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## ***Daily Meditations***

### ***October 4-9, 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 22:**

*Almighty and everlasting God, you are always more ready to hear than we to pray, and to give more than we either desire or deserve: Pour upon us the abundance of your mercy, forgiving us those things of which our conscience is afraid, and giving us those good things for which we are not worthy to ask, except through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ our Savior; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

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## **Balancing the Barbell Ends**

### ***Monday, October 4, 2021***

#### **1 Corinthians 10:14-11:1**

*"So whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God."*

Of the many videos circulating on social media, some of the funniest feature people who do not know how to properly use fitness equipment at the gym. Most are hilarious snippets of uninformed customers; others are perilously life-threatening. These run the gamut from people who don't know how to walk on a treadmill, to neophytes using leg machines for arm workouts, but some of the worst are unsecured free-weight mishaps. Whether it's bench press, squats, or another heavy movement, the bar slips or shifts and hundreds of pounds of iron fly off one side of the bar with sharp tilts, only to flip the opposite direction with the imbalanced torque hurling more demolition at anyone in the death radius.

Lifting has numerous benefits albeit with some risk. But lifting heavy with no clamps introduces unnecessary risk and danger. The benefits of resistance are only realized when the bar is kept in balance and moved through the desired

range of motion.

Today's passage begins with Paul's imperative to flee idolatry, then concludes with pleasing all men that some may be saved. Two ends of the evangelistic barbell. On one end is unwavering, uncompromised faith; the other end is sacrificial compromise of non-essential inclusion. A stalwart faith with no appeal will win no one. A compromised inclusion without faith will..wait for it...win no one.

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## **Faith Family Food Fight**

*Tuesday, October 5, 2021*

### **1 Corinthians 11:2, 17-22**

*"Do you not have houses in which you can eat and drink? Or do you show contempt for the church of God and make those who have nothing feel ashamed?"*

Communion has become, oh, let's say competitive. Paul is not happy. He might be if the competition were to serve others better or to deny self more. But in this case, the sacrament symbolizing unity (comm-union) is instead a race for individual indulgence. This Christocentric feast of holy remembrance had morphed into an egocentric open bar.

The Lord's Supper afforded the well-fed followers an opportunity to show some generosity and mercy to those who were not as well supplied. They failed. In this sense, they perverted the heart of the observance. Jesus' original meal with the Twelve was foreshadowing how He must serve them in that moment, then serve all mankind thereafter. In this text, some church members took advantage of being served first, with a generous pour, satisfying a gluttonous palate with no gratitude.

Our contemporary practice of individually dispensing Hosts virtually prevents this exact scenario from playing out. But that does not prevent the same selfish mindset in my life when I have to be first in line, first out the door, first on the list ... just first! Another time Jesus said, "The first shall be last." Of course, someone must go first, and there is the opportunity to give that privilege to someone who needs it or whose life has earned the respectful deference of the faith community.

We gather to give, and in the giving we get the blessings of obedience.

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## **The You and Me of Communion**

*Wednesday, October 6, 2021*

### **1 Corinthians 11:23-34**

*"For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes."*

My wife and I have contrasting entertainment interests, so when we find a show where our curiosities overlap, we guard it with our lazy lives. On one such show about surviving in the wild, we watched a man several months into his adventure who had trapped a squirrel. Because he was low on protein, and calorically deficient in general, he was beyond grateful for the nourishment, so grateful that he swiped his thumb across the squirrel's head, smearing a smudge of red on his digit, which he eagerly licked off and declared, "There is life in the blood." The TV program is titled *Alone*.

This survivalist was correct about blood carrying life. He was also alone.

As the word "communion" suggests, though, there is a communal aspect to partaking of the Lord's body and blood. Yes, Christ's sacrifice means life to you and me, but that individuality is subsumed in what it means to **us**.

Podcasts are my frequent friends, especially when jousting with insomnia. I recently heard a podcaster talk about a peaceful, pacifist Native American tribe that held a council to try a member who had violated the tribe's standards. The verdict was guilty, and the sentence was death. But how does a non-violent tribe execute an offender? They expelled him, banned him from the community, ignored him as if he were already dead to them. And he eventually died.

There are many ways to kill someone and just as many or more ways to kill his or her spirit.

