



Daily Meditations March 25-30, 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, Pat Gillory, Jay Nickel, Bob Reed, T. Cay Rowe, Lisa Wilkinson, and Carroll Wilson.

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

COLLECT for Lent 3:

Almighty God, you know that we have no power in ourselves to help ourselves: Keep us both outwardly in our bodies and inwardly in our souls, that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body, and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. **Amen.**

Appearances

Monday, March 25, 2019

John 7:14-36

"Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment." - John 7:24

Years ago, I volunteered in response to a radio request for extras to be in a performance of the Dallas Opera. Being a confirmed opera buff, I couldn't resist. I had a delightful time attending the rehearsals and the performances and being up close to some wonderfully talented singers. My assignment was to carry a Styrofoam trumpet covered with silver glitter while wearing a medieval courtier's costume, complete with mustache and beard, velvet hat and bright yellow tights in a coronation scene in Verdi's *Ernani*. From the audience the set looked glorious, with what appeared to be marble stairs descending under a gilded archway to the magnificent throne for the coronation of the richly robed king. But from where I stood, I could see the entire set was made of plywood and skillfully applied paint.

How often we are attracted to the glitzy and the attractive rather than to what is good and true. Jesus was highly suspicious of those who were attracted to him because of the miracles he performed; he knew that what mattered was faith based on trust in him as the one sent from the Father.

Living Water

Tuesday, March 26, 2019

John 7:37-52

"Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, 'Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water!'". - John 7:38

As residents of the Wimberley Valley, we are especially blessed by flowing water. Cypress Creek which flows through the center of town, is fed

almost entirely by the cool clear waters burbling up from the spring at Jacob's Well. As I write this meditation, the beautiful Blanco River is flowing calmly outside my study window. No matter what else may be going on in my life, that river is a constant source of beauty that feeds my soul.

I am told that the Greek rendering of the phrase "shall flow rivers of living water" is written in a tense that emphasizes a continuation into the future. In other words, those "rivers of living water" flow and will continue to flow without end. What Jesus is promising is not a quick one-time event for those who have faith, but a constant life-giving flow sustaining the believer's heart forever.

Starstruck

Wednesday, March 27, 2019

John 8:12-20

"Again Jesus spoke to them, saying 'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life'." - John 8:12

If you love watching the stars as I do, both of us are indeed fortunate that we live where the night skies are beautiful and star-studded, especially on clear, cool nights. You will be frustrated, however, if you step out of a brightly-lit house and immediately expect to see the stars. If you try to walk, you will be stumbling in the darkness. Only if you have the patience to allow your eyes to adjust will you begin to see many stars, and then the more you will see. You also find that you can see your pathway more clearly from the starlight alone.

Earlier in the Gospel of John, Jesus offered the Samaritan woman the living water. He repeated that offer to the crowds in Jerusalem during the Feast of the Tabernacles. After feeding the hungry multitudes by the Sea of Galilee, he offered them the bread of life. In today's reading, he offers the light of life. Water, food, and light: all that is necessary for our spiritual lives to blossom and grow. If we can just sit patiently and allow the eyes of our hearts to adjust to what Jesus is offering, we can then stop stumbling in the darkness and see the path more clearly by the light of life.

To Tell the Truth

Thursday, March 28, 2019

John 8:21-32

"If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." - John 8:31-32

O what a tangled web we weave
When first we practice to deceive.

I can still vividly remember 60 years ago my father quoting Sir Walter Scott's couplet to me when I made up some lie to try to avoid being punished for some childish act of disobedience. I can't remember now what I had done wrong then, but I've never forgotten this verse.

That's one of the things we learn from painful experience: It's always simpler in the long run to tell the truth, because it's so hard to keep your story straight when you're trying to defend your lies.

What Jesus is telling the crowd around him, though, is not about the contrast of childish lies and truth, but about the ultimate truth of God. The way to that truth is abundantly simple but extremely difficult: Just follow him.

How ironic that the last person Jesus sees on the way to the cross who could seemingly have set him free is Pontius Pilate, who instead asks him, "What is truth?" (John 18:38) Pilate didn't recognize the Truth when it was staring him in the face.

Accepting the Call

Friday, March 29, 2019

John 8:33-47

"If you were Abraham's children, you would be doing what Abraham did." - John 8:39b

More and more each morning, I see my father looking back at me as I shave. Recent research has indicated that we are even more powerfully formed by our genes than we had earlier thought. Not only our body type, eye and hair color, and receding hairlines, but also our personality type, intelligence, gifts and talents. We have inherited all these tendencies from our forebears. But at least in the case of our personalities, it is also clear that these are tendencies, not preordained destinies. We have the ability and the free will to make significant choices that through time and repetition will substantially change who we are and what we do.

In the extended argument between the Jewish temple authorities and Jesus, the Jews are falling back on their proud heritage as descendants of Abraham, the great patriarch of Judaism, Islam, and Christianity. But Jesus reminds them that what made Abraham great was his willingness to answer bravely the call of an unknown God to step out in faith and accept a total change in the direction of his life. Abraham's decision allowed God to fulfill his promise: that Abraham would become the father of a great nation and a blessing to all nations.

The Choice

Saturday, March 30, 2019

John 8:47-59

"Very truly, I tell you, whoever keeps my word will never see death." - John 8:51

One of my favorite hymns, "I Am the Bread of Life," is sung often at burial services. I suspect one of the reasons for its popularity is the third verse: "They who believe in me, even if they die, they shall live forever."

This verse beautifully illustrates how profound the words of Jesus are, and how they frustrated the literal-minded Jewish leaders with whom Jesus is arguing in today's reading. Just as Nicodemus, a great teacher of Israel, could not get beyond a literal understanding of what it meant to be born anew, so we struggle with the understanding of Jesus' words here.

How ironic that only a few weeks after reassuring his followers that those who keep his word will "never see death," Jesus is brutally murdered on the cross. Clearly Jesus is not talking about avoiding physical death here, but something much greater and deeper.

Over and over again Jesus emphasizes that we are given a choice: between light and darkness, between following him or turning away, between life and death.

But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or the will of man, but of God. (John 1:12-13)

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