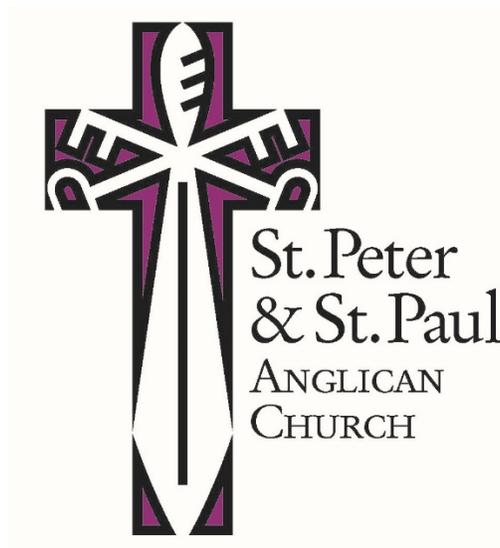


Good News Daily

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

October 2021



Sunday, October 3

Acts 12:1-17 *Suddenly, there was a bright light in the cell, and an angel of the Lord stood before Peter. The angel struck him on the side to awaken him and said, "Quick! Get up!" And the chains fell off his wrists. (v.7 NLT)*

Many are the stories that are shared about angels who intervene to remove us from dangerous and life-threatening situations. A guardian angel was definitely walking beside our family member years ago on a late morning in November. He was experiencing pains and debated with himself whether to go to the hospital or not. No one else was home. A voice told him to leave immediately and drive to the hospital. The voice directed him to a parking space and led him to the entrance. He suffered a heart attack in the emergency room. With God's grace, he survived. Without that encounter with his guardian angel and divine guidance, the outcome of this story would be different.

2 Kings 20:1-21; Psalm 118; Luke 7:11-17

Monday, October 4

Psalm 106:1-18 *There is joy for those who deal justly with others and always do what is right. (v.3)*

Those who deal justly with others... Our national pledge includes "with liberty and justice for all." However, our current times as well as historical times are replete with injustice on many planes. Is it just and fair for some groups to be treated with deference and other groups to be ignored or denied basic human rights? God has sent many who do good on a daily basis to defend and support those who have been mistreated. We pray for them and pray that God supports us also as we do good works. The ultimate justice and eternal joy are meted out by God alone.

2 Kings 21:1-18; 1 Corinthians 10:14—11:1; Matthew 8:28-34

Tuesday, October 5

Matthew 9:1-8 *Jesus climbed into a boat and went back across the lake to his own town. Some people brought to him a paralyzed man on a mat. Seeing their faith, Jesus said to the paralyzed man, "Be encouraged, my child! Your sins are forgiven." But some of the teachers of religious law said to themselves, "That's blasphemy! Does he think he's God?" (vv.1-3)*

We are a nation of laws. We grant authority to judges, policemen, and other officials to uphold the laws. By and large, these officials are faithful to their sworn duties and order is maintained. However, we know that in more personal and informal relationships, human nature intervenes, and altercations occur. Surely you have heard this exchange when one person feels that another has passed a boundary: "Who gives you the right to do what you are doing? Where did you get your authority?"

This is exactly what the religious teachers thought as they questioned Jesus' authority to forgive sins. In their eyes he committed blasphemy. The religious teachers remained paralyzed in their mindset. But, by his authority, Jesus released the man of physical paralysis and gave him spiritual freedom.

2 Kings 22:1-13; Psalms 120, 121, 122, 123; 1 Corinthians 11:2, 17-22

Wednesday, October 6

Matthew 9:9-17 *Later, Matthew invited Jesus and his disciples to his home as dinner guests, along with many tax collectors and other disreputable sinners. But when the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with such scum?" (vv.10-11)*

You know the adage, “You are known by the company you keep.” Since childhood we have used personal judgement to select people we want to be with. As children we chose a friend who perhaps had a toy that we wanted to play with. We rejected another because he or she was mean or pushed others around. Our sorting process for friends and associates changed as we matured. We selected friends and social groups that fulfilled our need for community and were in our comfort zone.

In this reading, the Pharisees were indignant that Jesus would choose to break bread with the least desirable guests at Matthew’s table. What Jesus showed us is that he loves everyone equally without regard to their status or circumstance. We all are loved.

