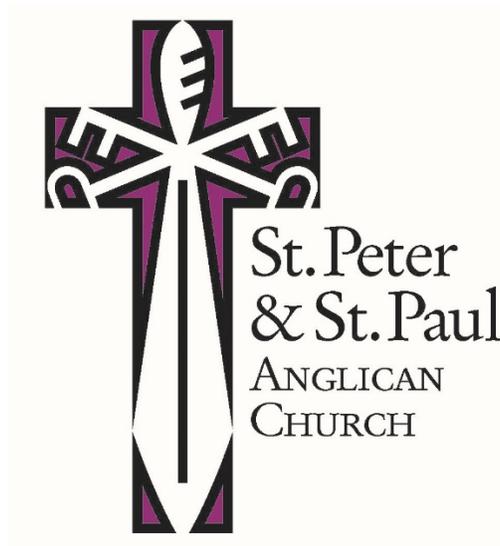


Good News Daily

Devotional Readings for each day covering the Bible every two years.

November 2021



Monday, November 1

Psalm 56 *My enemies trample on me all day long, for many fight against me.* (v.2)

Nobody wants to be trampled upon and least of all be called a “doormat.” I do believe that Jesus’ command to “turn the other cheek” should sometimes be taken literally. I usually ignore insults and criticisms of any actions that I consider right and just. Nothing can be gained from exchanging verbal insults with someone who feels differently than I. I feel that it is my duty to respond whenever: a) there are factual errors involved in the other person’s interpretation of a situation; or b) the person exhibits a pattern of behavior that inflicts damage on others; or c) I have some reasonable chance of preventing future damage by my response.

Hebrews 11 is a great honors list of visionary faith. As Os Guinness says in his book, *The Call*, “It is a stirring catalogue of men and women whose vision of God called them to live and work against the customs, values, and priorities of their generation. They marched to a different drummer.” If you march to Jesus Christ’s drumbeat, then you will create conflict and make enemies in the sinful, secular world. It’s guaranteed in writing. Stay close to God through prayer and study of His word so that you will know how to respond when confronted by evil.

Nehemiah 6:1-19; Psalms 57, 58; Revelation 10:1-11; Matthew 13:36-43

Tuesday, November 2

Revelation 11:1-19 *“The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will reign forever and ever.”* (v.15)

Does anyone really believe that good always triumphs over evil? I believe that it does in heaven, but not in this life. It often seems that good things happen to bad people and bad things happen to good people. Sometimes good people seem to prevail. Sometimes bad people seem to prevail. That is, of course, an over-simplification, but I doubt few will disagree. History provides us with many examples to prove these statements and we all can cite our own experiences as illustrations.

Reinhold Niebuhr wrote, “Nothing that is worth doing can be achieved in our lifetime; therefore we must be saved by hope. Nothing which is true or beautiful or good makes complete sense in any immediate context of history; therefore, we must be saved by faith. Nothing we can do, however virtuous, can be accomplished alone; therefore we are saved by love.”

This is not to say we shouldn’t struggle against evil or continue to seek God’s will or constantly strive to fulfill God’s purpose for us. We are the Body of Christ. We are our brother’s keeper. We must remember that Christ reigns when faith, hope, and love reign in our lives. Living that life will lead us to victory, ultimately, over evil.

Nehemiah 12:27-31a, 42b-47; Psalms 61, 62; Matthew 13:44-52

Wednesday, November 3

Psalm 72 *May he defend the cause of the poor of the people, give deliverance to the needy, and crush the oppressor.* (v.4)

Between 1980 and 2000, in the eastern slopes of the Peruvian Andes, dozens of churches were burned and many Christians beaten or murdered. The oppressors were members of Shining Path, a guerilla group, and the innocent victims were Indian members of the Quechua evangelical churches. Peter Clark, a graduate of Harvard’s

Kennedy School of Government, spent a year working among these Peruvian Christians and wrote an essay about it in his book *Finding God at Harvard*.

There was nothing revolutionary in Jesus' emphasis on loving the poor and needy. Throughout the Old Testament, we see this emphasis as well, which Jesus' life and teaching embodied. This passage from Psalms says more, however, in formulating a response to evil. First, it shows that God's will is to "crush" oppression, especially of those who are unable to fight it because of their poverty or powerlessness. Second, it shows that helping the afflicted may also mean crushing the "afflictors."

To love the poor and needy may require fighting against the powers-that-be that cause their oppression. You probably won't have to go to Peru to do it. If you pray to God to show you how you can help, you will find that you are soon offered an unmistakable avenue of service.

