

Sunday, September 2

Matthew 5:1-12 *“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.”* (vv.3-4 RSV)

When I was growing up, I was taught to shoot for the moon even if you hit a cabbage. What I found later was the moon is not mine, and not much would fit into my kingdom of self. No matter how hard I tried, I could not get my family to get it straight the way I wanted it.

When I later became aware that the kingdom of God is *not* the kingdom of self, I had to reevaluate. The things I thought I wanted were not the things I wanted. I thought I wanted them until I had them in hand.

God knows what I really want and opens the door for me when I am willing to accept what He is trying to give me. When I am willing to recognize my own emptiness, He fills me up with His life; and I can know what it is know the King and walk with Him in His kingdom as we pray as He taught us: “Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”

When I come to Him with my need, He meets it with His grace, and I am the blessed one of whom He speaks.

Job 11:1-9, 13-20; Psalms 148, 149, 150; Revelation 5:1-14

Monday, September 3

John 8:21-32 *Jesus then said to the Jews who had believed in him, “If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.”* (vv.31-32)

When I first started looking into the Christian Faith as a truly viable alternative to the world’s values and goals, I followed two or three professionals whom I considered wise in the faith. Each of them had a viewpoint, but they did not agree on some of the details that interested me, so I decided to try Jesus.

When I began to read his teaching, I began to see another dimension to the Christian Faith. Jesus is real and he is here to be known. That decision demanded that I learn prayer as a dialog and not just talking to him. When he began to speak to me, I found that I had to try out what he told me to see if it was truth or just nice thinking.

My experience at that point brought me into a knowledge of the Lord that I had not had before, and I began to come to know him as he talked with me. I have come to believe that he is both practical and truthful, and that he is making me free as I seek his will and walk it out with him.

Tuesday, September 4

John 8:33-47 *Jesus answered them, “Truly, truly, I say unto you every one who commits sin is a slave to sin.”* (v.34)

Anyone who has realized the experience of habitual sin knows the meaning of these words and knows that they are true. As one who has spent time trying to break bad habits, and failed to be able to do so in my own strength, the promise of Jesus that I will be set free when I know the truth and walk it out with him is almost beyond belief—until we try it.

For me it has meant freedom from bondage to tobacco, alcohol, and foul language—to mention a few. Now, if he will just set me free from putting off working on things and set me free to do them when he gives them to me to do. As I struggle to become his disciple, he struggles with me to make me what he wants me to be.

Job 12:1, 13:3-17, 21-27; Psalms 26, 28; Acts 12:1-17

Wednesday, September 5

John 8:47-59 *“He who is of God hears the words of God; the reason you do not hear them is because you are not of God.”* (v.47)

I remember when quoting Scripture was a game to prove who was the holiest. The focus of the game was on the others as they tried to out-quote the rest and be declared the wisest, holiest, and proudest.

When I began to ask what the Scripture was all about, there were some new thoughts that came to bear. Why bother to mess with Scripture? Leave it alone and let's get on about real life. But something else began to become obvious. If the world depends on human intellect to work out its problem, we are in deep trouble.

If God can be known, He is the *only* hope I can see. It was as I sought to come to know God that His word came to me as Light in the darkness of the world. I found that I must add prayer to the Scripture, and give God an opportunity to speak to me. Then I was able to hear His word.

Job 12:1, 14:1-22; Psalm 38; Acts 12:18-25

Thursday, September 6

John 9:1-17 *As he passed by, he saw a man blind from his birth. And his disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” Jesus answered. “It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be made manifest in him. We must work the works of him who sent me, while it is day; night comes, when no one can work.”* (vv.1-4)

There are many who think with the mind of the disciples before Jesus opened their eyes. What did someone do wrong that made God punish

them with some ailment? I think sometimes God allows someone to get sick in order for them to come to Him and let Him touch them with His healing love.

I can honestly say that I am thankful for my colon cancer in 1987. It was discovered just before my two-month sabbatical that I had planned and arranged. The surgery fell in the middle of the first month, and I was back on the job at the end of the second month.

The revelation I received in reading Bernie Segal's *Love Medicine and Miracles* and listening to some Jim Glennon tapes, taught me to find and pray for the stress at the root of the cancer, and it has been productive in ministry to others with cancer. I have seen it as something that God used to teach me something that I have been able to use in helping others.

