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## **Daily Meditations**

### **August 30 - September 4, 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](http://ststeve.org/daily-meditations)*

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### **PROPER 17:**

*Lord of all power and might, the author and giver of all good things: Graft in our hearts the love of your Name; increase in us true religion; nourish us with all goodness; and bring forth in us the fruit of good works; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. **Amen.***

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### **Prologue**

*I am writing these meditations early in the month since I will be out of town when they are due. I hope to be hugging grandkids and staring out at the Rocky Mountains soon. Maybe a little trout fishing and cool Colorado mountain air will treat me well. I am so very grateful for my current lot in life.*

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## **Kind Mercy Wins Over Harsh Judgment**

### **Monday, August 31, 2021**

#### **James 2:1-13**

*"For if you refuse to act kindly, you can hardly expect to be treated kindly." - The Message of Remix Bible*

James is the brother of Jesus and the leader of the original church in Jerusalem. During Jesus' lifetime, James and the rest of the family had often been embarrassed by his "looney brother" – the traveling preacher and healer. Since Jesus' death, James has had to come to grips with just how wrongly he had judged his brother. He now writes to some of the earliest believing Jews who had been driven out of Palestine.

I have a great deal of difficulty with this tale because I often surrender to the tendency to judge others. I wrongly tend to live my life in action mode – acting first and thinking of the consequences later. I do not tend to craft a response that is true to my beliefs without any unkind judgment of others. I just tend to shoot first and ask questions later.

As I am writing this, I have just received an email from someone complaining about being asked by me (and others) to either be masked and distanced in a public gathering or get the vaccine. My life-long tendency is to want to scream it from the mountaintops or to really get in this person's face. If I take a breath and reason with myself, I know that will do no good. I need to craft a response that is void of self-righteous judgment. I will try. Thank you, Jesus. TYJ

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## Faith and Works

*Tuesday, August 31, 2021*

### James 2:14-26

*"Do I hear you professing to believe...but then observe you sitting back complacently as if you'd done something wonderful? Do you suppose for a minute that you can cut faith and works in two and not end up with a corpse on your hands?" - The Message*

If I was to be quizzed on my "faith," I would be hard-pressed to get a passing grade on my answer(s). But I do know what Jesus has asked me (and you) to do. We will be known and remembered by our works and not just by what we say we believe.

So, what have I done today to live out this admonition from James? Well, not very much, I'd say. I can do my daily meditations and readings and prayers. I can go to church on Sunday and corporately pray and recite and listen and hear and greet. But what about my works?

Kevin has the right idea. Get me out of my comfort zone. Help me to help others who haven't enough food to eat or clothes to wear or the basic necessities of life that I take for granted. Opportunities await us all, both here in the Wimberley Valley and in the Rio Grande Valley.

Let me be known by my works for others. Let St. Stephen's be known by its works for others outside our comfort zones. Bishop Curry said it best in his book *Love Is the Way*, Avery Press, 2020. "What are you gonna do with your dash – that space between the birthdate and the end date on your tombstone?" TYJ

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## A Word Out of My Mouth

*Wednesday, September 1, 2021*

### James 3:1-12

*"A bit in the mouth of a horse controls the whole horse. A small rudder on a huge ship in the hands of a skilled captain sets a course in the face of the strongest winds. A word out of your mouth may seem of no account, but it can accomplish nearly anything – or destroy it." - The Message*

Well, here's a small token from James that I can surely relate to now, and in my past. It's strange how these gems just don't resonate with me when I so desperately need for them to do so.

It is EASY to destroy with words. It's much more difficult to build with them.

My father was a man of few words. He wasn't around very much of the time, and when he was around, he was rather remote from me and my brothers and sister. But there was once when just one or two sentences from his lips changed my life and the lives of others around me.

In the summer of 1968, I had just been suspended (scholastically) from college and was home working at a menial job and drifting through life. My older brother had been shot down and killed over the Gulf of Tonkin only one month earlier. My thoughts were only of myself – not of others.

After a sequence of events toward the end of that summer which resulted in my being re-admitted to the university under extended probation, my father came up to me in the driveway as I was about to leave the house. He said: "Listen to me. Your mother will not bury another child. Do you understand?" That was likely the greatest event of positive change in my entire life. Just a word from Dad.