2 Kings 22:14—23:3; Psalm 119:145-176; 1 Corinthians 11:23-34

Thursday, October 7

Matthew 9:18-26 *Just then a woman who had suffered for twelve years with constant bleeding came up behind him. She touched the fringe of his robe, for she thought, “If I can just touch his robe, I will be healed.”* (vv.20-21)

How much risk are you willing to take? At what cost will you take matter into your own hands to achieve your purpose? This passage of the suffering woman has intrigued me once I learned about the cultural and societal backdrop on which this scene is painted. Crowds were flocking around Jesus as he made his way down a dusty road. An unclean woman, unclean by Jewish law, desperately pushed and clawed her way through this throng just for the possible opportunity to touch the bottom hem of Jesus’ cloak. She risked condemnation and personal safety. She risked it all, but her faith pushed her and led her to healing.

2 Kings 23:4-25; Psalms 131, 132, 133; 1 Corinthians 12:1-11

Friday, October 8

1 Corinthians 12:12-26 *So God has put the body together such that extra honor and care are given to those parts that have less dignity. This makes for harmony among the members, so that all the members care for each other. If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it, and if one part is honored, all the parts are glad.* (vv.24b-26)

Harmony—what a beautiful state to attain! Harmony is the pleasant congruity of different parts, as in music. Notes play off one another to create peaceful and melodious sound. In harmonious relationships, people are at peace with each other; they are not fighting and arguing. In our reading, the image of the human body represents our community in Christ. Each person in community in Christ is unique and has their function within the group. The persons are in harmony, functioning to benefit the whole. The weakest parts are as vital as the more visible and seemingly stronger ones. With all our talents and abilities, we are one body in Christ.

2 Kings 23:36—24:17; Psalms 140, 142; Matthew 9:27-34

Saturday, October 9

1 Corinthians 12:27—13:3 *If I could speak all the languages of earth and of angels, but didn’t love others, I would only be a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. If I had the gift of prophecy, and if I understood all of God’s secret plans and possess all knowledge, and if I had such faith that I could move mountains, but didn’t love others, I would be nothing.* (vv.13:1-2)

Our community was host to a most provocative and entertaining guest. What an enlightening and renewing occasion to share an evening with the Presiding Bishop of our Episcopal denomination. Gathered in a monumental house of worship in our local area, we witnessed the bishop’s joy and enthusiasm as he focused on and reinforced

God's message of love. We are told to love one another as Christ loved us. Love defines our relationships with children, significant others, and friends. And we are to love the less loveable because all are loved by God. Love is the message. Love is everything.

Jeremiah 35:1-19; Psalms 137, 144; Matthew 9:35—10:4

by Dorothy Magill

Sunday, October 10

Jeremiah 36:1-10 *"I am banned from going to the house of the Lord, so you are to go..."* (vv.5-6 ESV)

Last year, a black student at the University of Virginia told white students to leave a multi-cultural center because there were too many of them around. The internet message site Twitter has banned conservative accounts without notice or explanation. A gay candidate running for the presidential nomination in the USA said Christians who didn't support his political position were hypocrites.

Such efforts to exclude uncomfortable critics are not new. The prophet Jeremiah faced similar attempts to silence his voice at the temple itself. He didn't stop. He found a way to proclaim God's message to the nation anyway. Christ's disciples faced beatings for their message. Jesus was crucified.

Christian witnesses don't seek out hostile reactions. But we mustn't be discouraged by them. They're not new. God's purpose in sending us to shine His light in darkness remains unshaken. And His concern doesn't stop with our tongues. God even makes the feet of His messengers beautiful! (Romans 10:15)

Psalms 146, 147; Acts 14:8-18; Luke 7:36-50

Monday, October 11

Matthew 10:5-15 *"Go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans..."* (v.5)

I was being considered for a job to manage a company I liked. I had worked for the company many years and knew the people. I had held similar positions at other companies. Still, I was turned down. Twice.

It was years before I became able to see that God closing that door had nudged me toward other doors that led me to unexpected and better opportunities. (Meanwhile, the company that had turned me down soon went out of business. My hoped-for future there would have been short.)

King David wanted to build God a temple. God said no. Paul wanted to take his mission work East. God said no. Peter wanted to know what Jesus had in store for John. Jesus said it was none of his business. But in each case, God did have further direction and purpose for each of these servants.