Job 16:16-22, 17:1, 13-16; Psalm 37:1-18; Acts 13:1-12

Friday, September 7

John 9:18-41 *Jesus said, "For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may become blind." Some of the Pharisees near him heard this, and they said to him, "Are we also blind?" Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would have no guilt; but now that you say, 'We see,' your guilt remains."* (vv.39-41)

One of the greatest problems of the Church through the ages has been the rise of individuals who will come up with some idea that is different from the rest of the Body and draw people away to practice the faith their way. The result has been fragmentation.

When we turn away from prayer to argument, we set ourselves up to be in the same class with the Pharisees: "We know the truth. You had better straighten up."

It seems to me that we are called to pray instead, "Lord, show us Your will in all of this confusion. Make it clear to all of us so that we might be led into all truth and find the unity that we need to show the world that we are Your Body, that we are one, and that You live in us and through us for the world for which You were willing to die."

Job 19:1-7, 14-27; Psalm 31; Acts 13:13-25

Saturday, September 8

John 10:1-18 *But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the gatekeeper opens; the sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice.* (vv.2-4)

I heard a story once that spoke to me about these words that I have come to see as important. A tour guide in the Middle East shared with his

group that shepherds in that area do not drive the sheep or use sheep dogs to drive them. They lead the sheep and the sheep follow.

As they passed through a small town, one of the group saw someone driving sheep up the street, and called it to the guide's attention, "I thought you said the shepherds here lead the sheep. That one is driving his sheep." The tour guide looked and replied, "Oh, that's not the shepherd. He's the butcher."

Jesus has come to lead those of us who know his voice and are willing to follow where he leads. He leaves that decision up to us.

Job 22:1-4, 21—23:7; Psalms 30, 32; Acts 13:26-43

by Al Durrance

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Sunday, September 9

Psalm 98 *Sing a new song to the LORD, for he has done wonderful deeds. His right hand has won a mighty victory; his holy arm has shown his saving power.* (v.1 NLT)

Today's readings all weave a powerful message of our life in God. From Job's struggles to Jesus teaching his people their identity as "salt and light" (Matthew 5:13-14), and "the great choir" singing a "new song in front of the throne of God" (Revelation 14:3).

The words of Psalm 63 are like a bell ringing out the longing of David as he "earnestly searches" and "thirsts." David says, "my whole body longs for you" (v.1). That longing vibrates into the recognition that "The ends of the earth have seen the victory of our God" (Psalm 98:3b).

Each day I can begin with the expectation of the wonderful things He will highlight for me. Each evening I can end with thanksgiving for all the ways He has shown His love and power.

Job 25:1-6, 27:1-6; Psalm 63; Revelation 14:1-7, 13; Mathew 5:13-20

Monday, September 10

John 10:19-30 *"My sheep listen to my voice; I know them and they follow me."* (v.27)

Two key words in life, both spiritual and secular—listen and follow. The Jews had doubts. Was Jesus really the long-awaited Messiah? They questioned Jesus. Jesus said, "I have already told you, and you don't believe me. The proof is the work I do in my Father's name" (v.25).

Over two thousand years later, some still question if Jesus is the Messiah? Or even more basically, is Jesus real, a myth, or just a teacher? In these days, we have the advantage of many records of testimonies of witnesses—a book full of them, in fact! John, an eye witness, shares his experiences at the side of Jesus. John heard Jesus say, "The proof is the work I do in my Father's name." John watched him work and recorded, that we might know who Jesus is.

It's a decision to be made by each of us—to listen to Jesus' voice, follow him, and be one of his flock.

Job 32:1-10, 19—33:1, 19-28; Psalms 41, 52; Acts 13:44-52

Tuesday, September 11

Job 29:1-20 *“When I was in my prime, God’s friendship was felt in my home.”* (v.4)

What an experience Job had to share! Could that be true of my home? What might that look and feel like? I look around my home. I do see evidence of God on my shelves and walls—Bibles, devotionals, a cross, a framed poster listing the names of God. Those are items that can be seen, but what is “felt” of “God’s friendship” when a friend, family member, or even a stranger visits my home?

What would God’s friendship feel like in one’s home? A glad to see you smile? A warm word of welcome? A gentle touch? Willingness to take the time for a guest—time to listen, to pray?

