



Daily Meditations

October 12 - 17, 2020

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, Becky Denton, Pat Gillory, Traci Maxwell, Jay Nickel, Bob Reed, T.Cay Rowe, and Carroll Wilson.

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

COLLECT, PROPER 23

*Lord, we pray that your grace may always precede and follow us, that we may continually be given to good works through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.
Amen.*

Commissioning Agents

Monday, October 12, 2020

Luke 8:26-39

Later a great many people from the Gerasene countryside got together and asked Jesus to leave...Too much change, too fast, and they were scared. So Jesus got back in the boat and set off. The man whom he had delivered from the demons asked to go with him, but he sent him back saying, "Go home and tell everything God did in you." So he went back and preached all over town everything Jesus had done in him. - vv. 37-39

"Go home and tell everything God did in you." Such a simple command...or was it?

We would have labeled the poor man a raving lunatic when Jesus first met him, possessing inhuman strength, running around buck naked as many people undergoing psychoses do, and hiding out among the dead at the cemetery, an unholy and scary place for many people, especially the Jews. How constrained and limited is our viewpoint of what is in front of us! Jesus looks at this poor devil (pun intended) and sees a mob of demons, all warring with one another and upon the human they have inhabited. The mob of demons sense the compassion Jesus feels, know his power, and fear for their future...as they should, for Jesus sends them into an unlucky herd of pigs, which then self-destructs. I cannot help but think that the herd of pigs was just a pit stop for the demons on their way to the abyss.

The reborn human given a new lease on life then sits at Jesus' feet, full of gratitude and love, even begging to go with Jesus when he leaves town. But

no...Jesus has other plans for him. At first I thought the statement needed to read, "Go home and tell everything **Jesus** did in you," but then I recalled that over and over Jesus prays to enact the Father's love on earth and "Not my will but thine be done." Jesus acts here as a channel of blessing from our Father to one of his beloved children, bringing this man back to a productive life. He seeks no fame or glory for it, only praise for God his father. This restored man becomes an apostle, a commissioned agent, for Jesus, and I think that Jesus commissions us to do likewise. "Go home and tell everything God did in you." Wow! What a list that could be.

In addition, Jesus uses a little two-letter word here...in...to reveal that what happened was not done *to* the man but *in* him. That provokes a thought that something must have changed within this human to open him up to God's goodness. Perhaps like many of us this man had needed to be knocked flat on his back before he would accept that he was beloved by God. The events of our last seven months have served to knock the wind out of the sails of many of us; I pray that it opens a new path for God to work his good *in* us also.

Oh, Wait...Maybe She Did

Tuesday, October 13, 2020

Luke 8:40-56

Then Jesus gripped [the little dead girl's] hand, called, "My dear child, get up." She was up in an instant up and breathing! - vv. 54-55

*Mama said there'll be days like this,
There'll be days like this, my mama said...*

Don't think my mama envisioned such a year as 2020 has proven to be so far. Oh, wait...maybe she did. She was born just before the Spanish Flu epidemic in 1918; her teenage years and early adulthood took her through the Great Depression; then our country went to war in 1941 against Fascism and the strongest military powers seen until that time; then she reared four teenagers through the '60s into relatively productive adulthoods. The circumstances may vary, but the human condition is the same: extreme events have a deep and lasting effect on our lives and our souls.

The lack of human company (mates excluded), the constant fear of infection, the cessation of many activities and events that keep us connected and lifted up, the uncertainty and anxiety of the news broadcasts regarding voices we listen to, all these work on me...and possibly on you...to create a hopeless and flat state of mind.

When I am in this dark place, I feel disconnected from life. In a way I am like the little girl, lifeless, with my spirit absent, and I need to hear the voice of Jesus calling me back to life and hope. And I have "heard" him: in the voice on the phone, a friend just calling to keep in touch; my spouse thinking up fun little activities; a card and note in the mail; a zoom visit with my children; and even the physical beauty of the world around me. God's love exists in every atom of our being and in the world around us, even though we sometimes are blinded by our psychic pain.

"My dear child, get up."

The Real Story

Wednesday, October 14, 2020

Luke 9:1-7

[Jesus] said, "Don't load yourself up with equipment. Keep it simple; you are the equipment." - v. 3

There's this thing about inspiration: when a human being catches fire with inspiration, she or he becomes almost unstoppable and able to do miraculous things. Yes, the accomplishment can be great, even amazing, but the change or growth in the person inspired is the real story. That is what I think is happening here.

The 12 apostles have been with Jesus night and day, listening to him teach, watching his compassion, and marveling at this power. But so far this has been a "spectator sport," fascinating and exciting but passive. Now Jesus commissions them to tell the good news about the kingdom of God and to heal the sick...them, those everyday guys, the fishermen, the tax collector the Jewish boys. And it's not "smoke and mirrors" or dependent on magic potions or even a physician's bag of medicine; it's them. Actually it's us.

We read over and over again that news of Jesus spread far and wide, and the people rushed out to see him, bringing their physically ill as well as their spiritually ill. The apostles are about to meet those same needy people. I can imagine their fear of failure, their lack of confidence, and their worry about what they will eat or where they will rest their heads at night. I believe Jesus wants the Twelve to see the desperate needs of the people, to feel compassion and love for the unfortunates, and to experience the wide range of acceptance from total belief in what they stand for to total rejection, just as he has. I also think he wants them to trust their faith and act upon their own belief in him.