Nehemiah 13:4-22; Revelation 12:1-12; Matthew 13:53-58

Thursday, November 4

Psalm 71 *I will also praise you with the harp for your faithfulness, O my God; I will sing praises to you with the lyre.* (v.22a)

Much is written about the sense of entitlement so pervasive in today's American culture. People feel they have a right to almost everything imaginable, as court actions demonstrate. The more I grow in Christ, the less that I feel I have a "right" to anything. I'm learning to approach each day as a gift from God.

That is why praise and gratitude are such integral parts of Christian worship and devotional life. Thanking and praising God daily help to cope with life's wounds and injuries. We don't really have a "right" to a life free from evil or strife. If we think about God's blessings and the little things that bring joy, then some of this life's evils often shrink to nothing by comparison.

We might also consider that wealth, position, fame, and status don't save us from anything, even as poverty, destitution, need, and powerlessness don't condemn us. Only Jesus Christ saves, and he gives us the one thing nothing else can: everlasting life.

Ezra 7:1-26; Psalm 70; Revelation 14:1-13; Matthew 14:1-12

Friday, November 5

Matthew 14:13-21 *When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them and cured their sick.* (v.14)

Jesus' life shows that compassion is often the most appropriate response to evil. People who cause insult and injury may be more in need of a compassionate helping hand than they are of a stern rebuke. More than once, Jesus demonstrated that a loving touch can heal.

Whatever success the civil rights movement achieved is because of Martin Luther King's commitment to nonviolence. The movement's earliest leaders were deeply committed Christians. Their philosophy of nonviolence was rooted in Christian love and the Sermon on the Mount. Despite all of the violence they suffered, King stressed that nonviolence "does not mean stagnant passivity but is ultimately the way of the strong man; it does not seek to defeat or humiliate the opponent but to win his friendship and understanding; it is directed against the *forces* of evil rather than the *persons* who happen to be doing the evil; it avoids not only external physical violence but also internal violence of the spirit. The nonviolent resister not only refuses to shoot his opponent, but he also refuses to hate him."

By embracing Jesus' example of compassion, we will be led to a life free of both outer and inner strife and, so healed, we can then become healers also.

Ezra 7:27-28, 8:21-36; Psalm 69; Revelation 15:1-8

Saturday, November 6

Matthew 14:22-36 *And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up to the mountain by himself to pray.* (v.23a)

Jesus didn't wait for the crowds to go away. He had to make time to get away and pray. So, he dismissed the crowds. Prayer was especially important to Jesus when he faced agonizing decisions. He spent the whole night in the Garden of Gethsemane trying to decide how to respond to the evil he faced.

So many situations I face defy easy explanations and advice. I am sometimes irritated by newspaper articles that tell you how to solve a problem with a list of pointers and suggestions. They give the impression that every problem can be solved by following a few words of simplistic advice, and are often written by a reporter who, after one or two interviews, is facing a deadline and just needs to finish the article and please an editor. Life's problems are not solved by articles in the daily newspaper.

Not every situation requires you to turn the other cheek and not every situation requires you to fight back or right a wrong. Some situations are so painful and complex that the only direction to turn is to God in prayer. There comes a point where you simply have to tell the crowds to go away so you can go and pray to God in solitude. He is there, wanting to listen, waiting to answer. Turn to Him in faith.

Ezra 9:1-15; Psalms 75, 76; Revelation 17:1-14

by David E. Sumner

Sunday, November 7

Luke 14:12-24 *"But they all alike began to make excuses."* (v.18a NRSV)

What did the invited guests excuse themselves from? Not a funeral or a work session, but a party! And it was free. So, they cut themselves off from blessings freely given!

What kept them back? Buyers don't buy a product without first looking it over. The man's field would still be there next week. The yoke of oxen would have been tested before they were bought. The bride's clothes from her wedding would have suited her to attend this banquet. These men's words are called rationalizing, or finding reasons which don't answer the basic question.

These fellows had plenty of time to arrange their affairs between the invitation and the banquet itself (vv.16-17), so their response is nothing but rudeness. Notice their increasing lack of manners. The first two at least said, "Please excuse me!" The third responded curtly, "I can't come." Excuses grow on us.

People who absent themselves from church, prayer, and Bible study start with simple rationalizations. But as time goes on and they continue to stay away, excuses cease to be necessary. We gamble when we rationalize sinful behavior because we never know when the invitation might be activated—when the messengers might come to say, "Come, now is the time. Right now." Are you ready?