Lord, may Your friendship be felt in my home! Lead me, heal me, teach me that I may be Your vessel, a conduit for Your love and friendship.

Psalm 45; Acts 14:1-18; John 10:31-42

Wednesday, September 12

Psalm 119:49-72 *I reflect at night on who you are, O LORD.* (v.55a)

Sometimes sleep comes slowly at night! I’ve found that reflecting on who God is provides that precious connection with Him—separating me from the tasks of the day. In the evening after dinner and all the cleanup involved is over—and perhaps an hour of TV—I love to settle in my special resting/prayer chair and reflect on “who you are, O LORD.” I sit sorting through the day, giving thanks, asking for truth and forgiveness, and reflecting on Who He is—a blessed way to end the day and head towards rest.

Who is He? Who is He to me? He is: Father, Almighty, Always There 24/7, Branch, Teacher, Healer, Cornerstone, Savior, Redeemer, Anchor. He is my Rock—firm and holding me accountable—and yet also tender, my safe place—soothing as my favorite fuzzy blanket. He is the Lamb and the Lion. The Way, the Truth, and the Life. I know He will be with me tomorrow—the Morning Star.

Job 29:1, 30:1-2, 16-31; Acts 14:19-28; John 11:1-16

Thursday, September 13

Psalm 50 *“But giving thanks is a sacrifice that truly honors me.”* (v.23a)

Giving thanks...Do we think of thanksgiving as a sacrifice? As honoring? Perhaps if we did we would recognize the weight and value of being thankful and expressing thankfulness. Giving thanks has a much deeper meaning than speaking the words, “Thank you.” It is a response—a recognition. Giving sincere thanks is an investment of time, attention, and appreciation. It is stopping a busy and perhaps self-focused life to give another person credit—in this case, the one who gives us life. We are the

receivers of such generous love and giving thanks is our part of the relationship. It is giving recognition and honor to the one who gave all.

We give our thanks to God, and we receive the joy and safety of His everlasting attending to us and the hope of His plans for our future. “For I know the plans I have for you... plans not to harm you, but to prosper you, plans of hope and a future” (Jeremiah 29:11).

Job 29:1, 31:1-23; Acts 15:1-11; John 11:17-29

Friday, September 14

John 11:30-44 *Then Jesus wept.* (v.35)

Jesus experienced the loss of a good friend. When we suffer loss like Martha and Mary did, do we believe Jesus is weeping too? Are we open to receiving his presence and comfort, knowing he suffered great pain and losses during his life on earth?

For me it is incredibly comforting and strengthening to remember and know Jesus has “been there”. He suffered as a human, like we do. He gets it. His comfort is not just a superficial pat on the shoulder of grief and fear, but a deep heart and spirit connection of empathy. We are truly not alone as we walk—and sometimes limp—through this life. Jesus weeps too!

We are so blessed to be able to open the Bible and find words to express the pain we cannot describe. As Psalm 40 teaches us, “He has given us a new song to sing, a hymn of praise to our God” (v.3). Lord, give us a new song to sing—Your song!

Job 29:1, 31:24-40; Psalms 40, 54; Acts 15:12-21

Saturday, September 15

Job 38:1-17 “*Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?*” (v.4a)

No, Lord, I wasn’t there! But now I look at Your creation with awe and gratitude. My heart overflows as I soak in the beauty, the connection, the usefulness of Your creation. I am humbled with thanksgiving. You created that beauty and storehouse around me—sustaining and giving me life. I am humbled and blessed that You, Lord, laid the Cornerstone. (v.6)

Jesus, the Cornerstone: a foundation, holding us steady, firmly supported in forgiveness and eternity, love and truth. Lord Jesus, you are indeed the Cornerstone in my life—guiding, supporting, leading. Helping me both when I need to have a steady foundation and when I must turn the corners of life.

We lose the earthly glue of our lives when change comes. Friends or family move away or pass away, finances wobble, jobs wind up or down. We age, losing the energy or heart to do what we’ve always done. Jesus, my Cornerstone, lead me. Help me turn those corners.

Psalm 55; Acts 15:22-35; John 11:45-54

by Barbara Maybee

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Sunday, September 16

Job 38:1, 18-41 *“Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?”* (v.2 NAS)

A psychology professor once said, “Prejudice is to prejudge with insufficient evidence.”