If you hear God's "No" or even His "Wait..." this week, remember it's because He already has a better plan for you.

Jeremiah 36:11-26; Psalms 1, 2, 3; 1 Corinthians 13:1-13

Tuesday, October 12

Matthew 10:16-23 *"Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves."* (v.16)

Melanie and I watch wildlife documentaries. Some of the most fascinating and dramatic scenes show the precautions the zoologists take approaching dangerous, large, wounded animals in order to care for them. Steps

are taken to protect the human workers from panicked, frightened animals who habitually try to avoid being approached at all. The humans are there to help, but face danger from the animals they try to rescue.

Last year there were sad stories of medical personnel who got infected while dealing with victims of the Coronavirus outbreak. The sick people were a danger to the ones trying to help them, even if they didn't intend to be so. Sometimes the threat is in the circumstance and misunderstanding, not the heart.

It might seem odd that Jesus wanted to send his own followers to face danger and hostility in the world. But sometimes in order to help, you have to get close first, regardless of danger. That's what Jesus did.

Jeremiah 36:27—37:2; Psalms 5, 6; 1 Corinthians 14:1-12

Wednesday, October 13

Psalms 119:1-24 *I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you.* (v.11)

As a writer, I have slowly built up a vocabulary to give me an assortment of words to express myself with. This plethora of morphemes enables me to avoid tedious, boring, long-winded repetitions. But to write the various words properly I have to know how to spell them. I don't always remember. My computer catches some errors (but not if I have typed the wrong word correctly). I often have to check a dictionary. Sometimes, in an overconfident hurry, I look at the word's proper spelling once, then forget it again when I try to type it down.

That doesn't work in writing. It doesn't work in trying to live a life pleasing to the Lord, either. I need to consult the Book, over and over. The more I commit it to heart, the longer I can go without stumbling. There are no errors in the Book. I want my life like that.

Jeremiah 37:3-21; 1 Corinthians 14:13-25; Matthew 10:24-33

Thursday, October 14

Jeremiah 38:1-13 *So they took Jeremiah and cast him into the cistern of Malchiah, the king's son, which was in the court of the guard, letting Jeremiah down by ropes. And there was no water in the cistern, but only mud, and Jeremiah sank in the mud.* (v.6)

Did you ever notice the people in beauty product advertisements or clothing catalogs? They're always head-turning knockouts. Movie stars are usually the same. These people earn money because the rest of us are willing to turn over every dollar we can if their products will only help us become as attractive and admired as they are. Advertisers are counting on that desire in us as they try to entice us to buy from them.

On the other hand, God lets some of His best representatives get covered in mud and ridicule and scorn. He allowed His own Son to die naked in public. Why would anyone want to be like them?

Perhaps the intended message is that the mud and scorn, definitely unpleasant for the moment, are actually worth it in the long run. Perhaps the messengers know something after all? What's that they're singing? "Whatever my lot Thou hast taught me to say 'It is well...'"

Psalms 18:1-20; 1 Corinthians 14:26-33a, 37-40; Matthew 10:34-42

Friday, October 15

Psalms 16 *You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.* (v.11)

Where would 20th century American song writers, musical stars and singers, and recording companies be without love songs? Before rap swept the pop music scene, romantic love themes appeared in 4 out of 5 hit song lyrics. Their popularity reflected our fascination with that strange awareness, the unexpected attraction that people sometimes felt upon meeting a new friend. What seemed so strange about such moments was that often the other person wasn't doing anything other than *being there*.

The feeling of wanting the company of someone else is a reflection of God's image, the one in which we are made. God as a Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, lives in the joy of each other's presence. That surprising and inexplicable joy is part of why we, too, feel such intrigue and interest in knowing more about God. He first loved us. We come to enjoy His Presence even when it surprises us and we can't explain it.

Jeremiah 38:14-28; Psalm 17; 1 Corinthians 15:1-11; Matthew 11:1-6

Saturday, October 16

Matthew 11:7-15 *As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds concerning John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? He who has ears to hear, let him hear."* (vv.7, 15)

I enjoy watching mysteries and magicians on TV. Both show you things and try to draw your attention to things. The goal is to draw attention away from something else, in order to conceal facts that would give away the tricky solution. The most confident magicians don't say a word while setting a trick. They tap a glass with their wand, expecting viewers to draw the conclusion that it is a simple, solid, normal glass. They poke and wave the wand inside a box, expecting you to conclude it is empty. All the time, the glass or box have nothing to do with the trick. You've been distracted from looking where the secret is hiding.

