



Daily Meditations October 7-12, 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 22:

Almighty and everlasting God, you are always more ready to hear than we to pray, and to give more than we either desire or deserve: Pour upon us the abundance of your mercy, forgiving us those things of which our conscience is afraid, and giving us those good things for which we are not worthy to ask, except through the merits and meditation of Jesus Christ our Savior; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Kingdom of Heaven Disruptions

Monday, October 7, 2019

Matthew 8:28-34

"Those who heard about it were angry about the drowned pigs. A mob formed and demanded that Jesus get out and not come back." Matthew 8:33-34 The Message

I have difficulty making sense of this story. There exist several interpretations. But, as my seminary professor, Charlie Cook, quoted Rabbinical scholars: "If scripture has only one interpretation, it is surely not of God."

All three synoptic gospel writers include this story in their writings (Mark 5:1-20, Luke 8:26-39) with different emphases and details. Only Matthew has two possessed men. Mark's version seems to emphasize that even demons cower under Jesus' authority. Luke emphasizes the joy and excitement experienced of the healed man. All three writers agree that the townspeople got upset at having their livelihoods disrupted and ask Jesus to leave. This last point rings most true to me. I suspect that the Kingdom of Heaven includes disruptions to our way of life and economy.

One Biblical text commentary suggests a political interpretation. The demonic possession symbolizes the occupying Roman Empire; the pigs (the mascot of the Roman Legion stationed in Antioch) symbolize those occupying demons; the drowning reminds us of Pharaoh's troops drowning in the Red Sea.¹

How do you choose how to make sense of this story?

¹Walter, J.H., Senior Smith, Tribe VandeerKam (2003). Matthew. Text commentary in The New Interpreter's Study Bible, Abingdon Press, Nashville)

I Forgive Your Sins

Tuesday, October 8, 2019

Matthew 9:1-8

"Some men carried a paraplegic on a stretcher and set him down in front of them. Jesus, impressed by their bold belief, said to the paraplegic, 'Cheer up, son. I forgive your sins'." - Matthew 9:3 The Message

What a strange response to some men's request to heal their paraplegic friend: "I forgive your sins."

I have occasionally gone and requested prayers of healing in church. Typically, the intercessor lays hands on my head or shoulders and says a prayer. I experience, with that touch, a feeling of warmth and power. Maybe that touch communicates the message, "I love you just the way you are," which could include the message, "I forgive your sins."

Maybe all healing starts with love and acceptance. *And how can we accept someone without letting go of our grudges towards their sin, without forgiving them their sin?*

Care to Share a Meal?

Wednesday, October 9, 2019

Matthew 9:9-17

"Jesus saw a man at his work collecting taxes. His name was Matthew. Jesus said, 'Come along with me'." - Matthew 9:9 The Message

Another story with political overtones.

The Roman Empire enlisted tax collectors from the local population. The Empire required the tax collector to pay what the Empire demanded but allowed the collector to collect as much above and beyond the required tax as they could and keep the excess. The people of first century Palestine viewed tax collectors with contempt, as collaborators with the occupying enemy. For Jesus to invite such a disgusting collaborator to join him and accept Matthew's hospitality truly shocks the mind.

What would happen if we gave up our contempt and invited someone with different political views to share a meal?

There Exists a Spiritual Core

Thursday, October 10, 2019

Matthew 9:18-26

"The news was soon out and traveled throughout the region." - Matthew 9:26 The Message

The Daily Office prescribes readings, this week, where Matthew reports a series of Jesus' miraculous healings and ministries, and people's reaction to them.

As a 21st Century man with a scientific bent, miracle stories don't move me much. I stand at a point in my faith where I experience skepticism and doubt about what the Bible and our church teaches. And yet, I acknowledge a deep-seated intuition that there exists a spiritual core to all things, a spiritual core that holds together all of creation, that touches us personally. The best way I know to engage this spiritual core is through the Christian tradition I know best.

I engage the Bible through an interpretive lens that affirms that this man, Jesus, did live, did manifest and reveal the Kingdom of God through his life, example, teachings, death, and resurrection.

I learn from Jesus' example in this story that he responds with love to all who approach him, from the more exalted city official to the ritualistically unclean menstruating woman. *How and to whom do we respond when approached?*

Accept What You Believe

Friday, October 11, 2019

Matthew 9:27-34

"The Pharisees were left sputtering, 'Hocus-pocus. It's nothing but hocus-pocus. He's probably made a pact with the Devil.'" - Matthew 9:34 The Message

As I wrote yesterday, magic miracle stories don't move me much. I'm tempted to join the Pharisees saying, "hocus-pocus." But as a psychotherapist who includes some hypno-therapy in my practice, I know, have seen, and effected seemingly miraculous changes in people, all through helping them accept/believe in their healing. As Jesus said, "accept what you believe."

Calling all Workers

Saturday, October 12, 2019

Matthew 9:35-10:4

"Jesus called 12 of his followers and sent them into the ripe fields. He gave them power to kick out the evil spirits and to tenderly care for the bruised and hurt lives." - Matthew 10:1 The Message

Jesus saw his world filled by people with diseased bodies and broken and bruised lives, more than he could address on his own.

As Jesus directed his followers, maybe we too should get on our knees and pray for workers: to go into our ever-growing world of broken bodies and broken lives; to make present and visible the Kingdom of God on earth, now.

Maybe Jesus calls us to that work.

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