Of course, we are blessed in that we have the benefit of confession, repentance, and forgiveness and can return to our Father's house to take part in the banquet of everlasting life through Jesus Christ.

Ezra 10:1-17; Psalms 93, 96; Acts 24:10-21

Monday, November 8

Matthew 15:1-20 *“These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.”* (v.8)

Sadly, I know what our Lord is talking about. As an Episcopal priest, I take three services on a Sunday and say the same words over and over. It becomes terribly easy for me just to let them roll over my tongue and not think about their meaning. I can find myself praying by rote like a prayer-wheel. During the week I catch myself rushing through the daily offices and my private prayers. I remember a verse from long ago which says, “I often say my prayers, but do I really pray? And do the feelings of my heart go with the words I say?”

The prime example of this sin is seen in Judas Iscariot, who used his lips to kiss Jesus and at the same time to betray him (Matthew 26:49).

In our church worship and during our devotions at home, do we really mean what we say? Do we sing the hymns and say the prayers with our hearts, or only with our voices? To sing God’s praises without the heart in it is to raise a din without meaning. Focus on God’s love for you with all your heart, and your prayers and worship will be full of joy.

Nehemiah 9:1-15; Psalm 80; Revelation 18:1-8

Tuesday, November 9

Matthew 15:21-28 *But she came and knelt before him, saying, “Lord, help me!”* (v.25)

Here is a Canaanite woman who took trouble to get to Jesus. She had travelled some distance and sought help not for herself but for her demon-possessed daughter. So, her motive and her deed were praiseworthy. Yet when she got there, she was disdained by the disciples and apparently ignored by Jesus. What a put-down! Many would have turned away in disgust.

Yet she persisted and prayed this second time. And in answer, Jesus referred to her and her people as “dogs.” If she were to take this remark as an insult, she could have gone away in a huff, and vowed never to return. Yet, tenaciously, she kept her mind focused on her mission, and turned it into another prayer.

That struck the bell! When Jesus saw that she meant business, he immediately granted her request!

Does he sometimes test us like this? Do we go to trouble to get to him? Are we patient enough to wait and persistent enough to keep trying? Will we cling to him even when other disciples around us give us the brush-off? Are we humble enough to take a lowly place in front of him? When we do all these things, what a reward awaits us!

Nehemiah 9:26-38; Psalm 78:1-39; Revelation 18:9-20

Wednesday, November 10

Matthew 15:29-39 *They put them at his feet, and he cured them.* (v.30b)

This huge outdoor clinic was hosted by the Good and Great Physician. To it came people with various kinds of problems: “the lame, the blind, the crippled, the mute and many others.” What did Jesus do? Did he just talk to them, counsel them, and comfort them? No. He healed them.

This same Jesus is healing people today. Sometimes he does it instantaneously, as here. But at other times he does it gradually (as in Mark 8:22-25). Sometimes he does it directly, as with these people. But at other times

he does it indirectly, through medicines, operations, and technologies. Here he uses other people to get these sick folks to him and employs his disciples to pass on the food to the multitude. And he can use us, too.

Notice that he cares not only about people's present needs but their future needs also. He doesn't want to send them off hungry and weak. So, after healing their various problems, he provides a meal for them. Let's remember that he foresees our future needs and will provide for us also.

Whom can we bring to him today? Whom can we minister to? Who needs our love and compassion, our healing touch, our kindness?

Nehemiah 7:73b—8:3, 5-18; Psalm 119:97-120; Revelation 18:21-24

Thursday, November 11

Matthew 16:1-12 *They said to one another, "It is because we brought no bread."* (v.7)

Here are people with whom I can identify! How often I get to a place only to find I've forgotten something! My memory isn't always dependable. And notice how their sense of guilt led to a misunderstanding of Jesus' words. We aren't the first to misinterpret him. They suspected he was referring to their complacency—and was blaming them for it.

What did he do? First, he stimulated their memories—reminding them of two previous occasions on which he miraculously fed them. Therefore, they were not to despair when needy or forgetful. Second, he used this subject of bread for an illustration. The Pharisees and Sadducees had just tried to trap him. So he pointed out that their core problems with faith were like yeast. The Pharisees were hypocritical (Luke 12:1) and the Sadducees were doubtful (Acts 23:8). Like yeast, both hypocrisy and doubt start in a small way, then spread, do their work silently, and finally soften the whole product—filling it with empty holes. That's great for bread but disastrous for people!

True faith removes all doubt from our hearts and minds. True faith moves mountains and changes hearts. We need no signs to know God's love for us and our faith connects us always to the source of our salvation.

