



Daily Meditations

June 28 - July 3, 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

PROPER 8:

O Almighty God, who hast built thy Church upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone: Grant us so to be joined together in unity of spirit by their doctrine, that we may be made an holy temple acceptable unto thee; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

A Forward Look into Eternity

Monday, June 28, 2021

Acts 7:44-8:1a

"Which of the prophets did your ancestors not persecute?"

Stephen calls the religious leadership uncircumcised, spiritually genetic matches of their godless, prophet-killing forefathers and, for some reason, they get their hackles up. Their first response was an expected teeth-gnashing, but that inevitably led to their fulfilling Stephen's own prophecy via mob murder.

While the mob was enraged and defensive, Stephen was not. He saw something that anesthetized, encouraged, and empowered him while the temple (church) folks stoned him to death. He saw the heavens open up, revealing Jesus standing at the right hand of God. He saw a forward look into eternity while suffering the consequences of a backward-looking people repeating their history of hate. Moreover, when Stephen saw Jesus, he did a very Jesus thing and interceded on their behalf, "Lord, do not charge them with this sin."

Standing at the scene was Saul, the first and worst version of St. Paul, whose mission in life was to make life a living hell for the followers of Christ. Later, he too would see visions of our eternal future, and it was sufficient to abandon the

cares of now for the glory of then.

If you are not familiar with Arthur Malcolm Stace, I encourage you to read his story on Wikipedia. After a radical conversion to faith, he would write "Eternity" at unexpected, serendipitous locations around Sydney, Australia. It is estimated he wrote over a half-million times, earning him the moniker *Mr. Eternity* and an exhibit in the National Museum of Australia, honoring his mission.

Screaming Vile Spirits

Tuesday, June 29, 2021

Acts 8:1-13

"Devout men buried Stephen and made a loud lament for him."

Any Vegas fans in the house today? If so, you have probably been to a magic show: Penn and Teller, David Copperfield or even Siegfried and Roy back in the day. You have also likely seen a few vile spirits screaming out of some pilgrims on the Vegas Strip. It happens.

I, for one, don't forget these "supernatural" or paranormal diversions from my ruts and rituals. They're weird, and they force me to think uncomfortably long on matters I settled quite comfortably a long time ago. I cannot ignore the call to reevaluate what I accept as normal, predictable, and under my control.

Such was the case for Simon the Sorcerer. He was the headline act on the proverbial Samaritan Strip (vv.9-11), having wowed the crowds for years. But when he saw the power of God working through Philip, he exchanged his shell game and Three-Card Monte bit for the real deal: miracles, signs, wonders, and lives changed for the Kingdom of God in the name of Jesus.

I wonder what amazing gimmicks, tricks, and illusions I perpetuate for self-aggrandizement. How would my life and ministry be more authentic if I exchanged my personal magic act for the reality of the Holy Spirit's power?

The Real Currency for Trade

Wednesday, June 30, 2021

Acts 8:14-25

"Repent of this wickedness of yours and pray to the Lord that, if possible, your intention may be forgiven."

The signs and wonders in Samaria got the A-Teams's attention! Peter and John rolled down from Jerusalem to complete new believers' baptisms and impart the Holy Spirit by laying on hands. The Gospel was new and fresh unlike today where we have clearly defined parameters to keep Him from acting out or embarrassing the visitors (sarcasm intended).

God was blowing up religion, normal, establishment, the natural order, everything.

Then Simon, the Former Sorcerer's flesh, rose up and cried, "How much you want for that power? I'm prepared to make an offer." Which was swiftly met with an apostolic response of, "Repent or die."

The structure of the response is direct and sharply piercing.

- You thought you could buy off God.
- Your heart is not right in God's sight.
- Repent of your wickedness.
- You are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity.

The self-reflective application of this text is a layup. God is always merciful and loves His children's trusting reliance of Him for every good thing in this life. But manipulation? No.

The only currency in which He trades is my surrender. The pretense of my alternate economy that barter's "my" money, emotions will, plans, ambitions, and fiefdom in exchange for a piece of God is frightfully pervasive. Withholding bargaining chips from God is foolish when categorical surrender would have been easier, and easily better.

