



## ***Daily Devotionals*** ***February 25-March 2, 2019***

*The Biblical readings are taken from the Daily Office in the Book of Common Prayer for Year 1 and written by the St. Stephen's Meditation Writing Team: Judy Aronow, Janice Bachardy, Pat Gillory, Jay Nickel, Bob Reed, T. Cay Rowe, and Carroll Wilson.*

*Click on the scripture reading for each day to go directly to link.*

### **COLLECT EPIPHANY 7:**

O Lord, you have taught us that without love whatever we do is worth nothing; Send your Holy Spirit and pour into our hearts your greatest gift, which is love, the true bond of peace and all virtue, without which whoever lives is accounted dead before you. Grant this for the sake of your only Son Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

### **The Beatitudes**

*Monday, February 25, 2019*

#### **Matthew 5:1-12**

*...and he began to teach them saying:*

#### ***Eight Recovery Principles based on the Beatitudes***

Exercising my will in divergence from the will of God has led me to disappointment and wreckage. I am broken. (Principle 1 - Matthew 5:3)

There is a God, and it's not me! If my will leads to brokenness and wreckage, then I need to have faith that He can lead me out of that and He wants this to happen! (Principle 2 -Matthew 5:4)

I have to be willing to let go of self for this change to occur--I have to be willing to give my life over to the care of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. (Principle 3 - Matthew 5:5)

My brokenness can be characterized by my darkest secrets. Knowing Christ has control in my life relieves me of the fear in confronting those secrets and in sharing them with God and another person, bringing that darkness into light. (Principle 4 - Matthew 5:8)

Having the burden of that darkness removed brings a new awareness of God's direction for my life and the necessity of following that direction in order to continue healing in Christ's love. I have to follow that direction! (Principle 5 - Matthew 5:6)

Now that the healing has begun in me, the time comes for me to offer others the same love and forgiveness that God has offered me. I do this

according to God's timing and not my own--self-will must be checked so that my attempts at reconciliation do not cause more harm when others may not be ready for that reconciliation. (Principle 6 - Matthew 5:7 and 5:9)

I am still broken, but I am healing in God's love every day. In order to stay in that healing process, I need to set aside time every day to speak with God and read His word. I need to be willing to hear God speak during this time and through others in order to discern His will and, more importantly, to be grounded in His love so that I can follow His will. (Principle 7)

I don't have all the answers, and yes, I am still broken. It is not about me! I have seen how this healing process can be a beacon of light and hope for those who still think their situation is hopeless. This is how the process started in me, by seeing how someone else doing it had begun to change and was continuing to grow in Christ-like character because of it. I have to give this love away so that I may truly understand what having it has done and what it continues to do in my life. This will not be easy, and may be uncomfortable sometimes, but God is with me and He is good...all the time! (Principle 8 - Matthew 5:10)

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## Christian Life for Dummies

Tuesday, February 26, 2019

### Matthew 5:13-20

*"I have not come to abolish (the Law or the Prophets) but to fulfill them."*

I've often wondered what this quote means. When, in the past, I have suggested to some people that perhaps some laws in the Bible are not very relevant to modern culture and also suggested that perhaps what Jesus had to say actually supplanted those old laws, they politely suggested to me that it was okay for me to focus on the red letters\* in the Bible. At first, I thought they were suggesting I cherry pick, that I just not worry about those areas of the Bible that did not seem so culturally relevant today. I was not very comfortable with this. *Christianity is all or nothing, right?* I mean, you either believe Jesus died for you or you don't. *And, if you believe this then the Bible is the Word of God, right?* The timing of one coming to that belief is unique to each individual and is on God's time, and I know His timing was perfect in my life. I'm digressing a little here, but it's important for me to relay the type of confusion that my head was full of--and not very long ago.

I've since come to the realization of what the word *fulfill* means in this quote. If I read a few chapters further, then I come to Matthew 22:37-40, where Jesus shares the greatest commandment to love God with all my heart and mind and soul, and also to love my neighbor as myself. He tells me that all the Law and Prophets hang on these *two* commandments. Those laws are important, nothing that Jesus says takes anything away from those laws. Quite the opposite, Jesus lays it out more clearly for us--kind of like Christian Life for Dummies. I understand now that those people who were telling me it was okay to focus on the red letters were not telling me to forget about the black letters or the areas of the Bible that I may have been in discord with; they were gently and lovingly pointing me in the direction of Christian Life for Dummies!

