



Daily Meditations

January 3-9, 2021

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: 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.

COLLECT: 2nd Sunday after Christmas Day

O God, who wonderfully created, and yet more wonderfully restored, the dignity of human nature: Grant that we may share the divine life of him who humbled himself to share our humanity, your Son Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.
Amen.

What it Comes Down To

Sunday, January 3, 2021

John 6:41-47

The Jews murmured about him because he said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven," and they said, "Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph? Do we not know his father and mother?..."

In this scene, among many others involving Jesus' confrontations with Jewish leaders, he and they are talking past each other. They always tend to take what He says literally, while Jesus tends to speak metaphorically. So, the Jews simply—or deliberately—misunderstand what Jesus is talking about most of the time and especially here. These few verses encapsulate a pretty sizeable chunk of what Jesus was all about, particularly when he says that those who believe will have eternal life. So, it comes down to a matter of faith. Faith is a matter of belief without physical evidence or concrete proof. How do we know something is true if we can't see it? But observation alone is not enough when it comes to apprehending the truth. Consider the flat-earthers, as primitive in their understanding of reality as the Jewish leaders. Consider those who flatly deny that humans ever set foot on the moon, instead arguing that NASA staged the whole thing in Area 52. Faith demands a letting go of the traditional instruments of evaluating what's true and real and what isn't. Yet not just in these verses but in many others (think about Doubting Thomas) Jesus is operating on a different plane of reality than those around him. Verse 47 here is, of course, controversial, because Jesus states that whoever believes shall have eternal life. And that is one criterion. But is it the only one?

In multiple other settings, we learn that faith or belief alone is not enough. Stay tuned.

It's Time to Repeat Myself (Again)

Monday, January 4, 2021

John 14:6-14

"Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me?"

And so here we are at the heart of the matter. The disciples, like the Jewish leaders mentioned above, are clueless. Thomas and Philip are named as specifically questioning what Jesus is up to and where he plans to go. And Jesus repeats himself in explaining his relationship with God and with men and women. If you know me, he says, then you know the Father. Now, here's the clencher, or as Paul Harvey used to say, here's the rest of the story. Jesus gets specific: "The Father who dwells in me is doing his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else, believe because of the works themselves." Furthermore, since physical evidence is required, Jesus continues: "Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever believes in me will do the works that I do, and will do greater ones than these because I am going to the Father." There is much work to be done. We have the works of Jesus as an example. What keeps me from rolling up my sleeves and getting right to it? More than ever before, I can see the poor, the hungry, those devastated by disease and disaster. What are we called to do?

Two-way Gift

Tuesday, January 5, 2021

John 15:1-6

"I am the vine, you are the branches."

One day when I was heading home from San Marcos, I stopped by the HEB to pick up eggs and milk and hurried to the checkout line intended to be used by customers with 10 or fewer items. As I waited, people, many of them students, began queuing up behind me. Something had slowed or brought to a complete stop the checkout process ahead of me. I quickly saw that the problem was an elderly woman in a riding cart. After watching for a few minutes, it became apparent that she had a limited amount of money to spend and had too many items in her cart, and the checkout clerk had run all of them through the scanner, but the woman didn't have enough cash or credit to pay the total. She was now in the process of having the clerk remove each item from the checkout list until she had reached the dollar amount she could afford. A man in the line saw the same scene, and as the students muttered and grumbled behind us he told the clerk to put the items back into the system, all of them, "I'll pay for them," he said. "Let her have them all." As he left the store, the woman was waiting and reached out to thank him, and he turned to her with a smile and said, "No worries, ma'am. Have a great weekend."

To Make Things Right

Wednesday, January 6, 2021

Matthew 12:14-21

But the Pharisees went out and took counsel against him to put him to death. When Jesus realized this, he withdrew from that place.

Jesus withdrew, but he did not stop doing good works. He went right ahead and healed all those who approached him. But, he goes even further down the path toward opening his spirit to everyone and extends his hand not just to Jews but also to Gentiles. These seem to be pivotal passages. Until now Jesus has been viewed by Jews and probably by Roman authorities as a cult figure. By including Gentiles in his audience or circle, he has doubled his threat to the powers-that-be. Moreover, he makes it clear that this and other matters he is pursuing are about ensuring that justice is done. Justice means to make things right. In church, we often hear one or another version of what that looks like at ground level, and the Catholic Church has laid it out pretty succinctly if not all-inclusively: They use the term "corporal works of mercy:" Feed the hungry. Give drink to the thirsty. Clothe the naked. Shelter the homeless. Visit those in prison. Comfort the sick. Bury the dead. Much more can be involved these days as many Christians undo what is unjust. And there is much to be done. Black lives have to matter. The wealth of the nation cannot be concentrated in the top 1 percent. The unquestioned state of killing prisoners cannot be allowed to go on. Women have to be respected and lifted up. When I was younger, we were taught a song that included this statement: "They will know we are Christians by our love by our love. Yes, they'll know we are Christians by our love."

