

Good News Daily

Sunday, November 1

1 Corinthians 12:27—13:13 *“Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? Now eagerly desire the greater gifts.... And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.”* (vv.29-31, 13 NIV)

Recently, when I went on a one-day spiritual retreat, I decided to sit quietly in the Center’s magnificent chapel, and simply be in God’s presence, not talking or asking for anything. But because the Holy Spirit has given me the gift of intercession, I couldn’t help wanting to pray for others. Instead of verbalizing prayers, I began to imagine each person about whom I was concerned sitting with me in the pew. At first, there were those who were sick—even some cradling their ailing pets for whom I’d been praying. Next, a couple of friends and family who had already gone on to glory appeared in the chapel.

It didn’t take long for the pews to be filled with people for whom I love and care. Truly, I sensed their presence, and so much love! Later, when I spoke with my spiritual director, he smiled and said, “I’ve always been a firm believer in the communion of saints.” On this All Saints’ Day, let us remember all “saints” both living and dead, giving thanks to God for their many gifts, and for the love with which they have blessed us.

Ezekiel 20:18-26; Psalms 24, 29; Matthew 18:21-35

Monday, November 2

Revelation 14:1-13 *Then I heard a voice from heaven say, “Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.” “Yes,” says the Spirit, “they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them.”* (v.13)

I love to hear this verse at the opening of our church’s funerals. The deceased is finally at rest, after a life of hard work, suffering, and pain—the destiny of all humans ever since we fell from grace in the Garden of Eden. But thanks to our redemption by Jesus Christ, in God’s heavenly kingdom healing and wholeness are ours at last. The good deeds no one noticed on earth will be blessed by God, and we will be assured that our labors for Christ were not in vain.

In many Christian traditions, today is “All Souls’ Day,” when those who have died in the Lord are formally remembered. In liturgies held, often a candle is lit or a bell rung as their names are read aloud. In the pews, one can hear sniffing, and noses being blown into tissues. We never stop missing those who have died, even though the pain of bereavement lessens over time.

I once read a Christian novel in which the author posited another dimension, just beyond what we can see, hear, and feel. There, our friends and family in heaven are so near we can almost touch them. How comforting it is, to believe that they, and our God, are just that close to us!

Ezekiel 20:27-44; Psalms 56, 57, 58; Luke 12:49-59

Tuesday, November 3

Luke 13:1-9 *“And he answered and said to him, ‘Let it alone, sir, for this year too, until I dig around it and put in fertilizer; and if it bears fruit next year, fine; but if not, cut it down.’”* (vv.8-9 NASB)

My Dad grew fig trees in his suburban back yard, along with apple trees, grape vines, rose bushes, and zinnias. He wasn’t always patient with his garden and, at times, I’d hear him yelling, “Grow! [cussword]!” at the seedlings. (That was before talking nicely to plants to help them flourish became popular.)

Today, Jesus tells a story about a vineyard owner who was ready to cut down an

unproductive tree. But the man’s farm manager asks him to give the plant another year. With proper tending (water, fertilizer), it may produce fruit. In His mercy, Jesus gives *us* second—and sometimes third—chances to bear spiritual fruit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23a).

Even though Dad sometimes cursed at his garden, he also fussed over it caringly, and it did produce delicious fruit and beautiful flowers. Our Lord also tends us with loving care, fertilizing our hearts with His word, and irrigating us with the water of life. So, let’s bloom and bear fruit for Him!

Ezekiel 24:1-14; Psalms 61, 62; Revelation 14:14—15:8

Wednesday, November 4

Psalm 72 *Whom have I in heaven but you? and having you I desire nothing upon earth.* (v.25 BCP)

At this point, my life is closer to its end than its beginning. When I glance at the obituaries in the newspaper, I notice far too many people passing away in their later middle-age. When I became officially a senior citizen, I expressed to my spiritual director my concern that not knowing how long I had left, I didn’t want to waste the rest of my life. Rather, I wanted to serve God with all my heart as best I could, and not be found wanting. Father Frank, in his wise, and always laid-back manner, assured me: “God doesn’t take us until He’s finished with us—and He’s finished with some of us sooner than later.” I found that reassuring.

Today, as I drove home from a medical test—one of many I’ve recently undergone for an as-yet undiagnosed condition—I thanked God that if He is going to call me home any time soon, my faith is now stronger, I am more at peace, and feel closer to Jesus than ever before. Truly, Christ

is what I desire most in this life and the next—whenever that may come.

