



Daily Meditations

April 19 - 24, 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: Third Sunday of Easter

O God, whose blessed Son made himself known to his disciples in the breaking of bread: Open the eyes of our faith, that we may behold him in all his redeeming work; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Perfect Practice

Monday, April 19, 2021

I John 3:9-4:6

"My dear children, let's not just talk about love; let's practice real love. This is the only way we'll know we're living truly, living in God's reality. It's also the way to shut down debilitating self-criticism, even when there is something to it. For God is greater than our worried hearts and knows more about us than we do ourselves." - 1 John 3:18 The Message

I love the directness of this translation/paraphrase of The Bible, and I often writhe under it as a bug on a pin. But when you need God and you need direction and hope, straightforward language is what you hunger for.

I was widowed 45 years ago as a young woman, and I sought comfort in God's word, but the translation of The King James Version left me lost and uncomforted, even though I had grown up with its measured and stately flow. That same year, The New International Version of just the New Testament was published, and I bought that slim volume. As I began to read it, I felt the words were spoken directly to me, and I consumed the book in one marathon reading session. I still think God responded to my troubled heart and self-doubt with just what I needed, and I responded to the clear message of those words with whole heart and mind.

After a year-plus of pandemic, racial strife, upheaval, and general anxiety, we know some things about worried hearts. But do humans have the means or methods to shut down these anxieties and heal ourselves? The writer of The Letters of John 1-3 says we have an avenue to healing through God's call to love, *real love*. Today's entire reading as well as most of this letter present the consistent message that the way to "God's reality" is the way of love, and the example of that "real love" is that God gave His Son for us out of love.

It should reassure us that in the verse above, the author writes that we should "...practice real love." Only through practice, *perfect practice*, do we get better at a skill. Achieving perfect practice entails failure and commitment, and John addresses this earlier in Chapter 3, verse 10: "Here's how you tell the difference between God's children and the Devil's children: The one who won't practice righteous ways isn't from God, nor is the one who won't love brother or sister. A simple test." I am thankful God knows us better than we know ourselves. He sees our hearts and our striving toward perfect practice, but perfect love covers up imperfect efforts.

To be a Mature-In-Love Person

Tuesday, April 20, 2021

I John 4:7-21

"God is love. When we take up permanent residence in a life of love, we live in God and God lives in us. This way, Love has the run of the house, becomes at home and mature in us, so that we are free of worry on judgment day—our standing in the world is identical to Christ. There is no room in love for fear. Well-formed love banishes fear. Since fear is crippling, a fearful life—fear of death, fear of judgment—is one not yet fully formed in love." - I John 4:14-18

Perhaps you grew up like I did: hearing about a God who on one hand sent His Son to save us while on the other meticulously wrote down each and every infraction of "the rules" and any sins or mistakes we made as well. This dichotomy was too difficult for a child/young person to grapple with, so I usually took the path of least resistance and believed both, but not passionately. In my world as a child, grace and love were not talked about much; instead, we heard a lot about punishment, "do nots," lists of sins and transgressions, and fear and trembling as well as gnashing of teeth. Miraculously, I still held onto my belief in God.

But in reading the writer of John 1, "Tak[ing] up permanent residence in a life of love" excludes Puritanism and judgmental attitudes as well as self-criticism for not living up to perfectionist standards. Loving others as myself implies that I love myself, and Paul writes that love keeps no record of wrongs (1 Cor. 13) and always looks for the best. The writer of John 1 in Monday's text writes of "debilitating self-criticism, even when there is something to it." When we live in love, it becomes the dominant force in our lives, a practice that grows in perfection as we exercise it more and more. And I think that forgiveness walks hand-in-hand with love, because human beings are not perfect, are not exempt from temptations and failings no matter how they strive to mirror God-like behaviors.

Once our love has matured, there's no room for fear. Instead of constantly worrying about making a misstep on the road of life, I can walk ahead confidently in the light of love. How does that look? Since I have not yet attained this, I envision this mature-in-love person as having a huge and compassionate heart, confident in his/her belief in God, calm and peaceful in personality, a wise person you can trust to listen to you and understand without judging you, but one who doesn't condone the evil of this world. In other words, a Christ-like person.

Combatting the Mess

Wednesday, April 21, 2021

I John 5:1-12

"This is the testimony in essence: God gave us eternal life; the life is in his Son. So, whoever has the Son, has life; whoever rejects the Son, rejects life." - 1 John 5:12"

The basic syllogism above is so simple and straightforward as to appear almost

unnecessary to believers today, but in the world this writer was addressing, the phrases are fraught with meaning.