1 Chronicles 10:1-14; Psalms 23, 27, 83; Revelation 19:1-10

Friday, November 12

Matthew 16:13-20 *"Who do people say the Son of Man is?"* (v.13b)

Jesus didn't focus on people's attitudes towards his teachings or his miracles or even his disciples. It was their attitude toward himself that he considered important. Still today, it is Jesus who is central. Our attitudes to the church and its doctrines, to the clergy and their behavior, even to the Bible and its authority, are not as vital as our attitude towards Jesus.

Of course, it's important what other people think. We ought to know their conceptions of him, for those conceptions are influencing their behavior and their attitudes to his Church. But underneath all that is our personal conception of him. "Who do *you* say I am?" he asked Peter (v.15). And that is what he asks each of us today. Is he just a great teacher, a miracle worker, a noble example? Or is he "the Christ, the Son of the living God" (v.16)? For on that "rock" of confession we are saved (John 3:36) and on that same "rock" he is building his all-powerful Church!

Who do *you* say Jesus is?

1 Chronicles 11:1-25; Psalm 88; Revelation 19:11-16

Saturday, November 13

Matthew 16:21-28 *Jesus turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me.”* (v.23a)

What a change from yesterday’s reading! There Peter was praised for his insight into Jesus’ nature. Here he is criticized for his resistance to Jesus’ future.

Why did that happen? Peter’s concern for Jesus’ welfare smothered his trust in Jesus’ wisdom. When the Lord announced he was going to the cross, Peter tried to divert him, and, in doing so, Peter became the instrument, the mouthpiece of Satan. The “rock” (v.18) became a stumbling-stone.

How subtle Satan is! Sometimes he tries to speak to us through a loved one. He tried that through Eve when she spoke to Adam (Genesis 3:1-6), and he succeeded. But when Satan tried it on Jesus, he failed.

Having spoken of his cross, Jesus went on to speak of his disciples’ crosses. Each of them was called to bear one, as we are. We must beware of avoiding duties that lie in front of us—faithfulness in marriage, honesty in business, sacrifice in stewardship, worship on the Lord’s Day. None of us is exempt from their call, and from Satan’s urging us to avoid them! It is only through Jesus Christ that we can bear our cross but, in doing so, we also carry his love to all we meet.

1 Chronicles 13:1-14; Psalms 87, 90; Revelation 20:1-6

by John Pearce

Sunday, November 14

Luke 16:1-13 *“He who is faithful with little is also faithful with much...”* (v.10 NASB)

I once managed a large estate. It included nine acres and a 30,000 square foot residence. I was responsible for the grounds, the home, the pool, the boiler rooms, the dogs, cars, event set-ups, etc. Prior to this I supervised the grounds of a 150-acre college campus so, while large, this home still felt within my scope.

In time the owners passed away and a younger couple purchased the property. Soon there were architects, engineers, contractors, and eventually some 150 workers bused in daily as the estate took on a ten-year overhaul. I went from center stage to near oblivion as this army descended. My opinions became rarely sought and usually dismissed. Eventually, most of the workforce knew nothing of my background or experience. I felt like a lord demoted to peasant.

I often recalled today’s reading thinking, just shut up and do your work. I reasoned if my work could not speak for itself, nobody could. In time, the workforce left and I regained stewardship, but not without the unforgettable humility of learning to remain faithful in little.

1 Chronicles 14:1-17; Psalms 66, 67; Acts 28:14b-23

Monday, November 15

1 Chronicles 15:1-29 *Michal...saw David dancing and playing, and she despised him in her heart.* (v.29)

Today recovery programs encourage addicts to make lists of those harmed and then forge direct restitution. David and Michal would have benefited from such therapy. Having had to flee Saul David could have, nevertheless, remained faithful to his first wife Michal while he was in exile. Instead, he is heavy laden with new

wives and concubines by the time Michal is “returned” to him. David knew how to repent before the Lord, but he never did so with Michal. And while Michal was not blameless herself, her resentment in today’s reading is understandable.

These are two worthy reminders. No matter how much I may succeed—or fail—in life, I need to be careful to restore anyone I may have wronged before I “let the sun go down,” as Paul put it. Many argue that Michal’s self-righteousness was her sin and bareness her penalty and that David was honorable in bringing alms before the Lord. But, as Christ taught, if I am at odds with someone, I need to make restitution with them first, then bring my alms.