Ezekiel 26:1-14; Revelation 16:1-11; Luke 13:10-17

Thursday, November 5

Luke 14:18-30 *“The master said, ‘Then go to the country roads. Whoever you find, drag them in. I want my house full! Let me tell you, not one of those originally invited is going to get so much as a bite at my dinner party.’”* (vv.23-24 *The Message*)

In my final year serving a previous parish, we had scheduled a spiritual retreat for the Vestry during a time on which everyone agreed. It was all planned, and then gradually, various members began calling to say they could not attend. There were quite a variety of creative excuses. The question remained: What were we to do? We had blocked out the days, paid for the space, and booked the Bishop’s right-hand man as the facilitator. And then *he* cancelled on us!

As I fretted, today’s Gospel passage came to mind. Jesus wasn’t talking about planning a party no one attends. He was speaking about the kingdom of heaven, and regretting that the Jews whom He came to save did not accept him as their Messiah, whereas the Gentiles did.

Inspired by this story, I decided to open the retreat to any parishioner that wished to attend. Three people accepted, and although we were small in number—and I had to lead it—the weekend was a time of excellent spiritual growth and discernment, as well as relaxation and fun together for everyone who came.

Ezekiel 29:17-21; Psalms 70, 71; Revelation 16:12-21

Friday, November 6

Revelation 17:1-18 *They will wage war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will triumph over them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings—*

and with him will be his called, chosen and faithful followers. (v.14 NIV)

In our Adult Bible Study class this Fall, we’ll be studying the Book of Revelation. I had taught this at the previous parish I served, where one member expressed concern about taking the class. She was afraid of the apocalyptic imagery and had always avoided reading Revelation. I told her, “All you have to know is: God wins in the end!” This comforted her enough that she took the class, and afterward said how much she appreciated learning about this intriguing text.

Throughout the 32 years I’ve been a converted Christian, I’ve taken at least 5 classes on Revelation—one was even a Seventh Day Adventists’ seminar. There is so much we simply do not understand in this complicated text that is so rich in biblical and cultural symbolism. So, I always return to the comforting truth of Scripture: “God wins in the end!” Amen!

Ezekiel 12:12-28; Psalm 69; Luke 13:31-35

Saturday, November 7

Luke 14:1-11 *Jesus asked the Pharisees and experts in the law, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not?” But they remained silent. So taking hold of the man, he healed him and sent him on his way.* (vv.3-4)

I love it that Jesus is willing to be a rule-breaker to be a people-healer. It’s not that he doesn’t care about God’s laws. But for our compassionate and loving Lord, people take precedence over procedures. Besides, the Pharisees had tacked a bunch of man-made regulations onto the Ten Commandments, and it was these which Jesus contravened—not God’s law.

As a task-oriented, detail fanatic, sometimes I become caught up in the minutiae of the administrative work that accompanies my vocation, forgetting it would be better for me to get up from my desk and go visit a sick person or

shut-in and pray with them. Too often, not until I make a pastoral visit, do I remember how blessed I feel when I leave that person’s home. I certainly don’t receive the same sense of joy, peace, and closeness to God by sitting at my computer typing, or scribbling lists of things to do. Christ has it right: Love before law; people before projects.

Ezekiel 13:1-16; Psalms 75, 76; Revelation 18:1-14

by Nina George-Hacker

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Good News Daily

Sunday, November 8

1 Corinthians 14:1-12 *Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy.* (v.1 NIV)

Are we really to desire spiritual gifts? Is it right to approach God in hopes of being rewarded? At first blush the apostle's words sound uncharacteristically selfish. What gives? Remember these verses flow right out of the 13th chapter of 1 Corinthians. That's the chapter often read at weddings because it concerns love. But if you want to be precise, Paul's words about love have more to do with the way church members get along than they have to do with marriage. In fact, that famous "love chapter" is situated between two chapters dealing with the use of spiritual gifts in the local congregation. Just so the Corinthians are still tracking with Paul's train of thought, he begins chapter 14 reminding them to "follow the way of love." In other words, if an other-centered concern characterizes our behavior, God delights in giving us gifts we can invest in the Church. If, however, we are wanting to "speak in tongues" or do a miracle for the personal pleasure it provides us, we are acting more like spoiled children than maturing believers.

Ezekiel 14:1-14; Psalms 93, 96; Matthew 20:1-16

Monday, November 9

Revelation 18:15-24 *"Rejoice, saints and apostles and prophets! God has judged her for the way she treated you."* (v.20b)

Later this week is Veterans Day. It's a day we honor those who have been willing to dress for battle in the uniform of a particular branch of service. It's a day we express gratitude for those who risked their lives and for those who gave

their lives in order to protect our freedoms in a sinful world.