We trust our eyes, thinking they are the most important tool we have to direct our thinking. Jesus pointed instead to our ears, the tools that allow us to hear words of direction and instruction, even when we can't see where we are going. The trick is to choose to give our attention to the right tool.

2 Kings 25:8-12, 22-26; Psalms 20, 21; 1 Corinthians 15:12-29

by Rick Hoover

Sunday, October 17

Jeremiah 29:1, 4-14 *"You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart."* (v.13 NIV)

The people of Israel rebelled against the Lord of hosts; they sinned and found themselves in a strange, foreign land. Even if they were able to come to grips with the fact they were in exile because of their own disobedience, it would have been easy to wish the time of exile would be short and that the Lord would intervene and rescue them one more time.

But God said, "Go about your business of living—build houses, plant gardens, raise your family, pray for the welfare of Babylon, be discerning about those who claim to speak for me, be patient and seek me with all your heart and you will find me."

When things don't go "right" in my life, it's easy to become impatient, to look for a quick fix, and wonder why God doesn't straighten everything out. In times like these, Jeremiah reminds me of the need to continue to go about my daily activities and to seek God's will with the assurance He hears my prayers, will bring me back from my self-imposed exile, and let me join with the psalmist to "praise him for his surpassing greatness" (Psalm 150:2b).

Psalms 148, 149, 150; Acts 16:6-15; Luke 10:1-12, 17-20

Monday, October 18

Jeremiah 44:1-14 *But they did not listen or pay attention; they did not turn from their wickedness or stop burning incense to other gods. (v.5)*

While vacationing in the beautiful White Mountains of New Hampshire this past summer, we took a spectacular three-mile ride up Mount Washington via the coal-fired, steam-driven “Cog Railway.” During the trip, the fireman shoveled a ton of coal into the engine’s open furnace forcing 1,000 gallons of water through the steam engine to push one car with about 80 passengers up the mountain at three m.p.h. The brakeman kept a vigilant watch to make sure the cog gears held the track, which goes up at a 25% incline (at one point it increases to 37%!).

Of course, what goes up must come down! On the steep descent the engineer applied the brakes of the engine cog gears while the brakeman engaged the brakes of the cog gears of the passenger car. Both men had to be completely focused on the task at hand and play by the rules to ensure a safe trip for all. If they became distracted, it could mean disaster for themselves and their passengers.

Taking their eyes and attention off God meant disaster for the Jews in Jeremiah’s day. This is a lesson we must heed today as well.

Psalm 25; 1 Corinthians 15:30-41; Matthew 11:16-24

Tuesday, October 19

Matthew 11:25-30 *“All things have been committed to me by my Father.” (v.27a)*

“Praise the name of Jesus. Praise the name of Jesus. He’s my rock, he’s my fortress, he’s my deliverer, in him will I trust” (Roy Hicks). Recently we spent a week with a group of Christians who share a tradition different from our own. The simple truths of this and other praise choruses joined us together with them in a unity only possible for those who confess Jesus as Lord.

Take a moment to reflect on the magnitude of Jesus’ claim: “All things have been committed to me by my Father.” It’s awesome and sobering to think that Jesus is part of everything we do and each thought in our minds. Do all our actions and thoughts honor him? Sadly, I know I often fall short.

In Colossians, Paul proclaims, “For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth... all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together” (1:16-17). “My heart leaps for joy and I will give thanks to him in song” (Psalm 28:7b).

“Praise the name of Jesus.”

Lamentations 1:1-12; Psalms 26, 28; 1 Corinthians 15:41-50

Wednesday, October 20

1 Corinthians 15:51-58 *Death has been swallowed up in victory. (v.54b)*

John F. Kennedy, Jr., his wife Carolyn, and Carolyn’s sister, Lauren Bessette, died in a plane crash and were buried at sea several decades ago. In the days prior to the burial, the news media often spoke of how the Kennedys had more than their fair share of tragedy. Life’s hard side begs the question, “How do we go on?” for the family and friends left to mourn after events like this.