Psalm 89:1-18; Revelation 20:7-15; Matthew 17:1-13

Tuesday, November 16

Revelation 21:1-8 ...*the fearful, the unbelieving, the sinful, the abominable, murders and those who commit adultery, magicians, idolaters, and all liars, their portion shall be in the lake that burns...* (v.8)

As Paul earlier alluded to, “fire itself will test the quality of each man’s work.” Today’s reading lists sinners expected to face this process at Judgment—among them adulterers and murders. Many translate, “their place shall be” [in this Lake of fire]. However, Green’s Greek Interlinear and Wycliffe’s Bible read, the “portion of” them, and, the “part of” them, respectively.

That a portion of a person’s life—that is sinful—is later purged by the smelter many would argue is a good thing. What’s beneficial remains. It would also be conducive to Paul’s analogy. Otherwise, today’s reading would damn Moses and David, both murderers themselves.

I am an unqualified lay person commenting on Revelation. But it reminds me of the spoils of war. Fourteenth century Turco-Mongol conqueror Tamerlane built an empire at the cost of five percent of the world’s population. But he also engaged his spoils bringing captured scholars and craftsman to build his capital of Samarkand, leaving remarkable architecture. If and when our souls are engaged may the gold within be great.

1 Chronicles 16:7-36; Psalms 97, 99, 100; Matthew 17:14-21

Wednesday, November 17

Psalm 109 *Let them that had a grudge...be clothed with shame.* (v.29)

Today’s reading illustrates how hard it is to pray for someone you hate. The psalmist starts off by saying he tries to love his enemies, then prays they be annihilated! He goes on to curse people who bear grudges! Hello? A wise elder once said, “Lord, teach us *how* to pray.”

Modern enemies have also been hard to love. An estimated 30,000 to 50,000 people were killed during Franco’s rule. Six million Jews are believed to have been killed during Hitler. And estimates are that Stalin was responsible for twenty million deaths. How on earth could I have prayed for such brutes? Besides, can a ruthless dictator even change? Well, research suggests Turkey’s Ataturk, South Africa’s FW DeKlerk, and Yugoslavia’s Tito are examples that they can. But what of today’s elusive terrorists? While the temptation is to pray-hate them like the psalmist, others urge differently. Based on Christ’s command that we love our enemies, one website (atfp.org) invites readers to “adopt” a terrorist—by praying for their souls.

1 Chronicles 20:1-8; Psalm 101; Revelation 21:9-21; Matthew 17:22-27

Thursday, November 18

Matthew 18:1-9 *Who is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?* (v.1)

When I asked a priest what he thought about the then-new Pope Francis, he admitted surprise. “Well, Jesuits aren’t supposed to aspire,” he noted. Perhaps that explains this Pope’s humility. In today’s reading it is telling that a group of mostly humble fishermen would soon find even themselves wondering who is going to be top brass in their increasingly popular rabbi’s kingdom.

Aware of the human nature to aspire, Christ’s redirect is stunning. His answer was like a concentrated universe explaining his sermons, his parables, and his ministry. Everything of being a supremely evolved human adult reverts full circle to the humility of a child: “Unless you change and become like little children you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven.”

Pope Francis has reportedly declined the traditionally opulent papal apartment for the much less formal St. Martha’s House, he continues to use public transportation, and cooks his own meals.

1 Chronicle 21:1-27; Psalm 105:1-22; Revelation 21:22—22:5

Friday, November 19

Psalms 102 *He looked down from His holy height...* (v.19)

Reality show *Undercover Boss* explores the dynamics of company owners assuming entry level positions in their company, incognito. For the owner there are rewards and risks. Since they are disguised, they can discover whether workers are truly naughty or nice. But, will they also discover company shortcomings that are embarrassing or leave workers slighted? It is normally a learning experience for all involved. The great reveal at the end of the show is judgment day. Unawares, workers are called in one by one to discover who they were really training. They are rewarded—or punished—depending on their revealed behavior.

I once heard a skeptic complain, “The earth is like a big tennis ball and God has just wacked it out of His court,” as if God hasn’t a care of what real people suffer. Perhaps He should send someone down to live a poor life, do physical labor, have to ride a donkey, be misunderstood and wrongfully hated then betrayed by his best friends, get beat up, whipped, spit on and left to die helplessly, slowly and alone—things like that.

1 Chronicles 22:1-19; Revelation 22:6-13; Matthew 18:10-20

Saturday, November 20

Matthew 18:21-35 *“Was it not right for you to have mercy on your fellow servant, just as I had mercy on you?”* (v.33)

I co-signed a loan once and was later stuck with it. Feeling betrayed, I devised clever ways to take out my revenge against my friend. But in the process, I felt myself slowly become an ugly person. Revenge is sweet until you begin to decay internally. Experts say forgiveness is less about condoning and more about letting go and saving yourself from emotional ruin. Plus, I am a believer. Since Christ forfeited revenge against me, how do I get off being greater than him? How can I accept Christ’s forgiveness but deny it to my own friend?