In today's passage of Scripture, we see God Himself on the front lines of battle. Aware of the bloodshed and injustice that has marked humanity through history, He is determined to settle the score once and for all. It's D-Day as far as the Ancient of Days is concerned. Babylon (a symbolic name for godless powers that have ruled our world) is doomed. As you picture our Holy God as the ultimate Veteran, see Him with raised sword standing on your behalf. No injustice that you have suffered in your life will go unrequited. The just judge will eventually make it right. After all, His Son, with battled wounds evident on the palms of his hand and on his feet attests to the fact that our Mighty Warrior must eventually win the battle. No wonder we are called to rejoice!

Joel 1:1-13; Psalm 80; Luke 14:12-24

Tuesday, November 10

Revelation 19:1-10 *"Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb."* (v.9a)

Don't you love to go to weddings? If you know the bride or groom is a personal friend, it's all the more meaningful. If you really like them, all the better. What is most fun is to attend a wedding where you have also been invited to a sit-down fancy dinner following the ceremony and reception. In such a setting you can't help but feel like a VIP. The guests of honor are the center of attention. But because you've been included in their celebration, you experience the benefits of all their special occasion involves. The same will be true some day for those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb.

Today's text provides us a peek through the keyhole of heaven. We see the most incredible party we'd be hard pressed to describe. More than a sit-down dinner, it's a fall-on-your-face

smorgasbord of praise. The Savior decked out in all his glory will receive the gifts we freely offer as an expression of our love. And we will be there, because he invites "whosoever will come." But as with wedding invitations you receive in the mail, an RSVP is required.

Joel 1:15—2:11; Psalm 78:1-39; Luke 14:25-35

Wednesday, November 11

Revelation 19:11-21 *I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True.* (v.11)

Saturday morning television in the fifties and sixties featured a masked cowboy and his Native American sidekick. As the William Tell Overture played in the background, the Lone Ranger galloped into view on his white horse Silver. For those who had been wrongly treated and desired justice, the sound of Silver's hoofs heralded hope. For those had broken the law, the approaching white horse and his rider was bad news. In much the same manner today's passage, those who will see the white horse and his riders will not be happy campers. Unlike the black and white television show of a generation ago, the gruesome details sketched by the biblical writer are in living color. And yet, what should our reaction be? For the believer in Christ, the lone response should be one of gratitude that we have been spared the imminent judgment that is coming for those who disregard the grace God has freely offered. No proud or haughty attitude is appropriate. Instead, we'd do well to get down off our high-horse and call unbelievers to reconsider their apathy to spiritual realities.

Joel 2:12-19; Psalm 119:97-120; Luke 15:1-10

Thursday, November 12

James 1:1-15 *Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete not lacking anything.* (v.4)

The Marathon of Faith—when God calls, a gun sounds, and a marathon begins. A life of service. A lifetime of measured steps, which (because of the distance to be covered) takes in stride the potholes along the way. Disappointment. Tears. Rejection. Exhaustion. Failure. Loss. A cross I think He called it. The One who finished first, who near the end of his own long-distance race (though winded) sighed, “I thirst!”

It was what he saw beyond the finish line that bade him stay his course. A faithful finish. And his Father’s proud “well done!” It’s true. Persistence has its price tags; but also, its rewards! Along the way, you learn endurance and, in the process, make a difference for Christ and his kingdom. Strong, not weak. Strong, not wilting. Not bailing out but holding out to the end. Perseverance. Persistence. Going the distance. Finishing well.

Joel 2:21-27; Psalms 23, 27; Luke 15:1-2, 11-32

Friday, November 13

James 1:16-27 *Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.* (v.22)

Reading God’s word is like looking in a mirror. It doesn’t do much good if we don’t act on what we discover. Our times of daily reflection don’t mean much unless we put what we understand into practice.

The Greeks had a word for action. It’s called *praxis*. If you could read the language in which the New Testament was originally written, you would notice that the book that follows John’s Gospel is called “The Praxis of the Apostles.” As important as it is to believe orthodox doctrine, it is far more essential to practice what we profess. Abstract truth never attracted anybody. But consistent compliance with the content of our creed will win a crowd any day. No wonder James insists that we take more than sermon notes on Sunday. There’s a reason he

calls us to take action. In other words, orthodoxy is good, but orthopraxy is better.

