



Daily Meditations

September 6-11, 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 18:

Grant us, O Lord, to trust in you with all our hearts, for, as you always resist the proud who confide in their own strength, so you never forsake those who make their boast of your mercy; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

He Who is the Anti-Machiavelli

Monday, September 6, 2021

Philippians 1:1-11

"And this is my prayer: that your love may increase ever more in knowledge and every kind of perception, to discern what is of value..." - The Catholic Bible

If we are filled with love, what do we value? From the perspective of a parent and grandparent, I have worked largely without a good grip on what I was doing to instill in my children and grandchildren the sensibility and wits necessary for them to come to value what I value. In the best of all worlds, communities operate in the same way through educational opportunities required and then offered and through other services. And, in fact, that's what church is all about – identifying what's valuable and encouraging – sometimes coercing when necessary – those around us in country, community, church family to value the same things so as to preserve what's important, including good order, and to cultivate those values for the future. A great many conflicts would be avoided if we valued that which would result in loving relationships. In this regard, Paul is the anti-Machiavelli (that philosopher most cherished by princes bound to create a world where fear and strife are the only common elements in "community.") As usual, Paul is addressing the importance of a community based, not on greed and treachery, but on mutual respect. In counseling the Philippians, Paul is also counseling us on how to create a Christ-centered world, lifting love to its rightful place in the hierarchy of values. And

we don't have to wonder what love is; he tells us that in a letter to the Corinthians.

The Impact of Knowledge

Tuesday, September 7, 2021

Philippians 1:12-30

"Yours is the same struggle as you saw in me and now hear about me." - The Catholic Bible

Alas, we are all in this together. Will we work together? After all, we live in the Light of Christ, and we have been made aware of what that entails and requires of us. As Paul writes, "For to you has been granted, for the sake of Christ, not only to believe in him but also to suffer for him." Would our lives be better if we had never heard of Jesus Christ?

I have an abiding interest in anthropology. As a college student, I was drawn to the story of Ishi, the subject of a book called: *Ishi in Two Worlds: A Biography of the Last Wild Indian in North America* by Theodora Koreber. Ishi suddenly appears in 1911, the last of his tribe. He became a specimen to be examined and put on display. In a sense, Ishi represented the many thousands of Native Americans who did and did not survive the genocide happily carried out by white Europeans in pursuit of so-called Manifest Destiny. When you read of Ishi's life in the white world, you wonder again and again if, in fact, his life was better – from his point of view, not ours. Did he feel saved or damned? Gaining knowledge can have an impact.

Knowledge of Christ also has consequences, Paul says, and suffering can be part of it, something we come to understand when we read of the early Christian martyrs, for example. Knowledge once gained cannot be forgotten or conveniently "placed" somewhere out of mind. Perhaps that's why so many modern Americans invent a Christ they can live with, one who makes them comfortable in their wealth and oh so prideful.

For the Interest of All

Wednesday, September 8, 2021

Philippians 2:1-11

"Do nothing out of selfishness, humbly regard others as more important than yourselves, each looking out not for his own interests, but [also] everyone for those of others." - The Catholic Bible

So, that's the heart of the matter right there. We might cut that sentence out and paste it into some modern contexts:

- What does this say about refusing to get vaccinated against a deadly virus?
- What does it say about refusing to wear a mask to protect society against a deadly virus?
- What about the accumulation of wealth stored up by one-tenth of one percent of Americans while so many around the world go without adequate food and shelter?
- What about fighting wars that result in thousands of deaths and the

enrichment only of those who sell arms that have no redeeming social value?

- What about active resistance to any reasonable solutions to the imminent collapse of the world's climate?

This kind of statement by Paul provides underpinning for the more universally acknowledged Golden Rule, now actively rejected by so many in today's America.