And I can remember once when I had the opportunity, totally unexpectedly, to build up a stranger with just a brief word or two. I was working in my office at the University of North Texas one afternoon in 1990 when I received a phone call. I answered, and I was immediately asked if I was the brother of Tommy – my Marine Corps brother shot down in Nam.

I said, "Yes," and the voice on the other end of the phone burst into tears. It was the Crew Chief of my brother's chopper. He was apologizing over and over, saying that it was his responsibility to save Tommy.

He'd been carrying that guilt with him for 22 years. The rest of the crew escaped, but Tommy did not. I told him that nobody in my family blamed him, that it was a dirty little war and that my entire family were sure that he had done his best to save Tommy. I hope I changed his life that day. I tried. TYJ

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## Live Wisely

Thursday, September 2, 2021

### James 3:13-4:12

*"Do you want to be counted as wise, to build a reputation for wisdom? Here's what you do: Live well, live wisely, live humbly. It's the way you live, not the way you talk, that counts." - The Message*

Somewhere in the many resources that I read early each morning, I remember it being said that wisdom is the distillation of knowledge plus experience. Neither attribute alone is satisfactory.

One might think, that with multiple college degrees and 73 years of experience under my belt, I might be blessed with wisdom to share. Think again! I'm often one of those folks you've heard about who does the same thing over and over and each time I expect a different result than was delivered the time before.

Where am I going with this? Well, as you might guess, I will have something to say here about our church. I won't be in church on a Sunday in August when Kevin has invited all the kids from our school and their parents to come to church with us. I'll be somewhere in Colorado with grandkids. I wish I could be there in church on that day. It's a bold and necessary and "wise" move on Kevin's part.

As I have looked around me while in church over the last two to three years, I

don't see many children, or youth, or young adults, or young families. How in the world should I expect St. Stephen's to grow, or even survive, without change? We need to focus on mission in our church – on helping others outside our church family. And we need to recruit and enlist folks a lot younger than me to participate in that change. Thank you, Kevin, and TYJ.

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## Worn Out

Friday, September 3, 2021

### Psalm 31

*"Be kind to me God – I'm in deep trouble again. I've cried my eyes out; I feel hollow inside. My life leaks away, groan by groan; my years fade out in sighs. My troubles have worn me out and turned my bones to powder." - The Message*

This morning on the porch with coffee and watching the birds, my wife and I talked about the anxiety plaguing us today – COVID and the effects of aging (not too gracefully).

I started this series of meditations in my prologue by stating my gratitude for the life I am living. It is so very easy to leave those feelings in the dust and fall back on the complaints of aging and the current state of local, national, and worldwide affairs.

A friend and I recently discussed the subject of gratitude and wondered out loud what was the appropriate response to the recognition in us that we ARE grateful. We decided that the appropriate response to gratitude was to get "out there" and help someone in need of help.

As I have said before, there is no shortage of opportunity to help – whether on my own, or through the church. It sure beats the propensity in me (and all of us) to just sit around and bitch about the current state of things. Let's all try to demonstrate our gratitude. TYJ

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## Patience

Saturday, September 4, 2021

### James 5:7-12

*"Meanwhile friends, wait patiently for the Master's arrival. You see farmers do this all the time. ... Be patient like that. Stay steady and strong. ... don't complain about each other. A far greater complaint could be lodged against you, you know. ... Take the old prophets as your mentors. They put up with anything, went through everything, and never once quit. ... Just say what is true." - The Message*

Well, that's a mouthful from James. I guess that what I take from it is the part about complaining. I need this admonition. As I said on Friday, it's so easy for me to lapse into complaint these days.

To quote here again from Joan Chittister in *A Spirituality for the 21st Century*, Crossroads, 2010: "Agitation drives out consciousness of God. When we are driven by agitation, consumed by fretting, we become immersed in our own agenda, and it is always exaggerated. ... The great spiritual question of life is not – *Is there life after death?* The great spiritual question is: *Is there life before death?*"

So, I'll try. I will backslide and I will fail, and I will try again. TYJ

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