Joel 2:28—3:8; Psalm 88; Luke 16:1-9

Saturday, November 14

James 2:1-13 *But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers.* (v.9)

Remember the wristband teenagers wore with WWJD written them? It stands for “What Would Jesus Do?” For kids who find themselves in settings where peer pressure could result in moral compromise, those four little letters can spell obedience to the royal law of God.

But it’s not just outside the church walls where ethical dilemmas are posed. And it’s not only kids who should be asking, “What would Jesus do?” According to James, that’s a question we should consider every time we enter the sanctuary with the intention of worshipping the Lord.

Now, as then, people who gather on Sunday mornings come from diverse backgrounds. Some are well to do, some not. Others are, well... you know. It’s easy to spend time with those who are like us and ignore those who aren’t. What we need to ask ourselves is this: “If Jesus were physically present in our gathering, who would he be inclined to spend time with? What would he do?” Why not try that tomorrow?

Joel 3:9-17; Psalms 87, 90; Luke 16:10-18

by Greg Asimakoupoulos

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Good News Daily

Sunday, November 15

Philippians 3:13—4:1 *I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.* (v.14 NIV)

The apostle Paul says the Christian faith is like a race. In life we run toward the finish line, a place where all of God's desired goals for us are accomplished, a place where we can rest with Jesus at the right hand of God for eternity. Christ "takes hold of us" through the gift of salvation and snatches us from living a life without him. He sets us on the runner's path and equips us with what we need to finish the race.

Paul tells us we must be active in "taking hold" as we press on in our relationship with Christ. As for myself, I can easily recognize that I run off course at times. My feet start to stumble when I look back or if I am distracted by something interesting at the sidelines. I run best when I keep my eyes looking ahead. How are you doing in your race? If you are discouraged, if you are stumbling, then take hold again! Keep the pace. Set your eyes on the finish line. Christ thought we were worth it when he "took hold of us" and brought us back to him. As for the prize at the end, it will be far more wonderful than we can ever imagine.

Habakkuk 1:1—2:1; Psalms 66, 67; Matthew 23:13-24

Monday, November 16

James 2:14-26 *What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds.* (v.14)

I remember feeling a nudge to take a small bouquet of store-bought flowers to an elderly woman in my neighborhood. Little did I know this woman was lonely. Little did I know she was discouraged in her faith, waiting for someone to invite her back to church. She had not been to church for over twenty years. The cost of

my visit was \$5.99. The effect of my visit, immeasurable. She returned to church and became active again.

Certainly, it is our faith in Jesus that saves us; however, good works come naturally out of a true faith. When we look upon the life of Jesus, we see the ultimate example of one whose faith was expressed through his actions for others. When we offer ourselves to do the right deeds for the right reasons, God blesses them. Even our seemingly small actions can be used to sow seeds for those hungry in faith and God takes note of them all. No matter how big or small, all our deeds will be remembered in eternity.

Habakkuk 2:1-4, 9-20; Psalm 89:1-18; Luke 16:19-31

Tuesday, November 17

James 3:1-12 *Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this should not be. Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring?* (vv.10-11)

The book of James is one of the more instructive writings of the New Testament. Here, he speaks about the "tongue" and how much weight it carries in our life. It is fitting for James to use the analogy of water coming from the spring since Palestine is a place where both sweet and salty springs are found. Remember the bitter waters of Marah?

The power of the tongue can produce both death and life. A few thoughtful words are enough to bring healing and encouragement to the deepest of wounds. Yet a few thoughtless words can be irritating like salt, bringing suffering and bitterness for a lifetime. Consider how easily children can be crushed by harsh words hurled at them by their parents. Reflect back on the many times insensitive words have been like fiery darts that pierced your own soul. With our tongues we have the power to bless or to curse.

I am encouraged to choose wisely the words that I speak. God has wise counsel for us to honor everyone as His creation just as He honors us. God loves us all...these are good, sweet, and refreshing to words to pass on.

Habakkuk 3:1-18; Psalms 97, 99, 100; Luke 17:1-10

Wednesday, November 18

Luke 17:11-19 *One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him—and he was a Samaritan.* (v.15)

Jesus noticed the humility of this Samaritan man. We should take notice of him too. All ten lepers encountered the Christ from a distance, received the same healing and the same grace. The others were healed but this man alone received the spiritual blessing.

Certainly, this man, crying and shouting out his thanks, crumpled himself at the feet of Jesus, turned heads and drew quite an attention in that day. But the man did not care, for there was no doubt this Samaritan outcast knew whose presence he was in that day. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, saw the man's heart and sent him away whole.