Christians and non-Christians alike face the terror of death at some point, whether it is the breakup of a relationship, loss of a job that provided material wealth, the diagnosis of a terminal illness of a parent, or the sudden accident that takes the life of a child. “But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (v.57). Jesus’ death and Resurrection affirm for us, as his followers, that death is not the end—God will have the last word.

We may be terrorized by the circumstances of death, but “My hope is built on nothing less/Than Jesus’ blood and righteousness,” for it is “On Christ the solid rock I stand/All other ground is sinking sand/All other ground is sinking sand” (Edward Mote).

Lamentations 2:8-15; Psalm 38; Matthew 12:1-14

Thursday, October 21

Psalm 37:1-18 *Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him.* (v.7a)

It’s difficult for me to be still; my mind always seems to be occupied, sometimes with important things, and at other times with trivia. There is a constant temptation to do rather than to be. The great preacher Phillip Brooks (author of “O, Little Town of Bethlehem” and rector of Trinity Church in Boston during the mid-1800s) is reported to have said, “The trouble is, I’m in a hurry and God isn’t.”

During a recent vacation day, I made a commitment to be still and meditate on this verse; to simply be and not do anything. Being still involves remaining quiet, with no agenda other than to enjoy being in the presence of God: “before the Lord.” For me this involved sitting silently in a chair with little movement, away from all distractions, and “waiting” with an awareness that I was on holy ground, patiently seeking to accept God’s timing rather than my own.

Through God’s word and by His grace, there was a sense of peace in this time of being that I often do not get to enjoy. The peace that we all seek is there—try it!

Ezra 1:1-11; 1 Corinthians 16:1-9; Matthew 12:15-21

Friday, October 22

Psalm 31 *In you, O LORD, I have taken refuge. Into your hands I commit my spirit.* (vv.1a, 5a)

During the past several years we have often closed our day together with the service of Compline in The Book of Common Prayer. It quiets our spirits and joins us with the saints down through the centuries in prayer to God. Repeating the first five verses of Psalm 31 frequently has moved the words off the page of the Prayer Book and brought them into my mind and heart to ponder. These words have been life-giving, offering encouragement and confidence that our God is faithful, worthy of my ultimate trust and in whom I can take refuge.

Jesus knew the Scriptures well and his final, dying words on the cross were taken from Psalm 31, “Into your hands I commit my spirit.” In using these words, Jesus is our example for demonstrating supreme trust in God our Father. He knew who to go to for springs of living water and for refuge and into whose hands he could trust his spirit. It serves me well in my daily ups and downs to “Bind them [God commands] on your fingers; write them on the tablet of your heart” (Proverbs 7:3). How about you?

Ezra 3:1-13; 1 Corinthians 16:10-24; Matthew 12:22-32

Saturday, October 23

Philemon 1-25 *I am sending him—who is my very heart—back to you.* (v.12)

Onesimus was a runaway slave who had the good fortune of encountering Paul, and his life was changed forever. Onesimus and Paul became brothers in Christ. To keep Onesimus with him was Paul's desire, but he knew he had to send him back to Philemon, his master. Paul knew it wouldn't be easy, but with Christ by his side, Onesimus could face his past mistakes, accept the consequences, and rise above them to become a free man.

In so many areas of life today it appears that people are encouraged to take the easy way out and run away from the truth. In reality we all desperately need a helping hand to face the truth and its consequences and move on to new life. In so doing, like Onesimus, we can enjoy the freedom of spirit that comes with meeting our mistakes head on.

I pray that, as Christians, we have the courage to face our circumstances with the boldness of Paul, to share the good news of Christ's love, enabling those close to us to gain victory over their actions and enjoy the freedom Christ offers.

Ezra 4:7, 11-24; Psalms 130, 32; Matthew 12:33-42

by Gail and Jack Potter

Sunday, October 24

Luke 10:25-37 *"He went to him and bandaged his wounds."* (v.34a NRSV)

The lawyer knew the commands of Scripture. He knew how to answer the question. Intellectually, he knew what was right. As he stood there wishing to appear holy for his wise answer, Jesus showed him there is more to righteousness than knowledge of the right.

The people who should have stopped, didn't. The priest scurries by pretending he doesn't see. The Levite is in a hurry and figures the guy must be dead. But the Samaritan, part of the despised, unclean, mixed race stops. And, "moved with pity, he went to him" (vv.33b-34a).