Minneapolis mother Mary Johnson, who in 1993 lost her only son to gunfire, recalled years of hatred “eating her from the inside out.” In time she found forgiveness and even reconciliation for the perpetrator. She later built the organization “Death to Life” helping others who have lost children through homicide. Life can toss

debris like a vicious tornado and Scripture says we will be judged by how we cope, which can be very scary—or wonderful.

Isaiah 65:17-25; Psalms 107:33-43, 108; Revelation 22:14-21

by William Bacon

Sunday, November 21

Romans 15:5-13 *Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.* (v.13 NKJV)

This is my fervent prayer for each of you readers of Good News Daily: May God's Holy Spirit continue to work deep faith in your hearts and lives. May you grow each day deeper in His grace and truth as you read His word, meditate on it, and pray. May you walk with God in your work and play. May your family follow Jesus more nearly each day and share his love for those around you.

Paul sends this loving wish to the Christian church in Rome and I send it to you!

Prayer: Dear Jesus, help us all be filled with your joy and peace in believing.

Isaiah 19:19-25; Psalm 118; Luke 19:11-27

Monday, November 22

Psalms 106:1-18 *Oh give thanks to the LORD for He is good, for His loving kindness is everlasting.* (v.1b)

I have found a wonderful activity for Thanksgiving week is to write a list of all the things for which we are grateful (another good choice is to write down 10 thanksgivings each day). Cultivating an attitude of gratitude is such an important spiritual discipline. It is far too easy to take all of God's blessings for granted.

Thanksgiving is something we need to practice daily. Too often, our prayer time is an "all request program," a to-do list for God, just "give mes" and no "thank yous." I am sure God loves to answer our prayers and intercessions with His good gifts, but I feel sure He takes even greater delight in hearing our gratitude.

Prayer: Thank You, Heavenly Father, for all Your blessings

Joel 3:1-2, 9-17; 1 Peter 1:1-12; Matthew 19:1-12

Tuesday, November 23

Matthew 19:13-22 *Then some children were brought to Him that He might lay His hands on them and pray, but the disciples rebuked them. But Jesus said, "Let the children alone and do not hinder them from coming to Me for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these."* (vv.13-14)

What a beautiful experience for these children to have Jesus lay his hands on them and pray for them. He has often said that we all need to have faith like little children, with pure hearts. Their lives must have been richly blessed by this encounter with our Savior.

Are the children in your life meeting Jesus in faith-building activities? Are you getting them to Sunday School, Vacation Bible School, having mealtime and bedtime prayers with them, sharing Bible stories with them during reading time? Are we helping them grow in grace and knowledge of the truth?

Prayer: Dear Lord, please help me share my faith with my children and grandchildren, and help them grow strong in You.

Wednesday, November 24

1 Peter 2:1-10 *You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of God's own possession, that you may proclaim the excellence of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light. (v.9)*

The apostle Peter is pointing out our unique status in God's forever family. We are His own possession. He has created us. His Son Jesus has redeemed us, and His Holy Spirit is now sanctifying us so that we can tell others this good news.

We once walked and stumbled in darkness, but as children of God we now can walk in His marvelous light and serve Him with gladness and singleness of heart. Verse 3 of our Scripture passage says: "You have tasted the kindness of the Lord" so, as we count our blessings one by one this Thanksgiving week, let us remember all the great things the Lord has done for us.

Prayer: Thank you dear Jesus, for all the many great gifts you have given us.
Obadiah 15-21; Psalm 119:145-176; Matthew 19:23-30

Thursday, November 25

1 Peter 2:11-25 *By His wounds you are healed. (v.24)*

This verse is often shared at our church's healing service by a woman suffering from cancer. Her strong faith is a gift to all of us.

On this day of national Thanksgiving it is another reason for an attitude of gratitude—Jesus paid the price for our salvation and healing when He died on the cross of Calvary. This is one of our greatest gifts from our Triune God.

I am so grateful that we can cast all our cares on Jesus because he cares for us. He brings us hope and healing.