Charles Spurgeon writes this, "You must grow downwards, that you may grow upwards; for the sweetest fellowship in heaven is to be had by humble souls, and by them alone." Humility prepares our hearts before God and makes us ready to be blessed and to be used by Him. I would love to see what happened to that Samaritan man down the road, certainly his life was changed.

Malachi 1:1, 6-14; Psalms 101, 109; James 3:13—4:12

Thursday, November 19

Luke 17:20-37 *“For the Son of Man in his day will be like the lightning, which flashes and lights up the sky from one end to the other.”* (v.24)

On the weekend my husband works as a Chaplain in the local trauma center. Frequently critical patients come in and have a pressing, urgent need for someone with whom to talk to and in whom to confide. They often share their regrets and their fears but are mostly looking for comfort and hope. Why the urgency? In a flash the unexpected happens. Suddenly only one thing matters. Are we ready for eternity?

Jesus has told us that he is coming back. These words to us are straightforward. They are both a reminder and a warning from the loving, just heart of Christ. Let us understand the urgency and stay prepared. Our Heavenly Father does love us so. Jesus has prepared a place for us in his Father’s house for all eternity (John 14:2). I can only imagine how much he wants to give us our due reward someday. May we be so prepared that he is pleasantly surprised to see us ready when he comes. “Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven” (Luke 6:23).

Malachi 2:1-16; Psalm 105:1-22; James 4:13—5:6

Friday, November 20

Luke 18:1-8 *“Yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won’t eventually wear me out with her coming!”* (v.5)

Jesus himself tells and interprets this parable. The two characters in this parable are important. One is a persevering widow who has a great need for justice to be carried out. The other is an unjust judge who is indifferent to her needs. I don’t know about you, but I have an image of this stubborn old widow. There is determination written on her face. Her fist is balled, she is worn

and tired, but she walks right up to this judge’s door. She has been there before, and she is not giving up! She prevails.

This is a parable of contrast. Unlike the woman who had to gird up her heart and determination to face an indifferent judge and force him to give her justice, we have a Father who beckons us with open arms. He knows all our needs before we even call. He is ready to pour out his blessings on all who seek Him in earnest. Jesus said, “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you shall find; knock and the door will be opened to you” (Luke 11:9).

God is waiting for us to come.

Malachi 3:1-12; Psalm 102; James 5:7-12

Saturday, November 21

Psalm 108 *I will praise you, LORD, among the nations; I will sing of you among the peoples.* (v.3)

I can almost envision the liturgy of praise as the leader reads to the people of Israel and as the people respond in verse, recounting the testimony of God’s protection over them time and time again. He was their only defense as they faced countless numbers of enemies; enemies from both without and within. In the psalms they were reminded over and again that Israel had no one to lean on “but” the Lord God. They perceived the earth to be fully under God’s control. If they were willing to trust Him, all would be well within the land.

I often rest in that very thought. Threats of wars may rumble the earth, but the living God knows every plan of the deceitful heart. The psalms assure us that no matter what we think or feel right now, no matter if we are in sorrow, despair, fear or even in joy and confidence, all is well because our God reigns. Let the psalms draw us to Him. Recite these verses to yourself. They will bring comfort and assurance to your heart.

Malachi 3:13—4:6; Psalm 107:33-43; James 5:13-20; Luke 18:9-14

by Robin Jagoe

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Good News Daily

Sunday, November 22

Matthew 21:1-13 *He was in the center of the procession, and the crowds all around him were shouting, "Praise God for the Son of David! Bless the one who comes in the name of the Lord."* (v.9 NLT)

Have you ever wondered why Jesus rode a donkey into Jerusalem? What kind of "Triumphal Entry" is that? Why not a horse? The disciples (being 12 strong) could easily have lifted their master on their shoulders and carried him through the streets. It seems that anything would have been better than a lowly donkey.

However, on reflection, a donkey makes perfect sense. At this time in history a horse was a luxury usually reserved for the military—for a conqueror. That is not how Jesus is pictured here.

Jesus is riding the animal of service. A donkey is not glamorous. He is not pretty in the usual sense of the word. A donkey is for carrying loads. A donkey is for shouldering burdens and providing strength to travel. This is a perfect way for the *Savior* to enter Jerusalem for the last time. Remember that it is only five days before his death. Through that death he will shoulder our burdens, carry the pain for our sins, and provide strength for our journey. But look ahead, when he returns it will be on "a great white horse" (Revelation 19:11). Think about the implications and rejoice!