Today we have a similar struggle. We feel pity and see pain but, because of insecurity, busyness or fear, we don't act. But we must not forget that a touch from a disciple of Jesus can be powerful. Author and Pastor Max Lucado comments, "Our hearts are good; it's just that our memories are bad. We forget how significant one touch can be. We fear saying the wrong thing or using the wrong tone or acting the wrong way. So rather than do it incorrectly, we do nothing at all" (from *Just Like Jesus*).

May God grant us boldness to reach out in His name to the beaten, bruised, and left-for-dead that we encounter every day.

Haggai 1:1—2:9; Psalms 63, 98; Acts 18:24—19:7

Monday, October 25

Psalm 52 *The righteous will see, and fear, and will laugh at the evildoer, saying, "See the one who would not take refuge in God, but trusted in abundant riches, and sought refuge in wealth!"* (vv.6-7)

I call them, "holy reversals." It is when God turns our human ways of seeing and thinking on end and says, "No, that's *not* how it works." Think about it.

A barren, elderly woman, Sara, with a walker *and* a baby carriage.

A one-time Christian killer, Paul, imprisoned for his Christian faith.

A carpenter's son from Nazareth, who is the Messiah...God made man.

Of course, there are more. Look at all the times Jesus says, “You have heard it said...” and then follows with, “But I tell you...” Sometimes we need to be reminded that God does have the final word—love is stronger, faith is real, and His promises are true.

Look at who is being chastised in verses 6 and 7. It’s a “holy reversal.” The faithful aren’t considered foolish for trusting in what they cannot see. Rather, the faith-less are ridiculed for trusting in what they can see—riches and wealth, fame and glory. They are chastised because what they cannot see is that all those things are the fading, elusive, momentary things of this world and will pass away.

Our faith is in the eternal love and provision of our God, who is eternal.

Zechariah 1:7-17; Psalm 41; Revelation 1:4-20; Matthew 12:43-50

Tuesday, October 26

Matthew 13:1-9 *And he told them many things in parables, saying: “Listen! A sower went out to sow.”* (vv.3-4)

Although I have read this often, something struck me differently this time. We usually read this and think of the different types of ground. We jump to the natural evangelistic point of this passage. Other times we key in on the way God’s word is received by different people. Sometimes we even see ourselves as the Evangelist-Sower and learn why everyone doesn’t embrace our faith.

But tonight, something leapt out at me. It is the sower. Do you see what he does? He sows. He keeps on scattering seed. No matter where it falls or what happens to it once it hits the ground, he continues to sow. That is his job.

Of course, God is the sower in the parable, as Jesus will explain later in this passage. But for now, I am astounded at the diligence and faithfulness of the sower. No matter what happens, He sows His word and scatters the seeds of faith. He knows that not all the seed will produce, but some will. What love is this that sends seeds to us even while our hearts are hard and distracted by thorns?

Praise God for His faithfulness and His active participation in leading us into a mature faith.

Ezra 5:1-17; Psalm 45; Revelation 4:1-11

Wednesday, October 27

Matthew 13:10-17 *“But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear.”* (v.16)

In the movie, *At First Sight*, Val Kilmer plays the part of a blind man who, for a while, regains his sight. He must learn to perceive through his now functional eyes. It is a difficult transition. Color, depth, texture and many other things must be learned in order for him to live with his “new” eyes.

In today’s passage, Jesus explains that “seeing they do not perceive, and hearing they do not listen” (v.13). He is describing the spiritual condition of some in his audience. Their hardness of heart and thickness of skull prevent them from seeing and hearing the truth which is right before their human eyes. However, to those whose hearts and minds are open, insight will be given.

When we come to Christ it is like seeing, truly seeing, for the first time. Often, as with the character in the movie, our perception is off and our steps unsteady. But if we persevere and trust, “more will be given” (v.12). Over time our spiritual sight will sharpen and focus, and our ears will become attuned to the voice our Savior.

Ezra 6:1-22; Psalm 119:49-72; Revelation 5:1-10

Thursday, October 28

Matthew 13:18-23 *“Such a person has no root, but endures only for a while.”* (v.21a)

Last year I planted a garden. I tilled up a patch in the backyard and commenced planting. Very carefully I followed the directions on the seed packages. I patted the earth firm around them and stood back with pride and looked upon my little project.