Having quoted my professor a thousand times in my life, you’d think I’d learned! Yet, as many times as I have quoted him, I have found myself guilty of this sin. I now conclude there is no cure for prejudice, only a life-long discipline.

I easily assume someone cutting in front of me in traffic is a jerk. Or, that my preferred news anchor has the story right. And I am sure I have, more often than not, jumped to the support of a friend who laments an injustice having only heard their side of the story. Never mind that jerk in traffic may have a choking baby in the back seat. Or, that my news anchor read half his copy. Or, that my dear friend overheard the wrong story.

Today’s reading is both an admonition and a source of hope. It says to Job (and to me), after you have repented of your chronic assumptions, rip that tunnel vision.

Psalms 24, 29; Revelation 18:1-8; Matthew 5:21-26

Monday, September 17

Acts 15:36—16:5 *And there occurred such a sharp disagreement that they separated from one another...* (v.39a)

In today’s reading Paul proves he is human—twice. First, he fails to forgive John-Mark. Second, he retreats to circumcising a new convert. That priests, pastors, and apostles fail, make mistakes, or steer off course is not the end of the world to me. If so, the world would have ended long ago. But it does test our faith.

In the early 80s I faced a religious institution suing a fellow Christian in court, then discriminating against Muslims while American televangelists promoted theme parks, hair styles, and money. It was all enough to create a 20-year divorce from me and the church. I’d had it. Not with God, but with the church.

Years later I recalled a wise pastor saying, “The church is going to disappoint you. I am going to disappoint you. But Christ won’t, ever. There’s a reason he is still around after 2,000 years.” I soon concluded that there is no such thing as a perfect church but, more importantly, that a lonely life in pious exile was a far emptier way to live.

Job 40:1-24; Psalms 56, 57, 58; John 11:55—12:8

Tuesday, September 18

Psalm 62 *If riches increase, do not set your heart upon them.* (v.10b)

In today's reading, I'm left wondering if there is a difference between having wealth and possessing it. On the one hand we are promised blessings through our giving (Malachi 3:10). And yet, here, we are clearly warned not to "set your heart" upon them. A fine line, indeed.

In the 1981 comedy *Arthur*, Dudley Moore plays a chronic alcoholic who is heir to a family fortune. While plans are set for him to marry a local rich girl, he falls in love with a lower income thief played by a captivating Liza Minnelli. Ultimately, he faces a sobering choice between true love and fortune. He chooses love.

In mirroring divine jealousy, Christ once urged us not to fret over shelter and clothing but to "seek first the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added unto you." Arthur ultimately got his inheritance, but not because he "set his heart" on it. On the contrary, it only came after he forfeited it first.

Job 40:1, 41:1-11; Psalm 61; Acts 16:6-15; John 12:9-19

Wednesday, September 19

Acts 16:16-24 *And she continued doing this for many days. But Paul was greatly annoyed...* (v.18a)

In today's reading, Paul is annoyed by a fortune teller continually announcing to people the apostle's anointed arrival. Paul's annoyance eventually morphed to redemption.

In high school I recall a new student being rumored a warlock and casting spells on people. As a new convert, my righteous indignation meter went through the roof. But, just as quickly, calm prevailed and I found myself praying for this "warlock".

Weeks later our prayer group met miles away from our usual place. During the meeting, in walked the warlock. I later learned he lived next door. That night he awoke on his couch being molested by his stepfather. He fled—to our meeting next door. That night the young boy accepted Christ.

I have never viewed "wicked" people quite the same ever since, whether they are witches, terrorists, or psychopaths. How many times do we read Christ calming his own disciples' religious indignation? My high school warlock profoundly reminded me that Christ came "not to judge the world but to save it."

Job 42:1-17; Psalm 72; John 12:20-26

Thursday, September 20

Job 28:1-28 “*But where can wisdom be found?*” (v.12a)

The two smartest people I have ever met in my life have one thing in common. They ask questions. I mean, like children—naïve and innocent. Ironically, unlike some less intelligent people I know who never ask questions because they seem to know everything!

The story of Job is that of a classic skeptic in which relentless miseries finally build a case for inner resentment, exhaustion, and cynicism. Later, through what appears a long, drawn-out epiphany, Job finally concludes wisdom can be found—in the fear of the Lord.