*\*Some Bibles print the words of Jesus in red letters.*

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## The Thought is the Sin

Wednesday, February 27, 2019

### Matthew 5:21-26

*"First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift."*

Talk about tough love! *The thought is as much the sin as the action is? How about that for leveling some egos? So, even if I am not acting on those evil thoughts that may occasionally creep into my mind, I am still committing a sin by having them.* A pastor friend of mine is fond of telling me the two requirements for recovery: that a person be created in God's image, and that he perpetually falls short of His glory. In recovery, I am reminded that the things I did were not the cause of my troubles or the wreckage in my life; rather those things were a symptom of deeper issues that can only be healed through God. I think this falls in line with the premise of "the thought is the sin."

Similarly, I am reminded of how often I may have a bad thought about someone that has festered into some sort of resentment that inevitably led me to act out towards that person. The other person doesn't have a clue about this resentment and does not carry the burden of it at all. It's all mine! This is why I like The Peace so much during worship--it is a time to be intentional about remembering those little resentments and seeking reconciliation *before* I come to the altar for Communion. It is a time, as Principle 6 from Monday says, to evaluate my relationships and offer forgiveness to those who have hurt me and also make amends to those people I may have hurt. This may also be the reason why I feel the necessity of being fed through communal worship several times a week.

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## **Let Your Yes be Yes**

*Thursday, February 28, 2019*

### **Matthew 5:27-37**

*"Simply let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No' be 'No'."*

Chop it off! Pull it out! Get rid of the offending part so that it does not contaminate the rest of your body. I am not too sure I follow this literal nip-it-in-the-bud thinking, but I do relate to the necessity of maintaining a constant conscious contact with God so that those areas where I glaringly fall short can be metaphorically nipped in the bud, before they fester into overt acts of willful sin.

This surely can also relate to the sanctity of my marriage. Though I strayed from the church in my younger years, there was something that always remained with me that kept me of a mind that marriage is holy and a life-long commitment. This is not to say that I have always been faithful to my wife--if the thought is the sin, then I have undoubtedly committed adultery. I have been unfaithful through my lustful thoughts, though these thoughts are given to God so that I may remain true in action to my wife.

I remember when I got married, and it came to the part where I was asked if I would take my wife. It seems like it would have been a much stronger showing to have emphatically sworn by some act or being that I would take this woman as my wife. Instead, I simply said "I do." This reminds me also of the times in church where I publicly made my commitments to God and to the church, in my baptism, confirmation, and reaffirmation. It almost seems like answering those important questions with strong oaths of "I swear by God" would have made the promises all the more convincing. Instead, I simply answered "I will," and it was enough. So, in looking back at some of the most life-changing events where I was called upon to make a life-long commitment before God, I simply let my yes be yes. No other overture could have made the commitment any more firm.

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## **Pray for God's Will**

*Friday, March 1, 2019*

## **Matthew 5:38-48**

*"But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you."*

*How tall an order is that? Jesus tells me to love my neighbor, and then I find out that my neighbor includes my enemies! It includes those who persecute me, who try to take advantage of me. There is an adage in recovery that tells me that when I have an issue or problem with a person, then I should pray for God's will in that person's life for a minimum of two weeks. The idea is that after two weeks, I will have let go of whatever resentment I had and will begin in earnest to pray for the person's well-being. It is intentional effort to accept people as God made them and not as I would have them. It is also an act of humility to come to an understanding that most of the resentments I have had against people were entirely of my own making...most of the time they were oblivious of my animosity. Having learned through recovery and worship what it means to love someone in God's love, *what* used to seem like a tall order has become something to strive for. I strive for that perfection of my Heavenly Father, and it's okay that I will perpetually fall short--Jesus closes the gap!*

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## **Spirit Prays Through Us**

*Saturday, March 2, 2019*

### **Matthew 6:1-6**

*"But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And you Father who sees in secret will reward you."*

*What reward do I expect from God? Who am I to expect anything from God? Certainly Faith calls me to Hope. Hope for what?*

I want a seat with leg-room on the plane I'm about to board. *If I pray for it, should I hope for it?* I pray for health for myself and my family, and I hold onto hope as my only option. I don't pray for parking spaces. I know many holy men and women who do. Is their reward the parking space they find? I think not. Instead their reward is the relationship with God of sharing their moment-to-moment activities, thoughts, and hopes.

*When I practice contemplative prayer, do I hope for an ecstatic sense of connection with God and the universe, a sense of peace, lowered blood pressure, and better health?* I confess that I do, but the proper purpose is to know God better.

The Book of Common Prayer says, "Prayer is responding to God." We pray not for ourselves but in response to God. In some sense the Spirit prays through us, teaching us how to pray and what to pray for.

Walter Wink teaches "the future belongs to the intercessors." That God longs to bring about God's holy wholeness and health to all of creation [often referred to as the Kingdom of God]. But in God's love for us, God would never intrude on our free will. When the Spirit moves us to pray for peace and healing, we open a space to allow God to work God's will here on earth. Our reward is to draw closer in union with God, to know and be known intimately by our great Lover, to participate in God's will for creation.

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