Psalms 118; Zechariah 9:9-16; 1 Peter 3:13-22

Monday, November 23

Luke 18:15-30 *But when the man heard this he became sad, because he was very rich.* (v.23)

C. S. Lewis, the great Anglican writer and Oxford Fellow, wrote in *Mere Christianity*, "Christ says, 'Give me all. I don't want so much of your time and so much of your money and so

much of your work: I want you.'" This is precisely the point in today's passage.

The rich man was basically a good guy. He had sought to follow the law, even from a young age. His record was impressive—no adultery, no murder, no theft, no lying, and he had been good to his parents. Even by today's standards he had done all right. However, there was still something missing. It eluded him like it eludes many of us. It was an abandoned heart.

The rich man still refused to let go of what was most important to him. He had one foot on the dock and one foot on the boat. Jesus challenged him to make the leap—to choose one way or the other. That is his challenge to us. We may project a Christian image with our clean language, proper dress, church attendance, and piety. But if we value something above Christ, it must be released. He desires *all* of us.

Zechariah 10:1-12; Psalm 106:1-18; Galatians 6:1-10

Tuesday, November 24

Psalm 121 *The LORD keeps watch over you as you come and go, both now and forever.* (v.8)

There is a pattern to psalms 121 through 123. In each of these there is a recurring idea of the provision of God. God is the "help," the one who will not let us "stumble or fall" and who "preserves your life."

Christianity in America has developed into a personal event. Often, we have a "Jesus and me" mentality. While it is true that we all have an individual relationship with Christ, it is no less true that we all exist in this life *together*.

These psalms are psalms of comfort. Yet they are meant to comfort so we can connect. They refresh us as they tell of how God provides for and restores us. When we are reliant and confident of God's love and grace towards us, we are free to reach out to those around us. For example, in Psalm 122 the psalmist shifts focus

to the community of Jerusalem: "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem," "I will seek what is best for you, O Jerusalem." The psalmist is focusing on the community, the group.

As we come to see that God's love for us is constant and real, we too are able to focus on those around us.

Zechariah 11:4-17; Psalms 120, 122, 123; 1 Corinthians 3:10-23; Luke 18:31-43

Wednesday, November 25

Luke 19:1-10 *"Zacchaeus! Quick, come down! For I must be a guest in your home today."* (v.5)

In my weaker moments I find there are people that I'd rather not have in the kingdom of God. There are people that cause my heart to turn to stone and cause me to clench my fists in anger. Perhaps you feel the same way about a person or group. It may be based on the way they look, or talk, or smell; or their religion, political stance, or lifestyle. This story is for us when we find those stony spots in our hearts.

Zacchaeus was a Jew working as a tax collector for Rome. This made him a sellout among his people, and he was not highly regarded. The Jews despised having to submit to Roman authority and were searching for a way out from under Roman rule. So, to be a rich Jew and a Roman tax collector did not win Zacchaeus any points in the Jewish community.

However, it is in these circumstances that Jesus enters Zacchaeus' house. The community, quite naturally, voiced their protests. They could not believe that Jesus would show favor to this man by eating with him. They thought Zacchaeus was beyond, or unworthy of, God's grace. Yet he was obviously searching for Christ (he climbed a tree just to catch a glimpse of Jesus). We must be careful not to limit God's grace only to those we like. God's grace is limitless.

Zechariah 12:1-10; Psalm 119:145-176; Ephesians 1:3-14

Thursday, November 26

Psalm 131 *But I have stilled and quieted myself, just as a small child is quiet with its mother. Yes, like a small child is my soul within me.* (v.2)

The renowned Catholic theologian, Henri Nouwen, said in his book *Out of Solitude*, “Somewhere we know that without a lonely place our lives are in danger. Somewhere we know that without silence words lose their meaning, that without listening, speaking no longer heals, that without distance closeness cannot cure.”

We are resistant to quietness. We are so used to noise that we are uncomfortable in silence or solitude. Yet the words of the psalmist remind us that in silence we find refuge with God. In solitude the still, small voice of the Spirit speaks. Like a child cuddled in its mother’s arms we find rest in the arms of our loving Father. There we find renewal so we can go about doing the work He has given us to do. Without it we fill our lives with activity alone, empty of the deeper meaning we long for.

Take time this week to turn away from the constant chatter of the world. Turn the TV off. Shut down the computer. Stop the music player. Put down the books. Take time simply to listen to the still, small voice of the Spirit.