Initially the corn came up, but never made it above waist high. The carrots sprouted their tops, but never developed into the wonderful orange monsters I envisioned. In fact, three months later I mowed over the whole patch and promised myself I’d never try it again.

The seeds were planted with the best of intentions. However, I forgot about the long-term care that would be needed for my crops to succeed. Once the seeds were in the ground, I forgot that the work is just beginning for the seed, for it has a lot of competition.

Many things compete in our lives as well. We can be self-centered, hard-hearted, overly concerned with the cares of the world, and so entwined with all the troubles we are having that we miss the rich, fruitful spiritual life we are meant to have. May we strive to keep our spiritual “seeds” cared for by focusing on the one who has sown His love into our hearts.

Nehemiah 1:1-11; Psalm 50; Revelation 5:11—6:11

Friday, October 29

Nehemiah 2:1-20 *Then I replied to them, “The God of Heaven is the one who will give us success, and we his servants are going to start building.”* (v.20a)

He was a trusted member of the palace—the king’s cupbearer. But when he hears of the scorched, broken down wall of Jerusalem, he weeps. Then he cries out in prayer to God. Here in Chapter 2 we see Nehemiah sensing God’s power, as the king gives permission to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the wall. In his book, *Transforming Leadership*, Leighton Ford says, “Genuine leaders operate out of a sense of calling, not a sense of drivenness.”

Nehemiah’s vision is not a result of a drive for earthly fame and fortune. It is rooted in a call from God. In fact, he tells no one of his calling or his plan. He even goes out at night to inspect the wall so that he won’t be seen. He prays for guidance and courage and when chastised by government officials he again points to the calling of God as his rationale.

We must earnestly seek what God is calling us to do with our lives. What calling might this be? What passion has He given you? Seek His guidance and see where He leads. Let that be your sole motivator and primary source of joy.

Psalms 40, 54; Revelation 6:12—7:4; Matthew 13:24-30

Saturday, October 30

Psalm 55 *But I call upon God, and the LORD will save me.* (v.16)

The evening news can be a depressing half-hour. Sometimes all the news seems to be bad. Murder, bombings, disasters, disease, and war seem to dominate the headlines. I think if David had lived in our time, he could have written psalms like this after watching the news.

Hope is scoffed at. Faith in God is considered outdated. Yet that is exactly where David, when faced with similar situations in his day, placed himself—squarely on the hope and faithfulness of his God (vv.16-19, 22).

Paul tells Timothy, “God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline” (2 Timothy 1:7). If we allow ourselves to be paralyzed by fear and shrink from our world, we are unfaithful to our Savior, who has himself come to this world.

May we, like David, place our lives firmly on the faithfulness of Christ and, with confidence, live as his ambassadors in a world that is in desperate need of Good News.

Nehemiah 4:1-23; Revelation 7:4-17; Matthew 13:31-35

by Chris Findley

Sunday, October 31

Nehemiah 5:1-19 I was very angry when I heard their outcry and these complaints. After thinking it over, I brought charges against the nobles and the officials. (vv.6-7a NRSV)

If you ask most Christians what they’re supposed to do when other people sin, the most immediate answer is forgive—seven times 70 to be exact. But if you look more closely at Scripture, the answer isn’t always that simple. The Bible contains many passages that warn or encourage us to rebuke the sinner that causes harm or damage to others. That doesn’t preclude forgiveness, but more action is sometimes necessary to prevent future occurrences. Even Jesus called the Pharisees a “brood of vipers” and angrily drove the moneychangers out of the temple.

It is true that the Bible tells us to look to our own sin before condemning others. Righteous anger, however, directed toward behavior harmful to society or to those powerless to protect themselves, like children, is our duty. Because of Nehemiah’s protest, the public officials repented and reimbursed the people they had wronged.

How do you react to other people’s sinful behavior? How do you respond to unfairness and injustice? Do you sit back and take it, or do you fight for what’s right? The answers aren’t always simple; sometimes prayer is the only answer.

Psalms 24, 29; Acts 20:7-12; Luke 12:22-31

Monday, November 1

Psalms 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.

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

Psalms 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

Psalms 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

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