Job’s epiphany reminds me of those two smart men I know and of Samuel Coleridge’s “willing suspension of disbelief” that is characteristic in drama, but also in discovery.

When things go perpetually wrong for me, can I swallow my pride? Can I remain childlike amidst my anger? Can I forfeit my intellectual dignity to “the fear of the Lord” in order to find the wisdom I’m grasping for? Job, another smart man and one far more battered and bruised than I have yet to be, seemed to think so.

Psalms 70, 71; Acts 16:25-40; John 12:27-36a

Friday, September 21

Psalms 69 *What I did not steal, I then have to restore.* (v.4c)

Ever co-sign a loan and then get stuck with it? During my prodigal-son years, I befriended someone who had more laughter in his DNA than anyone I knew. His family was the same. It was a good time in my life, initially. But, when he defaulted on a loan I co-signed, I was furious. To save my credit, I paid it off. When my friend did not repay the loan, I haunted his family and friends. When he moved I sent public court documents to potential employers, successfully ruining his reputation. Revenge began to steal my soul. I felt myself becoming ugly inside.

Victor Hugo’s *Les Miserable* helped turn the tide for me. In those years I had forgotten about forgiveness, but could only lament my injustice like today’s reading. Revenge is frightening. It is more powerful and wicked than I imagined. It destroyed my soul and my friendships. Christ’s forgiveness, like the priest’s in *Les Miserable*, is just the opposite. It heals, it restores, and it promotes life. I am still searching for my old friend, to ask his forgiveness.

Esther 1:1-4, 10-19; Acts 17:1-15; John 12:36b-43

Saturday, September 22

Esther 2:5-8, 15-23 *Now when the turn of Esther...came to go to the king, she did not request anything...* (v.15)

In today's reading, Esther was given the option to use adornments before presenting herself to the king. She chose to present herself just as she was. The king ultimately picked her to be queen.

Esther's simple act spoke volumes. It spoke of humility, sacrifice, forsaking control, exhibiting profound confidence while portraying absolutely none. In short, she was genuine. We instinctively know that God is the one person we cannot approach in pretense. It can be both the hardest and easiest thing to do.

Unlike Esther, Paul now tells us to "put on the new man." My struggle is how do I put on that new man without becoming a Pharisee? What do I do when that new man makes me feel enlightened, or superior? How do I remain, like Ester, genuine and unadorned before God?

I have only one choice but to cling to grace and the Spirit of Truth. For I am still just a Gentile, a son of a Muslim, and a gay man to boot who, like Ester, found grace in the eyes of another King.

Psalms 75, 76; Acts 17:16-34; John 12:44-50

by William Bacon

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Sunday, September 23

Psalm 93 *God is King, robed and ruling, God is robed and surging with strength. And yes, the world is firm, immovable, Your throne ever firm—you're Eternal!* (vv.1-2 The Message)

Our God is a majestic King! Not like an earthly king, flawed and broken. Our King isn't robed in cloth but in light and power. He doesn't come and go with popularity or wars. He is a forever King that chooses you and me to inherit all His wealth, power, and property. "He will give us the nations as an inheritance" (Psalm 2:8). He shares His throne with us as we rule and reign with Him. The wonder in the truth of His promises makes me stand and honor Him. I want to make Him known to everyone I encounter.

How then can I choose to live as a disinherited pauper, powerless and afraid? How can I worry that it might be politically incorrect to tell another that God loves them? I encourage you to meditate on the promise of James 1:25 as a response to those questions.

Lord, you are mightier than any problem, situation, or challenge that we face. Father God, please bless us with strength and courage.

Esther 3:1—4:3; Psalm 96; James 1:19-27; Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18

Monday, September 24

Acts 18:1-11 *One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision and told him, "Don't be afraid! Speak out! Don't be silent! For I am with you, and no one will attack and harm you, for many people in this city belong to me." So Paul stayed there for the next year and a half, teaching the word of God.* (vv.9-11 NLT)

In this passage from Acts, the Holy Spirit is directing the apostle Paul and, of course, the church in Corinth. Isn't it interesting how often God tells us, "Don't be afraid!" Paul knew that Crispus, the leader of the synagogue, and his family were also believers, and yet he was afraid. Fear is an emotion that robs us of peace, joy, and the awareness that the Holy Spirit is with us all the time. We are never alone! So, what do we do with that fear? Let's lay it at the foot of the cross where it belongs.

