maybe those of us identifying as white can see ourselves in the special elect Jews who have rejected God's call and instead pursued self-interest, taking for granted our special status as elect. Perhaps we can see how we have benefited from our special status at the expense (injustice, pain, suffering, death) of others, how we have remained safe, complacent, and silent in the face of those unjustly imprisoned, the sick without healthcare, the hungry without good nutrition.

But Paul's message to us, The Good News, is that God still loves us and continues to call and welcome us to salvation as we allow the Spirit to guide our lives towards a more compassionate, loving, and just world.

New Interpreter's Study Bible (2003), Abingdon Press, Nashville.

Understanding the Good News

Tuesday, July 14, 2020

Romans 11:13-24

I am talking to you, Gentiles. Inasmuch as I am the apostle to the Gentiles, I take pride in my ministry in the hope that I may somehow arouse my own people to envy and save some of them. - NIV Romans 11:13-14

Paul writes to the Gentiles with a radical message that the love of God-of-Abraham is as available to Gentiles as to Jews and that God's plan makes salvation available to all people. Malcom X in his autobiography (1965) says that, as a minister in the Nation Islam, he preached a radical message to the black people of the United States that they were fully equal to the white race, that they deserved respect and opportunity, they should demand it, and they should settle for nothing less. He went on to teach how the structures and institutions of colonialism, slavery, biased criminal justice systems and rigged economic systems oppressed people of color, especially people of African descent. In all this, I agree. I understand this in terms of Walter Wink's (1998) definition of Satan as the fallen spirituality at the heart of our bureaucratic, economic, and political systems that depend on violence to maintain their power. My Mennonite brothers and sisters understand that violence includes coercion and oppression. Paul hoped that in preaching the Good News to the Gentiles, the Jews of his heritage would also come to understand and embrace the reality of the Good News for themselves and all people.

I hope that this time of traumatic revelations of the horror of the oppression and abuse of people of color, both in the past and the present, helps us

understand the Good News God calls us to manifest in our lives seeking justice and peace.

X,M., & Haley, A. (1965). The autobiography of Malcolm X. New York: Grove Press.

Wink, W. (1998). The powers that be: Theology for a new millennium. New York: Doubleday.

Called to be like Jesus

Wednesday, July 15, 2020

Romans 11:25-36

*...in order that they too may now receive mercy as a result of God's mercy to you. - NIV
Romans 11:31b*

As I wrote on Monday, the Good News means that God intends and offers salvation to all of us, incomprehensible and irrational as that seems.

In our Baptismal Covenant (BCP, p. 306), we promise that whenever we fall into sin, we will repent and return to the Lord. Repent means more than apologizing, it means "to turn away from." So, if I recognize I have fallen into sin through my blindness, through my unconscious acceptance of the benefits of a system biased for me because of my skin tone, through my complicity in fearfully accepting a "law-and-order" criminal justice systems that for many unfairly and unnecessarily imprisons people and ruins lives and families, then let me repent, turn to a new way of behaving, and work towards new, more gracious systems.

Because God calls us to be like Jesus, to make visible and present the Kingdom of God, here, now, because we are called to love our neighbor (and our enemy) and because God loves us, I offer Paul's Doxology from *The Message* translation in closing.

Is there anyone around who can explain God?
Anyone smart enough to tell him what to do?
Anyone who had done him such a huge favor that God has to ask his advice?
Everything comes from him;
Everything happens through him;
Everything ends up in him.
Always glory! Always praise!
Yes. Yes. Yes.

A Living Sacrifice

Thursday, July 16, 2020

Romans 12:1-8

I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship....be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. - NIV, Romans 12:1-2

The conventional view sees sacrifice as something put on the altar for the use of or pleasure of God (like a dead animal or our money offerings at church). Paul asks us to make our lives, the entirety of our lives, a "living sacrifice," an ongoing offering of our selves and actions, for God's use and pleasure. In other words, to make visible and present, the Kingdom of God, here and now. Paul

further entreats us to renew our minds to be able to discern God's good will, and thus by acting accordingly, manifest God's plan in our lives.

I have been offering ideas from my "renewed" mind as I encounter and engage the ideas emerging from our country's and world's recent recognition and confrontation with racial injustice, with police violence, and with economic disparity. I hope you find them helpful to renew your mind in search of your calling to make the Kingdom present and visible. Amen

Practice Hospitality

Friday, July 17, 2020

Romans 12:9-21

Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality. - NIV, Romans 12:9-12

I suggest through these meditations this week, that our faith calls me and white people like me to repentance. Again, I remind myself that repentance is not a state of mind but an action of turning away from my old ways and engaging in more just, more merciful, more healing ways. Writing these particular meditations this week demonstrates my early steps in this active repentance process.

The readings today serve as a valuable reminder to not let myself get carried away in my zeal to the extent that I fail to love. "Practice hospitality" seems like a good and simple summary to me.

Obey Authorities?

Saturday, July 18, 2020

Romans 13:1-7

Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. - NIV, Romans 13:1

This passage is difficult to accept in light of what we know about the brutality and injustice exhibited by governmental authorities throughout history to the present day. I assume slave owners taught this passage to "Christianized slaves" to teach that they should submit to their enslavement with grace and humility. I assume that people would have used these verses to condemn Rosa Parks' decision to ignore the law and the authorities telling her to move her seat on the bus.

I recognize that Paul wrote this passage with the knowledge of Jesus' brutal execution on the cross and of his own incarcerations by the Roman authorities. Paul probably could anticipate his own execution at the hand of Roman authorities, which probably happened not long after authoring this letter (Pyle).

I turned to Greg Herrik (2004) for insight. From an article with 174 footnotes and a bibliography of nearly 100 entries, I take away the understanding that Paul taught humility and submission to authorities; with an assumption that

peace and good-order in the community are part of God's plan; and that authorities are a necessary part of it (at least in our fallen world). Paul does not address unjust governments and authorities here. When we respond to those, I refer you to the advice given in yesterday's reading (Romans 12:9-21). I understand Jesus' submission to a brutal execution as an example of how to reveal the poverty, impotence, and shame of a system that practices such inhumanity.

Herrick, G. (2004, June 27). Paul and civil obedience in Romans 13:1-7. Retrieved at https://bible.org/article/paul-and-civil-obedience-romans-131-7#27_4699 on June 28, 2020.

Pyle, B. (2019, August 5). How did the apostle Paul die? Retrieved at <https://www.christianity.com/wiki/people/how-did-the-apostle-paul-die.html> on June 28, 2020.

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