Zechariah 13:1-9; Psalms 132, 133; Ephesians 1:15-23; Luke 19:11-27

Friday, November 27

Romans 15:7-13 *So accept each other just as Christ has accepted you; then God will be glorified.* (v.7)

There are areas of Scripture that we readily accept. It is easy for us to read that we are to come to Christ when we are “burdened and heavy laden” where we “will find rest for our souls.” It is also easy for us to stomach the thought that we are “not to worry about tomorrow for tomorrow will bring its own worries.”

It is much more difficult for us to apply the teaching that Paul suggests in this passage. He doesn’t say tolerate. He doesn’t say patronize. He says *accept*. Not only that, but we are to accept *as Christ has accepted us*—in our brokenness; in our sinfulness; in the full knowledge of the things we hide in our inmost selves—Christ accepts us as his children. He calls us his own.

This is our standard in regard to each other as well. Certainly, there will be people that we disagree with and don’t understand, just as there are people who can’t agree with us and find us incomprehensible. But within the Body of Christ, we are all called upon to accept one another as brothers and sisters. We are all travelers on this journey, and we are all traveling *together*.

Zechariah 14:1-11; Psalms 140, 142; Luke 19:28-40

Saturday, November 28

Philippians 2:1-11 *Though he was God, he did not demand and cling to his rights as God.* (v.6)

The very idea that God—who flung the planets to their courses, carved the mountains from the rocks, and painted the wing of the butterfly—would come to us, as one of us, is incredible. Our track record was less than stellar. We disobeyed Him, we lied to Him, we ignored Him, and we ran from Him.

When all the miracles of deliverance and the pleadings of the prophets had not stirred our souls to love Him, He did the unthinkable. He became one of us. Christ’s life was not the life of a king or a nobleman. It was the life of an itinerant preacher with a soft spot for the outcast, the broken, and the hurt. It was a life where the religious tried to trick him, neighbors threw him out of his hometown, and one of his friends betrayed him to his death. This is God?

You see, God loves you and me with the same power and passion that gave the planets

their courses, shaped the mountains, and tenderly fashioned the wings of the butterfly. To Him, death as a common criminal was worth the price—if it caused our hearts, at last, to accept His love.

Zechariah 14:12-21; Psalms 137, 144; Luke 19:41-48

by Chris Findley

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Good News Daily

Sunday, November 29

2 Peter 3:1-10 *But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night.* (v.10a KJV)

Today's Scripture focuses on preparing for the meeting of our Maker. Recently, I found that nothing prepared me more for this than serious illness. Subsequent to my two angioplasties last year, my bout with medications at times seemed worse than the cardiovascular disease itself. I've learned if there's a side effect to any medication, I'll likely get it!

At least four times last year I honestly wondered if I would survive. Living alone, I even made a "selfie-video" for my family describing the whereabouts of paperwork they might need—in case.

The odd thing is that I soon discovered an unusual calm that came along with all that concern. Chronic dizziness, insomnia, gasping for breath, even chest pains I later learned were all potential side effects. Still, their endless onslaught created a yearning for relief that I imagined welcoming in "the inevitable." Now, a year later, I look back on that yearning, a yearning which yoked itself with my faith that now affords me, a slightly loosened tether to this world in line with today's reading.

Isaiah 1:1-9; Psalms 146, 147; Matthew 25:1-13

Monday, November 30

Luke 20:1-8 *And Jesus said to them, "Nor will I tell you by what authority I do these things."* (v.8 NAS)

I am a very impatient person. After 40 years in horticulture, I know how to design, plan, and implement gardens quickly. I have learned that can be good and bad. Saving people time is helpful and efficient. But haste can make waste as well. Recently, I took to building my

own backyard water feature. Not being an expert, I impatiently relied on my "creative sense" rather than taking more time to consult with an experienced installer. The result was costly and unsuccessful.

In today's reading scribes rely on their self-assuredness in tricking out answers from Christ—and are denied. When I give in to the temptation of the pride of being a know-it-all, I rarely get what I'm after.

My water feature is now just what I'd hoped for. But I have to admit, it came only after taking the advice of a good friend who urged me to slow down, swallow my pride, and get outside help.

Isaiah 1:10-20; Psalms 1, 2, 3; 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

Tuesday, December 1

Isaiah 1:21-31 *How the faithful city has become a harlot, she who was full of justice!* (v.21a)

History is full of countries that have steered off course—for good or bad. The Old Testament's Book of Kings is quite a tempest. A righteous king followed by a wicked king followed by a righteous king. Back and forth, endlessly. Similarly, 1940s Nazi Germany could hardly be compared to the civil Germany of today. The political "state" is always vulnerable to storm, which is perhaps why Christ told us to "give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God." Even being a "chosen" nation does not guarantee citizens will stay the course.

