



Daily Meditations

May 31 - June 5, 2021

The Biblical readings are taken from the Daily Office in the Book of Common Prayer for Year 2 and written by the St. Stephen's Meditation Writing Team: Dave Boyd, Jon Campbell, Becky Denton, Pat Gillory, Jay Nickel, Bob Reed, and Carroll Wilson.

Click on the scripture reading for each day to go directly to link. Current and past copies of the "Daily Meditations" may be found at: ststeve.org/daily-meditations

COLLECT:

*O God, your never-failing providence sets in order all things both in heaven and earth: Put away from us, we entreat you, all hurtful things, and give us those things which are profitable for us; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, one God for ever and ever. **Amen.***

The Ministry of Reconciliation

Monday, May 31, 2021

2 Corinthians 5:11-6:2

"Working together, then, we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain."

As fate would have it, a great many people have tried to list the *Top Scripture Readings of All Time*, and you can find them with a Google search. I have scanned a few of them, finding that the lists generally include only "the most popular," not necessarily the most important or the most impactful. If we were going to list the latter, we might include the verses cited here. Commentators note that Paul is the only New Testament writer who uses Greek terms of "reconciliation" and "to reconcile," (which seems odd, doesn't it?). And he introduces the idea of a ministry of reconciliation: Spread the word, he writes to the Corinthians. They must know that God loves them and wants them to be reconciled and has offered reconciliation as a kind of blank check. Be an ambassador for Christ, he writes, and urge others to recognize what is freely given and pass it on. What would the world be like if people took that seriously? Reconciliation begins with a personal relationship with God but continues in the reaction we have toward that act. In this corner of the world, we face a people strongly divided politically and religiously; we face a people separated according to class and bank accounts; we face a people who struggle to come together to push away prejudice, fear and anxiety, addiction and misunderstanding. Working together, as the saying goes, there is nothing we can't accomplish. The opposite, though, is also true: Working against one another, there is nothing we can accomplish.

But, Will We Really Change?

Tuesday, June 1, 2021

2 Corinthians 6:3-7:1

"For we are the temple of the living God;..."

Paul lists some revelatory challenges here, such as "Don't be yoked by nonbelievers." Why? Because you probably have much in common. Nevertheless, I find myself put off by these passages; I have seen the results of Christian separation or exclusivity: Pride bordering on arrogance, distancing one's group from all others lest the group be tainted or diluted; ethnocentrism; a refusal to find a path all of us can walk together in peace; and warfare. History is replete with examples, and many have died for want of a hand up from "Christian" peoples and groups. When we come to believe in our exceptionalism, we focus inwardly, we set ourselves on pedestals, and we are blinded to the facts of everyday existence. Today, this is being played out, much to the West's apparent dismay, in Israel and Israeli-occupied Palestine. No doubt, I will be struck by lightning for saying so, but the state of Israel is a victim of the mindset about which I warn. Will they change? The question for today is whether we will change. That is what reconciliation is all about.

Godly Sorrow

Wednesday, June 2, 2021

2 Corinthians 7:2-16

"For godly sorrow produces a salutary repentance without regret, but worldly sorry produces death."

Paul says he is encouraged because that seems to have been the case with the Corinthians. He wrote in an earlier letter to the Corinthians about their shortcomings, and the Corinthians felt godly sorrow, which is the worst kind because it is "heartfelt, soul-sickening sorrow" (a commentator's words), before repenting and then changing. The change must have been excruciating for the Corinthians, just as it was for Judas, who, commentators note, fell into godly sorrow for his treachery and tried to return the silver paid him to deliver up Jesus, and, when it was refused, then hanged himself. Worldly sorrow on the other hand is rooted in self-pity, situational awareness rather than cosmic awareness. I wonder: Does anyone expose himself or herself to situations that would result in godly sorrow? When I am in a foul humor, the world of today seems made up of folks who are only sorry they don't have more power, they don't have more money, they don't have more weapons, more, more, and ever more. What kind of event or circumstance would lead world or corporate leaders to sincerely feel godly sorrow? Imagine.

What's Right and What's Wrong

Thursday, June 3, 2021

2 Corinthians 8:1-16

"Not that others should have relief while you are burdened, but as a matter of equality your surplus at the present time should supply their needs, so that their surplus may also supply your needs, that there may be equality."

Paul must be speaking here about the allocation or distribution of resources, because he is, after all, trying to raise money from the Corinthians in this letter. His words challenge us to think about what's right and what's wrong with systems that we as moderns have constructed to try to be true to the goals outlined in the U.S. Constitution among those goals being the achievement of equality among people created as equals. Unfortunately, our system of commerce mitigates against us achieving that goal in my lifetime and perhaps even in the lifetimes of my grandchildren. Not long ago, Thomas Picketty, a French economist, published a monumental work called "Capital in the Twenty-First Century." In this remarkable book, Picketty said (as summarized by VOX):

- The ratio of wealth to income is rising in all developed countries.
- Absent extraordinary interventions, we should expect that trend to continue.
- If it continues, the future will look like the 19th century, where economic elites have predominantly inherited their wealth rather than working for it.
- The best solution would be a globally coordinated effort to tax wealth.

Various studies before and since confirm the strength of his position. We could well be headed away from a democracy toward an oligarchy, where the richest rule and the rest of us do their bidding. An oligarchy will almost inevitably lead to tyranny because the richest are defined by their wealth, and they will conclude sooner than later that they know better than you do how to run your affairs. It is to them that I hold up the sign that reads: REPENT!

What Would You Find Searching for Trust?

Friday, June 4, 2021

2 Corinthians 8:16-24

"For we are concerned for what is honorable not only in the sight of the Lord but also in the sight of others."

Here, Paul is referring to his use of gifts that might be offered by the Corinthians, and he's concerned that he is seen as having nothing but honorable intentions. Trust is essential. He claims himself honorable and trustworthy, two words not bandied about much these days in the halls of power. (I assume Scouts still count trustworthiness as a goal to be achieved.) In fact, I could argue this point: that nobody in the electorate even expects leaders to be trustworthy, a somewhat tragic turn of events traceable to its origin as a working concept to the late Ronald Reagan. For the heck of it, I did a Google search on the word "trust" and found millions of references. One stood out, a website run by an organization called *The Trusted Advisor Associates*. The TAA assert that there are four main attributes of trust: credibility, reliability, intimacy, and self-orientation. What? That's it? Ah well, perhaps that is it and why I wistfully and probably with delusion long for the days when one's leader(s) could be trusted as the Corinthians trusted Paul. (Just for fun, try the Trusted Advisor Associates Trust Quotient assessment to see if you are trustworthy. Go to: trustedadvisor.com.)

A Circular Kind of Abundance

Saturday, June 5, 2021

2 Corinthians 9:1-15

"Moreover, God is able to make every grace abundant for you, so that in all things,

always having all you need, you may have an abundance for every good work."

That would mean, I think:

- Not an abundance so you can hoard it, perhaps in an offshore account so that it will not be taxed versus used to benefit the world at large;
- Not an abundance to pass off to your kids when you die so they won't have to work for what they get;
- Not an abundance so you can end up with the most toys;
- Not an abundance so you can have bragging rights;

But...an abundance so you do good works.

Which simply echoes what Jesus is quoted as saying in Luke 12:48: to whom much is given, much is expected.

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