I think this is the root of Paul's teaching in this passage. Communion includes you and me, but it is really about the body of Christ, all of us.

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## Full of Cheese and Lincoln

*Thursday, October 7, 2021*

### **1 Corinthians 12:1-11**

*"To each individual the manifestation of the Spirit is given for some benefit."*

The Harvest Moon occurred this week. When I'm not all jacked up and jittery on pre-dawn coffee, I fumble with my telescope to locate the biggest, brightest thing in the sky for an up-close look. I mean, it's right there all full of cheese, embossed with a likeness of Abraham Lincoln, but it takes some patient work to lock it in from a back-tilted Adirondack chair on my deck with diminishing eyesight and shaky hands.

This morning, I spent half my available time looking at a "brightish" object, but I could not capture a clearly focused image. I changed lenses, turned knobs, muttered under my breath, but nothing helped until I scrapped my failure and looked around for something else, which is when my eye was rudely and thankfully blinded by the actual moon for which I had been searching. It was magnificent, by the way.

One moon is all we have revolving around our rock. It should be easy to find and focus on, but there are infinite competitors in the night sky for an untrained eye that only glances once a quarter.

The Corinthians had been led off to dumb idols (NKJV translation), and Paul is retraining their focus to the uniqueness and singularity of Christ: "Look at Jesus. All these varieties of gifts are through the Spirit for the glory of God and the profit of all His people. Do not be distracted by flickers of false hope!"

How can I use God's gifts in my life for His glory and the profit of all His people?

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## Don't Be Chicken

*Friday, October 8, 2021*

### **1 Corinthians 12:12-26**

*"As a body is one though it has many parts, and all the parts of the body, though many, are one body, so also Christ."*

When I was in high school last century, I took one year of ag. I got my cool blue corduroy jacket and raised lambs, chickens, and onions. While I couldn't work the remaining three years into my academic curriculum, that one year's lessons have remained with me into my sixth decade.

When COVID panicked the world's grocery shoppers last year, we decided to use those agrarian roots to become more self-sufficient, primarily by procuring a half-dozen rescued cinnamon queen hens for egg production. They're bullies. We don't even have a rooster, but these girls are bullies.

If you are familiar with the term "pecking order," this is its origin. It's a habit or pattern of flock dominance. They literally peck the weaker ones until the hapless hens bleed, lose plumage, or suffer more serious injuries learning where they belong in the brood.

Paul in his masterful narrative on the body of Christ is telling us not to be chickens. None of us is better than the others. No one gets picked on or pecked on. No one is lesser. In Paul's hierarchy, there is an inversion of importance in which those who might feel lesser are rather greater. It's the upside-down Kingdom of God.

Your gifts were given to you for supernatural reasons that only God fully understands. Nothing, including your own self-doubt, can dismiss God's call and gifting on your life. How can you exercise your gift a little bit more today?

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## Why is Power Easier than Love?

*Saturday, October 9, 2021*

### **1 Corinthians 12:27-13:3**

*"So faith, hope, love remain, these three; but the greatest of these is love."*

Henri Nouwen, one of this old Baptist's favorite Catholic contemplatives, said in his book *In the Name of Jesus*:

*"Power offers an easy substitute for the hard task of love.*

*It seems easier to be God than to love God.*

*Easier to control people than to love people.*

*Easier to own life than to love life."*

Nouwen's insight is so spot on that it approaches paraphrasing one of Paul's most memorable and quoted passages, the "love" chapter. Chapter 13 is read at weddings, but without the context of chapter 12, it's missing some vitamins and minerals that the church needs every day, that love is better than power. More pointedly, power without love is powerless.

Paul's synonyms for gifts, expressions and endowments of power include apostles, prophets, teachers, miracle workers, healers, and others in positions of authority within the church.

We've all seen it, and I confess to having done it: "The ministry would be great if it weren't for the people." It's always easier and more gratifying to be in charge, tell followers what to believe, pronounce prophetic predictions or opine on truth than it is to listen to, walk with, and lift up people.

As a very pragmatic and personal example, it's quite easy for me to arrange and rearrange devotional thoughts in Microsoft Word from the stillness of my

office. It's quite another Herculean task to care about you as a reader or hear that these words don't work for you today and you might need something painfully sacrificial from me.

Who benefits more from our gifts and strengths? Our egos, or Christ's body?

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