Dear Holy Spirit, who are you leading me to talk to? Who needs to hear the story of the saving power of Jesus Christ today? There is nothing we can do on our own, so we are trusting in you to direct our path.

Esther 4:4-17; Psalm 80; Luke 1:1-14, 3:1-14

Tuesday, September 25

Esther 5:1-14 *Esther replied, “My petition and my request is this: If the king regards me with favor and if it pleases the king to grant my petition and fulfill my request, let the king and Haman come tomorrow to the banquet I will prepare for them. Then I will answer the king’s question.”* (vv.7-8 NIV)

Favor is something that is done or granted out of goodwill, not from justice or demand. Esther was in no position to do anything but hope for favor. In our culture it is very common to believe that we must earn everything, and sometimes this includes the belief that we must earn our own salvation. If we perform enough religious acts or serve enough, we will be good enough to be saved. That is the opposite of what it means to be a Christian. Our salvation is a gift freely given by the King who chose to take all our sin upon himself and die for us. If we receive that gift, we are God’s children. Walk today in the truth that we are highly favored by our God. We are His favorite, so to speak.

Lord, we are so grateful that You favor us, not because we deserve it but because Jesus is our very good Savior. We are so grateful!

Psalm 78:1-39; Acts 18:12-28; Luke 3:15-22

Wednesday, September 26

Esther 6:1-14 *When Haman told his wife, Zeresh, and all his friends what had happened, his wise advisers and his wife said, “Since Mordecai—this man who has humiliated you—is of Jewish birth, you will never succeed in your plans against him. It will be fatal to continue opposing him.”* (v.13 NLT)

Either by prophesy or reputation, the wise advisors knew that God keeps His promises to His people, the Jews. Even though they warned him, Haman, in his wicked jealousy, continued to pursue his plan to kill Mordecai and the Jewish people. How does this apply to us centuries later? Believing that our God is a promise-keeping God opens our lives to endless possibilities. He says He blesses us for a thousand generations if we love and obey Him. His love is endless. His provision is endless. His plan is to protect us. His plans for us are good and not evil, all the days of our lives. When I follow the plan He has for my life, I am fulfilled. He designed me for His plan, so it’s the best fit for my life and I feel like it fits—similar to my favorite clothes. Esther and Mordecai found God’s plan for their life trusting that He is a promise-keeping God.

Lord, as I surrender my life to You again today, I declare Your word from Psalm 119:101, “I have refused to walk in any evil path so that I may remain obedient to your word.” Let it be so!

Psalm 119:97-120; Acts 19:1-10; Luke 4:1-13

Thursday, September 27

Esther 7:1-10 So the king and Haman went to Queen Esther's banquet. On this second occasion, while they were drinking wine, the king again said to Esther, "Tell me what you want, Queen Esther. What is your request? I will give it to you, even if it is half the kingdom!" (vv.1-2)

Tell me what you want, says our God. Can I believe He's really asking that? Lord, I want a world that looks like Luke 4:18-19. I want to bring good news to the poor. I want to comfort the broken-hearted. I want to set the captives free. I want to tell the whole world that they are favored by You and that You will bring beauty out of the ashes of our broken lives. That's the kind of community we hear about in Acts 20. Paul and the early church did exactly what Jesus proclaimed. The fulfillment of God's word ushers in God's kingdom and the freedom that He promised. Let's do that as well.

"Praise the LORD! How good to sing praises to our God! How delightful and how fitting! He heals the brokenhearted and bandages their wounds. He counts the stars and calls them all by name. How great is our Lord! His power is absolute!" (Psalm 147:1, 3-5a).

Psalms 146, 147; Acts 19:11-20; Luke 4:14-30

Friday, September 28

Luke 4:31-37 Then Jesus went to Capernaum, a town in Galilee, and taught there in the synagogue every Sabbath day. There, too, the people were amazed at his teaching, for he spoke with authority. (vv.31-32)

What does it mean to teach with authority? Authority means that there is enough power behind what is being spoken to command others to listen. The power of God's truth commanded ears to hear. In our world we heed speed limits when driving because police officers have authority to issue a ticket and fine if we don't obey. All authority was given by the Father to Christ Jesus. If we don't obey he has the power to issue a consequence. Jesus, when returning to heaven after his resurrection, sent the Holy Spirit to live in us. With the Holy Spirit, that same authority was passed on to us. What a glorious privilege we have to speak with the authority given to us! Let us be diligent to speak the truth of our mission: Christ has died, Christ has risen, Christ will come again.