In a parallel passage in Mark 6, "They [preach] with joyful urgency that life can be radically different..." and they help the people in whatever way is needed. I believe they return to Jesus as changed men, knowing that Jesus is indeed their deliverer.

A Simple Recipe: Self-Sacrifice

Thursday, October 15, 2020

Luke 9:18-27

Then he told them what they could expect for themselves: "Anyone who comes with me has to let me lead. You're not in the driver's seat—I am. Don't run from suffering—embrace it. Follow me, and I'll show you how. Self-help is no help at all. Self-sacrifice is the way, my way, to finding yourself. Your true self. What good would it do to get everything you want and lose you, the real you?" - vv. 23-25

It doesn't get much clearer than this. Following Jesus is not the way to fame and fortune, not an aisle in the bookstore crammed with books on how to improve your life or how to win friends and influence people, not an exercise in developing our egos. Instead, it is simply self-sacrifice, and Jesus shows us the way.

What does self-sacrifice mean? To me, it means placing the needs of others before my own; it means giving up something so someone else can eat; it means not just pulling up the oppressed and disenfranchised to my level but advancing them on. Greed and our insistence on our rights and privileges do not fit this description. Calling myself a Christian, a follower of Jesus, demands that I remove this selfishness from my life.

Pray Continually

Friday, October 16, 2020

Luke 9:28-36

While he was in prayer, the appearance of his face changed and his clothes became blinding white...Then there was a voice out of the cloud: "This is my Son, the Chosen! Listen to him." - vv. 29, 35

A footnote in the New American Standard Bible points out that when Jesus prays, revelations and major events ensue. Just after Jesus was baptized, the voice from heaven identified him as God's son; just before Jesus chose the 12 apostles, he prayed; Jesus had been praying just before the scene in today's passage occurs, commonly called the Transfiguration; and finally, Jesus prayed in the garden of Gethsemane just before he was arrested. These references are all from Luke, and without a doubt, Jesus prayed many more times but these are linked to significant events, events spanning heaven and earth.

Did Jesus pray because he knew what was about to happen? Or did he pray and revelation occurred? Or possibly both answers are true. Good question.

For us, the best answer is: pray continually. Pray before, during, and after events. Pray with gratitude, pray for solace, pray for guidance, pray for trust. God hears us and cares for us. On the Mount of Transfiguration, God's purpose in speaking from the cloud was for the benefit of the apostles who saw what happened, not for Jesus: Jesus already knew he was the Chosen One. We already know we are God's beloved, made in his image and permeated with his being. Let us hold that close in our hearts during these difficult days of fear and isolation and uncertainty, and pray with all our hearts.

It's Your Spirit, Not Your Size

Saturday, October 17, 2020

Luke 9:37-50

They started arguing over which of them would be most famous. When Jesus realized how much this mattered to them, he brought a child to his side. "Whoever accepts this child as if the child were me, accepts me," he said. "And whoever accepts me, accepts the One who sent me. You become great by accepting, not asserting. Your spirit, not your size, makes the difference." - vv. 47-48

Jesus' words seem to speak directly to my heart: "Your spirit, not your size, makes the difference." We all love the sweet openness of a child, his or her spirit of confidence and willingness to try new things, and his/her absolute love and devotion. When I see this in a child, my heart lifts and my soul smiles.

I love the words of Emily Dickinson who marveled at the innocence of a child:
The Child's faith is new-/Whole-like His Principle-/Wide-like the Sunrise/On
fresh Eyes Never had a Doubt-/Laughs-at a Scruple-Believes all sham But
Paradise-Credits the World-/Deems His Dominion/Broadest of
Sovereignites-...^

The other side of children is that, in the ironic words from the musical "South Pacific," "You must be carefully taught."* A popular poem for parents is "Children learn what they live."** Some things are easier for the pure souls of children to accept. If parents are accepting and loving, the child will be; if parents are harsh and critical, the child will be conflicted and most likely will copy that behavior. I can remember my conflicted emotions when my dad,

who was one of the kindest people in the world who shared fresh vegetables from his huge garden and other things with so many people, making a generally unkind comment about black people. How could this wonderful man feel that way? It didn't jive with his behaviors. As an older daughter, I questioned him about it, and he revealed how his parents imprinted their beliefs about race and other things. While I understood that his parents had "carefully taught" him to be racist, I could not reconcile that with my understanding of him as a human, and certainly his belief did not imprint on me, but his kind behaviors did. This made a huge impression on me, especially as I reared my own children, how attitudes have long-reaching effects.

Jesus is teaching attitudes, here one of acceptance of people without regard to age, size, clothing, wealth, skin, accent, ethnicity, or other physical trappings. Living in the world we do, this teaching impacts me, making me question my own attitudes.

[^]<https://interestingliterature.com/2018/01/a-short-analysis-of-emily-dickinsons-the-childs-faith-is-new/>

^{*}<https://genius.com/Richard-rodgers-youve-got-to-be-carefully-taught-lyrics>

^{**}<http://marigold.chicousd.org/subsites/Laura-Holman/Children-Learn-What-They-Live---A-Poem/index.html>

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