Prayer; Thank you, Lord Jesus, for your victory over sin, death, and the devil.
Zephaniah 3:1-13; Psalms 131, 132, 133; Matthew 20:1-16

Friday, November 26

1 Peter 3:13—4:6 *Sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to anyone who asks you for an account for the hope that is in you. yet with gentleness and reverence. (v.15)*

Do you have an answer if someone asks you why you are a Christian? Is it because your parents were Christians? Or your spouse is a Christian? Or you want your children to have good moral training and healthy sports activities at church?

Or have you had a personal encounter with our living, loving Lord? Has He delivered you from some deadly sickness, financial problem, family disaster, or sin-filled life? You need to have your story ready to share! And as Saint Peter says, do it with gentleness and reverence.

Prayer: Dear Jesus, thank you for your activity in my life, and help me share my faith story with those who need to hear it.

Isaiah 24:14-23; Psalms 140, 142; Matthew 20:17-28

Saturday, November 27

1 Peter 4:7-19 *Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another because love covers a multitude of sin.* (v.8)

In *The Message* translation of the Bible this verse reads, “Love each other as if your life depended on it”—so true, our life in Christ does depend on our love for God and our love for our brothers and sisters in Christ. We are one in the Spirit and one in the Lord—we need each other.

Can it be said of us in our church, as it was of the early Christians, “See how they love one another”? And see how they reach out to those outside the church with loving acts of kindness and service? Jesus says we will be known by the kind of fruit we produce.

Prayer: Dear Lord, help us love and serve one another as You have loved and served us.

Micah 7:11-20; Psalms 137, 144; Matthew 20:29-34

by Jacqueline Littleford

Sunday, November 28

Luke 21:5-19 *“As for these things which you see, the days will come when there shall not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.”* (v.6 RSV)

Pharaoh crumbled into desert sand. No one can find Solomon’s bronze cherubim. The Emperor of China’s tea pot is a museum piece, and mildew grows up the walls of the Medici palace. It isn’t the wrath of God that brings down our empires; they fall under the weight of our own corruption, arrogance, greed, sloth, and religion that has lost its soul.

My own small kingdom, myself, was programmed, even before I was born, to die. Our country seems bent on its own destruction. What should we do?

“This will be a time for you to bear testimony,” Jesus said. Be strong for the weak, defend the helpless. Have the courage to be pure, to be honest, to be generous and merciful. Don’t run with the crowd, don’t laugh with the cruel. Trust God, hold to Christ. Then your life will be your testimony to the kingdom that lasts forever.

Amos 1:1-5, 13—2:8; Psalms 146, 147; 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

Monday, November 29

Amos 2:6-16 *“And I raised up some of your sons for prophets.”* (v.11a)

God gave us Amos for our time—the shepherd from the wilderness of Tekoa, the dresser of sycamore trees. Today, he lives in Montana raising sheep and tending his orchards. In his solitude, he feels God’s nearness; he sees God’s hand in the order of the stars, in the faithfulness of the seasons, in the obedience of the beasts.

In his flannel shirt and jeans, he comes into the city to sell his wool and fruit. He watches the women strut by in their floor length mink; he hears of living babies thrown into dumpsters.

The media tell him stories of corruption and depravity. Advanced technology deafens him with dissonance; vulgarity leers at him and is applauded. He watches mindless crowds worshiping disreputable idols. Across the street from luxury apartments renting for \$9,000 a month, the homeless huddle in doorways.

Amos knows that the barbarians were already within the gates. God sent prophets to help us see ourselves as we are.

Tuesday, November 30

2 Peter 1:12-21 *No prophecy ever came by the impulse of man, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.* (v.21)

In a way, anyone in the least observant and with a modicum of common sense could be a prophet. There is the matter of cause and effect. It is a fool who thinks we can go on breaking the laws of God and nature and get away with it. We worry about sin, of course, now and then. We know perfectly well that we should do something about it. Maybe later. We stifle the impulse to talk about it in certain company.

God's prophets can't stifle the impulse. There is a terrible urgency in them; they can't be still.

"Hear this!" Amos shouts. "Hear this!" We don't want to hear him. He is bad for business, he disturbs our contentment, makes shambles of our progress reports. When he speaks in church, he embarrasses everyone and is asked to leave. Someone notifies Washington about his subversive activities.

Amos is angry. "Aha!" we say very comfortably self-righteous, "you can't trust a man who is angry. He is out of control. Anger is a mortal sin." But as Dorothy Sayer has pointed out, there are two kinds of anger. Wrath is sinful for it is cruel, vindictive, and vengeful—it runs out of control, it desires destruction. But there is an anger that is focused, controlled. It is merciful. It purifies like fire destroying a place filled with disease. Amos doesn't gloat over the fate of the Israelites. His anger asks for amendment. He calls for repentance.