When You Need the Light

Thursday, September 9, 2021

Philippians 2:12-30

"Do everything without grumbling or questioning, that you may be blameless and innocent children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine like lights in the world..." - The Catholic Bible

At a minimum, Paul counsels these Christians to act righteously within the community and not outside of it. If we are to be the light in a dark world, what does that mean? "Light," I think, means more than leavening. It means illuminating, providing a guiding presence that can be seen and, most of all perhaps, chasing away that which lurks and thrives in dark shadows and at 3 o'clock in the morning when nothing good is around and about. Several years ago, my wife and I enjoyed watching Shark Tank, and one memorable segment included a pitch for venture capital from two friends who had gone to business school together and had this idea they thought could change entire swaths of places where women and children had to shiver and fret in the darkness because they lacked a simple light or lantern. These two entrepreneurs had come up with a plastic, inflatable solar-powered light that could be placed in a tent after dark. A couple of years after seeing that Shark Tank episode, I found Luci EMERG inflatable, solar-powered lights, and I bought two of them with the idea they might come in handy but also with the idea that I would be helping out these two women and multitudes elsewhere. In February, we had *Snowmeggedon* here in the Wimberley Valley, and our home did not have electricity for five days—not even rolling blackouts. I actually never expected I'd be in a situation where I'd need the Luci EMERG solar-powered lights. I was certainly glad I had them.

If it is Legal, is it Right?

Friday, September 10, 2021

Philippians 3:1-6

"...in zeal, I persecuted the church, in righteousness based on the law I was blameless..." - The Catholic Bible

Just because something is legal doesn't mean it's right. Our tax laws provide a most irritating example, as does the way the "law" sometimes treats black boys and men. The institution of slavery casts the longest and largest shadow even on modern times in America. Even mainstream churches sanctified slavery in the 1800s, and the establishment of a Jim Crow legal system was propped up by the good folks who sat so piously in their pews at places of worship all across this country even into this day and age. I'm proud to say that in recent decades, Episcopalians have come together to make amends, to make things right, to promise to do better now and in the future.

We still must, as Paul avers, beware the zealot who claims for himself or herself the mantle of God or, equally as frightening, the wielder of a light saber for the Dark Side. By keeping our hearts and minds on what it is we should value, we can defeat the dark.

And, perhaps you recall these verses from a song written and played by Bob Dylan many years ago called "With God on Our Side:"

*But now we got weapons
Of chemical dust
If fire them, we're forced to
Then fire them, we must
One push of the button
And a shot the world-wide
And you never ask questions
When God's on your side*

*Through many a dark hour
I've been thinking about this
That Jesus Christ was
Betrayed by a kiss
But I can't think for you
You'll have to decide
Whether Judas Iscariot
Had God on his side*

*So now I'm leavin'
I'm weary as hell
The confusion I'm feelin'
Ain't no tongue can tell
The words fill my head
And fall to the floor
That if God's on our side
He'll stop the next war*

Citizen Requirements

Saturday, September 11, 2021

Philippians 3:17-4:7

"Their minds are occupied with earthly things." - The Catholic Bible

"They" are active nonbelievers, at worst persecutors like the Paul before he took the road to Damascus. While we occupy space among a certain people at a certain period of time, our goal, according to Paul, is to be our destiny—citizens of Heaven with God and Christ. In various letters, Paul advises about what citizenship requires, which is merely love. (See 1 Cor. Chapter 13) If we really believed Paul's radical statements about how we should live, what would America look like? Many a writer of utopian literature has taken a swipe at that. At several points in our country's history we even had benefactors who established villages in rural areas to practice community building in a Christ-like manner. Because we were and are mere mortals, then have failed and will likely continue to fail because the standard increasingly seems beyond our capabilities to attain. And then there's indifference. Today, interestingly enough, dystopian literature is all the rage, something that has English teachers and librarians scratching their heads just as their antecedents did

when confronted during bubble-gum AM radio days by "The Eve of Destruction" by Barry McGuire. It's worth listening to again.

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