Many argue contrite prayers behind closed doors open to the whispers of the Holy Spirit is our only true hope that His "will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

Psalms 5, 6; 1 Thessalonians 2:1-12; Luke 20:9-18

Wednesday, December 2

Isaiah 2:1-11 *Their land has also been filled with idols.* (v.8a)

As a kid I recall we had a pine tree in our backyard with a small alarm clock wedged in it. My father woke up late for work one day and hurled the clock out his window. I remember myself taking a McLane edger above my head once and tossing it to the ground when it wouldn't start—like that was going to fix it! I loved my dad, but he did have a little temper—which I share.

There are sixteen words in the Old Testament translated *idol(s)*. Most of them simply mean graven images. However, New Testament apostles later added coveting and passions to the definition—those "which draw the soul away from God," say theologians Strong and McClintock.

I never thought of temper as an idol, *per se*. But, is it a passion that can "draw the soul away from God?" Oh, I think so. I am mesmerized when I discover someone immune to tempers. I find them rare and valuable, and always hoping they'll grow contagious.

Psalms 119:1-24; 1 Thessalonians 2:13-20; Luke 20:19-26

Thursday, December 3

1 Thessalonians 3:1-13 *And may the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another, and for all men....* (v.12)

My mother grew up in the port city of Kobe, Japan. Her parents were Turkish immigrants originally from Russia, traveling east through China finally to Japan. She was always surrounded by diversity. As a youth she spoke Tatar at home while at school she was taught English by French nuns and played with Japanese, German, and Italian children.

"My head used to spin sometimes with all the different languages," she recalled. Her

father, while a devout Muslim, learned to live among diversity as well in his business of trade with Japanese, Chinese, and other local immigrants.

Scholars tell us Thessalonica in Paul's day was also a bustling port city—200,000 no less! Full of Greeks and pagan deities and ruled by Rome and its emperor-god. It also attracted scores of immigrants, being a city free of taxation. Paul's poignant words that the flock there abound in love for one another ...and... for all men reminds me of the lesson of how my mother grew up maintaining her own identity while respecting the sea of cultures around her.

Isaiah 2:12-22; Psalm 18:1-20; Luke 20:27-40

Friday, December 4

Luke 20:41—21:4 *And He said, "Truly I say to you, this poor widow put in more than all of them; for they out of their surplus put into the offering; but she out of her poverty put in all that she had to live on."* (vv.3-4)

On a quiet September day, 82-year-old Maksura Akchurin was found dead on a sidewalk just blocks from her home in the San Francisco suburb of Burlingame, California. Maksura lived on a small stipend from her husband's Social Security and her children's support. Hers was a pleasant 1-bedroom duplex above a garage. She owned no car (never learned to drive), or boat, or real estate and died long before personal computers. She did have a telephone but spoke very little English.

Maksura was my grandmother. She would often ask me—well, point—to address envelopes to relatives in foreign countries. Since she now lived in America, relatives assumed she was wealthy and would ask her to send clothes, household goods, and even cars!

We later learned Maksura was on her way to give money to a neighbor on that fateful September day. Jesus said, when giving, to not

let your right hand know what your left hand is doing. I'm not sure I learn that from today's "prosperity gospel" but I certainly do from the example of my dear grandmother.

Isaiah 3:8-15; Psalms 16, 17; 1 Thessalonians 4:1-12

Saturday, December 5

Psalm 21 *Thou has given him his heart's desire....* (v.2a)

As Christians we know God grants us the desires of our hearts but there's often a catch. A bishop once taught that while tithing meant ten percent in the Old Testament, for Christians it's 100 percent.

As far back as I can remember my heart has been in the garden. But at every turn in my life my heart's desires were preceded with forfeiture. I first gave up my love of horticulture to major in Business in deference to my parents. The Business major soon included studies in Horticulture followed by a landscaping business which my father fully endorsed.

After later completing further studies out of state and seeing no future I, again, relinquished aspirations and prepared to return home. Suddenly a Gardens Supervisor position opened on a private estate to which I remained some 35 years. Retirement was another forfeiture. Physically I was exhausted, emotionally I left kicking and screaming. But now, semi-retired, God granted me yet again the desire of my heart on another estate, part-time. It is a sober wonder to repeatedly find life after losing it.

Isaiah 4:2-6; Psalm 20; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; Luke 21:5-19

by William Bacon

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