The writer of John has a specific purpose: to counteract and contradict the then-spreading concepts of Gnosticism, a heresy that arose in the first and second centuries. Gnosticism is a complex and multi-stranded philosophy that I do not pretend to understand, but some of its tenets still linger and are clearly refuted in the writings of the Letters of John.

Putting an emphasis on "hidden knowledge" revealed exclusively to those seeking it (*gnostic* means "knowing or able to discern"), often through mystical means; followers of a gnostic philosophy denied the incarnation of the Son of God in the person of Jesus and denied his central role in God's plan of salvation. As if that's not enough, many Gnostics rejected the idea of living a Christian life; some denied the goodness of the God of the Hebrew Scriptures, labeling Him as vengeful and petty. Other Gnostics claimed the physical world was all evil and fallen; therefore, why resist our own physical urges since our pure spiritual natures would not be released until our deaths.

All of this is to say that the writer of John I combats this mess with simple, easily understood and straightforward statements of Jesus' divine nature, his central role in salvation, and the importance of living a life in Christ.

<https://bible.org/seriespage/introduction-1-john>

They Knew

Thursday, April 22, 2021

I John 5:13-21

"My purpose in writing is simply this: that you who believe in God's Son will know beyond a shadow of a doubt that you have eternal life, the reality and not the illusion." - I John 5:13

Words and language have been my life, and while I am not a scholar, I know to pay attention when I hear echoes of other words or phrases or ideas repeated. My connection to the quote above comes from The Gospel of John 20:31: "These are written down so you will believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and in the act of believing, have real and eternal life in the way he personally revealed it." The echoes in these two statements would seem to support that both The Gospel and the Letters of John were penned by the same writer.

Regardless, these are strong assertions. In fact, in our passage for today, the phrase "we know" is used between five and seven times, depending on the translator, and the concept of confidence in belief is reiterated several times. This strength of faith comes from a deep, unshakeable conviction in the promises of God and His faithfulness to do what He has promised. Of interest to me is that the 12 men who knew and traveled with Jesus during his three-year ministry, all, with the exception of Judas, remained strong in faith and conviction until their deaths. They *knew* that Jesus was the Christ. They *knew* Jesus offered the way to eternal life. They *knew* he was the Son of God.

The Most Welcome Message

Friday, April 23, 2021

II John 1-13

"But permit me a reminder, friends, and this is not a new, commandment but simply a repetition of our original and basic charter: that we love each other. Love means following his commandments, and his unifying commandment is that you conduct your lives in love. This is the first thing you heard, and nothing has changed." - II John 5-6

"Our original and basic charter" is love. Wow! Not church rules or mandates issued from somewhere far away, not opinions or feelings...just a basic command to love. So simple, and so difficult. Eugene Peterson wrote:

Love is the most welcome message in life and one that we very much like getting...But there is also an immense irony here: The subject and activity that we are most attracted to is at the same time the subject and activity the we are least good at. Over a lifetime we accumulate more failures in love, both individually and collectively, than in any other single thing.

Regardless of this, I have not stopped attempting to love. At times I have failed miserably, but most times I achieve some level of success. I have discovered that loving others means you must develop empathy for them, sometimes even forgiving them. And loving others does not entail that warm fuzzy feeling, although you may get some of that; instead, it's the day-in-day out seeking another's well-being, even over your own. Rearing children or marriage comes to mind.

Empathy, compassion, understanding, forgiveness, love...they all seem to work together.

<https://spu.edu/stories/articles/message-love-world-war-eugene-peterson/>

If We Love, We will Act

Saturday, April 24, 2021

III John 1-15

"Dear friend, when you extend hospitality to Christian brothers and sisters, even when they are strangers you make the faith visible....It's good work you're doing helping these travelers on their way, hospitality worthy of God himself!" - III John 5-6

To the list at the end of the previous section, we should add hospitality as a component of godly love. I love the phrase "make the faith visible." We have all heard "Actions speak louder than words." Obviously, love is not just a passive feeling, but an action, just as faith is. If we love, we will act.

So often we let our hospitality and generosity come through institutions: the church or the local philanthropic group. Sometimes we open our homes or our wallets to people we know. We like to think the world is worse than when this letter was penned, but I don't really think so. Solomon wrote that there is nothing new under the sun, and I think that human beings have always been highly capable of dreaming up evil deeds. Our "charter" is to love...sometimes more circumspectly than other times. I like what Bishop Michael Curry says:

I'm here to say there is power in the kind of love that is unselfish, even sacrificial, that seeks the good and the well-being of others as well as the self – enormous untapped power in that kind of love that can help both to give us hope in troubling times and to help us find our way and navigate our way through.

<https://www.episcopalnewsservice.org/2020/09/22/qa-presiding-bishop-shares-stories-from-his-life-and-ministry-in-new-book-on-christian-love/>

Connect with us