Father, thank You for Jesus and all he accomplished for us. Thank You for sending the Holy Spirit to live in us as believers. Please strengthen us in Your truth so that others will be drawn to You.

Esther 8:1-8, 15-17; Psalm 88; Acts 19:21-41

Saturday, September 29

Luke 4:38-44 After leaving the synagogue that day, Jesus went to Simon's home, where he found Simon's mother-in-law very sick with a high fever.

“Please heal her,” everyone begged. Standing at her bedside, he rebuked the fever, and it left her. And she got up at once and prepared a meal for them. (vv.38-39)

What a very sweet and simple prayer, “Please heal her!” And our God who heals just did it. That is a very powerful model of prayer for us to follow. Just ask.

Now consider the same event from the point of view of the mother-in-law. Nobody likes to be sick, but having a high fever is kicking it up notches. High fever drains you of any strength and, as you recover, it often takes days to regain your energy. When Jesus healed this woman, she didn’t just gradually get better, she instantly recovered. Then, to top it off, she used that energy to serve others. What a faith-building story for the disciples and for us!

Recently, a friend was diagnosed with two brain aneurisms. She went into the hospital with stroke-like symptoms. She came out of the hospital two days later—no symptoms, no aneurisms (an MRI proved it)! Thank you, Jesus. We boldly ask for you to heal your people.

Hosea 1:1—2:1; Psalms 87, 90; Acts 20:1-16

by Charlene Laird

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Good News Daily

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Sunday, September 30

Matthew 13:44-52 *“The kingdom of Heaven is like treasure hidden in a field which someone has found; he hides it again, goes off in his joy, sells everything he owns and buys the field.”* (v.44 NJB)

I have a friend who keeps discovering parts of the kingdom in the here-and-now of his life. When he makes these discoveries, he’s very excited. He tells his friends at church all about the discovery: “This is life changing for me,” he enthuses.

Yet after a week or two, he seems to have forgotten all about his discovery. I’ve asked him about this a few times. He replies, “My schedule got too busy, and I couldn’t find the time,” or “I was overloaded at work, and was too tired to think about it.” My friend discovers parts of the kingdom, but he’s not yet ready to buy the field.

Sometimes, folks joyfully find the treasure, but discover the cost of buying the field includes giving up some aspect of our lives we’re not yet ready to part with. The Holy Spirit will keep revealing parts of the treasure of the kingdom to us. The good news is that God will provide, guide, and support us in finding our way to buying the field.

Hosea 2:2-14; Psalms 66, 67; James 3:1-13

Monday, October 1

Luke 5:1-11 *For he and all his companions were completely awestruck at the catch they had made.* (v.9)

In the last twenty years, my faith community has spent a tremendous amount of time and energy on the matter of church growth. We’ve read books about growing a congregation. We’ve attended workshops on church growth. We’ve created programs advised by “experts”. We’ve even hired a consultant or two. Yet, honestly, all our time and energy has had some good results, but not what we hoped.

It occurs to me that in all our efforts, we’ve never taken the time to pray intently (as a group) about where Jesus wants us to cast the net. I’m convinced that if we took a weekend together praying, sharing, and fasting about the matter, Jesus would find a way to show us where and how to cast the net.

Like it or not, denominations and congregations are institutions. Institutions do institutional programs, proposed by institutional experts. I wonder what would happen if we did something radically Christian, and asked Jesus to show us the way. I believe we’d be awestruck by the results!

Hosea 2:14-23; Psalm 89:1-18; Acts 20:17-38

Tuesday, October 2

Luke 5:12-26 *Seeing their faith Jesus said, “My friend your sins are forgiven you.”* (v.20)

At all worship services in our congregation, we pray aloud a list of people who’ve asked us to pray for healing for themselves, or someone else. The list is quite long. (Some people complain it takes “too much time”.)

The people who ask for our prayers often have minimal connection with our congregation, but they know we’ll pray for anyone who asks, for as long as the request remains. I often think about how this practice expands the size of our faith community. People we don’t personally know, from places we’ve never heard of, become friends. Periodically, we get a report back about healing and grace-filled events in the life of one of our distant friends. What blessings!