When To Believe or not to Believe

Thursday, January 7, 2021

John 2:1-11

When the wine ran short, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine."

Turning water into wine at a wedding constitutes the first of many signs designed by Jesus to show his disciples, among others, that he was who he said he was. This is the most trivial of all the signs but follows some sort of chronology important to Jesus' mission. And yet in verse 11, we are told that because of this his disciples began to believe in him. Wow. A little magic-like trick, and the scales fall from the eyes of his followers. Truly, those were much less complicated times than we confront in today's world. But, skepticism contains a hard and sometimes impenetrable component. Haven't some of us failed to be moved by even overwhelming evidence? Global warming comes to mind. It's irrefutable, and yet so many refuse to acknowledge its inevitable destructive force. How about this business about Hillary Clinton and other crafty power-mongers running an international ring of child abductors and molesters a theory so ridiculous it's laughable, and yet a man carried a weapon and shot up a pizza parlor because he believed. Facts these days are twisted to fit narratives that promote the powerful or their wannabes. If we are to be stewards of the faith and stewards of the values that underpin our democracy, shouldn't we find ways not to be tricked and deceived so that we may, like the disciples, begin to believe in Him and what He stood for?

How to Climb Out of the Silo

Friday, January 8, 2021

John 4:46-54

The father realized that just at that time Jesus had said to him, "Your son will live," and he and his household came to believe.

The second sign in the series related by the writers of the book of John involves Jesus' healing of the son of a royal official. The most interesting phrase in this story is, "Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will not believe." Now I ponder why people don't believe unless they have seen signs and wonders, encountering then the next step in Jesus' quest for bringing the world fully awake to his message and his mission. Jesus was clearly frustrated, and it is certainly a matter of consternation to see how this works out 2,000 years later. We have learned over the millennia that even seeing is **not** believing. Why don't people believe even when they see? When I was teaching journalism and editing publications, I always cautioned my reporters to be skeptical when interviewing eye-witnesses. I would not publish a story with just a single witness quoted. Trial lawyers understand how unreliable eye-witnesses are. And the law itself requires that in criminal cases the burden of proof falls on prosecutors, and jurors must make decisions about guilt or innocence on whether the state has proven its case beyond a reasonable doubt. Seeing clearly today is a matter of overcoming a great many obstacles thanks to social media, mass media, and our tendency to find safety in our own comfortable silos, shutting out anything that might challenge or overturn our preconceived ideas. How do we break out? First, we have to want to do so.

Why Not?

Saturday, January 9, 2021

John 5:1-15

Immediately, the man took up his mat and walked.

This is another of the signs, but for whom it is intended I'm uncertain. There is no mention of the disciples being present. Jesus heals this man who had been sick for 38 years, and tells him to go sin no more, and that's that. Why, with no witnesses present, would Jesus have bothered? Why not? Jesus' acts of mercy were not simply publicity stunts. He healed because he could. It was within his power. At my age, I look back on all the times when I had the power to help someone. In some instances, I did what I could. In others, I didn't, and in hindsight I can't tell you why. Did I judge them as undeserving? Did I suspect their motives? Did I feel as though I would be enabling bad behavior? My parents taught me well. I remember in those early years after the end of World War II walking on the sidewalk in front of fancy stores in downtown Amarillo. Every Saturday at one particular store, a man *with one leg* would sit. Just in front of him he would place a tin cup filled with No. 2 pencils and a tin cup he hoped people would fill with change. My dad would always give me a quarter to drop into the cup. In so many instances, I have simply forgot what Jesus taught: I'm not the judge. My job is to love my neighbor. And that's not to mention the overwhelming emphasis in this country on the acquisition of stuff and power. It brings to mind one part of a speech by the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. in 1967. He said, "that if we are to get on the right side of the world revolution, we...must undergo a radical revolution of values. We must rapidly begin...the shift from a thing-oriented society to a person-oriented society." Amen.

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