Amos 3:1-11; Psalms 5, 6; Matthew 21:12-22

Wednesday, December 1

Amos 3:12—4:5 *"Hear this word, you cows of Bashan..."* (v.1a)

Amos called the privileged ladies of Israel "fat cows." It was not tactful, it was not kind, but it was true. Were the ladies of Israel always fat and rich? Were they once young wives of young husbands struggling to get started? The wives probably made their own clothes; family vacations were bike rides to the lake with peanut butter sandwiches and frisbees.

Then things looked up. There was a new house and now there is a bigger one with four cars for three people (absolute necessities!). Hamburger and macaroni casseroles and screw cap bottles of Chianti are no longer de rigueur for company meals. If his business is going to take the next step forward, the husband must close his eyes to the small shops and houses his developments blow away. Cutting back or even standing still are signs of a fool or a failure. We are duty bound to get ahead.

Slowly and subtly we are seduced into luxury. We get used to it, and our luxuries become our necessities. We use our "things" to define ourselves, to prove ourselves, even to prove love. We begin to call them "gifts of God," but all the time they are clogging the veins of our compassion, deforming justice, diverting our eyes from sunsets. We forget the freedom of simplicity; we no longer find wonder and grace in God's gifts of pelicans and peanut butter. Is it time for some honest self-examination?

Psalms 119:1-24; 2 Peter 3:1-10; Matthew 21:23-32

Thursday, December 2

Matthew 21:33-46 *“He will let out the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the fruits in their seasons.”* (v.41)

We arrived at a one-room building that was a school, a storage shed, and this day a church in the mountains of Honduras. The people came. All their children were clean—glistening clean. (How can that be, I wondered, when they have to wash them in the rivers?) They had walked barefoot for miles over boulders and gullies. A man carried his old mother on his back; children brought their deformed brother in a cart.

The musicians were ready with a fiddle that had seen too many rainy seasons, a bass made from a box and three strands of rope, percussion supplied by two blocks of wood. *“Alabaré”* O, praise my Lord! A young woman who couldn't read held the bishop's Bible reverently. A dying baby was gently baptized. We shared the cup. Epiphany. Our Lord with us. *Alabaré*.

God brought Amos out of the back country to draw a decadent church into what has been called the greatest moment in Israel's history. Is he preparing another Amos today in the slums of Nairobi or the mountains of Honduras to take our comfortable church on its next journey?

Amos 4:6-13; Psalm 18:1-20; 2 Peter 3:11-18

Friday, December 3

Matthew 22:1-14 *“Friend, how did you get here without a wedding garment?”* (v.12)

The story of the wedding guest who was cast into outer darkness is stern stuff. He had seen a good thing, and when he was invited he pushed into the feast rubbing his hands and looking for the best company. No need to change his clothes. The host was a friendly type, not fussy about the guest list. But before he knew it, that guest was out in the cold.

I have never seen a picture of a stern Jesus, and yet, at times, he was. The Bible tells us so—in several places. There were times when people were distinctly uncomfortable in his presence. We know that he was kind, merciful, profoundly understanding, approachable, generous. We want to press it further. We want him to be lenient, permissive, benign, indulgent. We ask him to make compromises.

But is there a bottom line for those of us who call ourselves Christians? Do we just throw on our wedding garments over our old sins and take them into the church, into the coffee hour? Do we use the church for our own purposes, or do we let our Lord use us for his?

There is a bottom line, a place where we will meet his stern regard and hear his rebuke.

Amos 5:1-17; Psalms 16, 17; Jude 1-16

Saturday, December 4

Amos 5:18-27 *“I take no delight in your solemn assemblies...but let justice roll down like waters.”* (vv.21, 24)

We come to church faithfully and often. We honor our pledge. We join prayer groups and study the Bible. We make some sacrifices to contribute regularly to charity. We go on retreats, on pilgrimages to the Holy Land, we do our private devotions on our knees.

Does it change us at all? Does it turn us upside down and shake out our meanness? Does it pull us up short and show us what we are doing amiss? Does the world think we are peculiar? Does it make us fools for God?

Our lessons this week have been filled with tough love. Whereas Scripture encourages and enlightens us, it also challenges and convicts. For our spiritual health's sake, it does not allow us comfort and complacency. God wants more from us than lives filled with self-interest leading to self-destruction. God loves us just as we are, but He likes us too much to let us stay that way. And that is Good News.

Psalms 20, 21; Jude 17-25; Matthew 22:15-22

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