In the Scripture verse above, Jesus validates that the faith of others can be a powerful force in the healing of a person who needs that healing.

In the midst of these public healing prayers, my mind often sees an image of the paralyzed man’s friends lowering him through the roof to the healing Lord. Let’s join them!

Hosea 4:1-10; Psalms 97, 99, 100; Acts 21:1-14

Wednesday, October 3

Luke 5:27-39 *Jesus said to them in reply, “It is not those that are well who need the doctor, but the sick.”* (v.31)

In the busy life of the church, I often find that in the midst of programs, planning groups, and worship services, it’s often difficult to remember that we’re a group of people on a mission. My denomination enshrines that mission in this statement: “The mission of the Church is to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ.” I wonder what would happen if we actually made this mission the first priority in our congregation? What if we actually spent the majority of our resources of time, energy, and money on undertaking that mission?

Many of us first came to Jesus Christ and his Body, the Church, seeking to be healed, forgiven, and given a new start in life. We all encounter people who are seeking to find something that can transform and give meaning to their lives. We have a personal witness to bear to them about the love and transforming power of God, in and through Jesus Christ. Our mission is to share that witness!

Hosea 4:11-19; Psalms 101, 109; Acts 21:15-26

Thursday, October 4

Psalm 105:1-22 *Seek Yahweh and his strength, tirelessly seek his presence!* (v.4)

Recently, a friend of mine complained, “As the pace of my life speeds up, and the huge amount of information that comes my way each day increases, I often find myself feeling spiritually overwhelmed and emotionally drained. There are days I’m just too numb to think about God, or to pray.”

There are days I feel that way too! This leads me to some reflection about the matter. When I feel overwhelmed and drained, I find that I’m viewing my relationship with God and prayer as something to be engaged in when I have the time and energy. Yet, when I actually take the time for prayer and devotion in a hectic and information overloaded day, I don’t feel overwhelmed and drained, even though the pace of the day and the barrage of information are the same. Hmm!

Jesus promised us that when we are overburdened, overwhelmed or drained, we can come to him and be refreshed. He truly means it!

Hosea 5:8—6:6; Acts 21:27-36; Luke 6:1-11

Friday, October 5

Psalm 102 *He will turn to hear the prayer of the destitute, and will not treat their prayer with scorn.* (v.17)

For several years, I’ve joined other members of our congregation participating in a United Way Resource Day for homeless people in the Seattle area. Our ministry has been the washing of homeless people’s feet. This includes caring for their wounded feet (due to spending many days without being able to remove their wet shoes and socks). It is a profound experience!

In the intimate exchange of holding and washing their feet, they open up to us about their experience of homelessness. They often talk about longing for a different future for themselves. In that sharing, which is truly prayer, I’ve come to realize I have more in common with them than I could have ever realized. I’ve also come to know these people are very special to God, in ways I could never have imagined.

Most of all, I’ve learned that it’s actually the Risen Christ who is ministering to them through me, loving and not despising them! They have given me much more than I’ve given them.

Hosea 10:1-15; Acts 21:37—22:16; Luke 6:12-26

Saturday, October 6

Luke 6:27-38 *“Instead, love your enemies and do good to them, and lend without any hope of return. You will have a great reward, and you will be*

children of the Most High, for he himself is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked.” (v.35)

I admit that I have some difficulty not viewing people with whom I disagree as “enemies”. As I overhear conversations, watch TV, read magazines and newspapers, I’m becoming more and more aware other people are having the same difficulty.

What bothers me most about this is I was a Marine in Vietnam, willing to kill and harm people I did not know. I’ve thought a great deal about this recently. What I’ve realized is I was willing to do this violence to others because I’d depersonalized the people I considered enemies. It troubles me that I see and hear myself and others doing that same depersonalizing here and now.

Jesus gives us a vision of reunion and reconciliation of all people. He asks us to live out that vision in everyday life. That doesn’t mean we have to agree with everyone, or even to like them and their behavior. It does mean we are called to be kind and loving toward all people, not to depersonalize them into enemies. Tough stuff!

Hosea 11:1-9; Psalms 107:33-43, 108; Acts 22:17-29

by John Ferguson

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