Luke 11:9-13 is a relevant read, coincidentally, written by the same Luke who wrote Acts. The irony of Simon's purchase offer is that the Spirit is free to those who ask.

Some Bizarre Word

Thursday, July 1, 2021

Acts 8:26-40

"Do you understand what you are reading?"

We might as well say this from the get-go. To the unbeliever, this is some bizarre Word. To those of us who believe, we should remember that this is more than a Vacation Bible School tale; this is still some bizarre Word. I mean this respectfully as a reality gong that while familiar to us, the Kingdom of God is NOT a natural, mundane, predictable appointment in our day planners or Google calendars. God creates diversions and divine appointments for His purposes.

An angel appears to Philip, instructing him to start walking until he overtakes the chariot of a eunuch who is the Secretary of the Treasury of Ethiopia. The eunuch was reading Isaiah but questioned if the author was referring to himself or to a future messiah. Philip preaches Jesus to him and since a pond is convenient nearby, they hop in and baptize the high-ranking government official. Upon emergence from the baptismal waters, Philip is teleported to another city (his body vanishes from the baptistry and he pops into another city miles away). The Ethiopian guy is joyful. The End.

Seriously, this is the stuff of Star Trek, isn't it?

The angle of this short story that gets my attention, though, is the breadth of realities spanned and unified. In this handful of verses, the Spirit's power and freedom span race, nationalism, economic status, Old and New Testaments, space and time. What else can you identify?

More importantly, what is the impossible gap the Spirit wants to traverse in your life and mine?

Come-to-Jesus Meeting

Friday, July 2, 2021

Acts 9:1-9

"On his journey, as he was nearing Damascus, a light from the sky suddenly flashed around him."

With all the salvation, baptizing, happy Ethiopians, joyful Samaritans, teleportations, and screaming demons, you would think Paul would RSVP to the Gospel party posthaste. Nope. There is always one who needs advanced invitation, interrogation, and instructional methods.

God's all-consuming, infinite lumens of interrogation take Saul down for a literal come-to-Jesus meeting. Of all the things Jesus could have said, He chooses a really vulnerable question, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?"

Two observations here:

First, the indirect object of Jesus' question overtly equates believers with the body of Christ. Saul was not only persecuting Christians, he was persecuting Christ. I do the same when words and deeds harm another believer (or anyone).

Second, Jesus renders no verdict or sentence on Paul's implied response or lack thereof. In fact, the apostles were much more threatening of Simon the Sorcerer's Ebay bid for the Holy Spirit's power than was Jesus toward Saul's outright hostility. Why this is so could be a valuable thought exercise. Possibly, the real enemy is not the openly hostile unbeliever but the insider charlatan.

Verse 5 is the most subtly powerful revelation: Resisting God makes life hard.

Why would you do that?

I think I've found my new mantra!

Calling the Transformed and the Obedient *Saturday, July 3, 2021*

Acts 9:10-19a

"He answered, 'Here I am, Lord.'"

In the shocking conclusions to Saul's conversion, a new character is introduced: Ananias. Continuing yesterday's devotional theme, God is spanning unbelievers and believers, closing the gaps to reconcile those who would kill to squelch the Gospel with those who would die for it.

Since our last chat, Saul is now a praying man. Christ's revelation to him included a vision of a man named Ananias, who wisely double-checked names, addresses, and references to ensure the Lord had the right Saul of Tarsus. He did and to Ananias' credit, he obeyed God's uncomfortable and disquieting directive, resulting in shed scales, more Spirit, another baptism, and dinner.

In order for this "blessed are the peacemakers" beatitude moment to happen, there had to be both a transformed Saul and an obedient Ananias. Neither person arrives at this grateful conclusion apart from both the sovereignty and revelation of God.

Ananias didn't coerce Saul to change; God had already done that. Nor did Ananias have to teach or commission Saul; God had already authored Saul's mission.

Which character in this story have we been? It is not unthinkable that we

played both roles: blindingly and abruptly redirected sinner and/or spiritually nudged saint. Both were led by God to fulfill His purposes. Whichever we are, let us pray for the receptivity to hear the Spirit and the courage to obey. It could change the world.

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