

## Devotions for the 12<sup>th</sup> week after Pentecost – August 16-20, 2021

### Monday of Pentecost 12 – Prayer of the Week

Almighty God, whom to know is everlasting life, grant us to know Your Son, Jesus, to be the way, the truth, and the life, that we may steadfastly follow His steps in the way that leads to life eternal; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

*When I was ten years old my father accepted a call to a very small community which was filled with interesting characters. The parish had about three times as many people as the town claimed. In truth, you may know some of these people. The man who came up with the idea for the old TV series “Petticoat Junction” grew up in that community and many suspect he based some of the strange people in that series on the folks in this little hamlet. I am pretty sure the grocer Sam Drucker on TV was based on the man who owned the local store.*

*There was one filling station and garage in town which served everyone. Glen, the proprietor, was a gentle man who kept the cars of all the widows in town running after their husbands passed away. He would remind them when it was time for an oil change and made sure the brakes and tires were in good working order. I cannot imagine that he made a lot of money, but there were people who would have been lost without him to help them keep up their cars. It could never have happened in a larger place. He truly knew everyone and their car in town. His station was situated on the intersection of the only two streets the town possessed. As Gertrude drove by his station, he would listen to the engine to see if it was running properly. If not, he would call and have her bring it by for a fix.*

*We pray today to almighty God whom to know is everlasting life. This is not the sort of knowledge which a new graduate from the local tech school may have about internal combustion engines. He knows a great deal about what can go wrong and how to fix the problem, but this knowledge is something very different. This is knowing someone, knowing that her husband used to take care of the car and she knows nothing about it, knowing that she is on a very tight income and helping her stretch the life of her car as long as possible, knowing that sometimes she just needs to talk to someone. Knowing God, really knowing Him, being a lamb of His flock, His friend, His person, that is to have everlasting life because He knows you.*

### Tuesday of Pentecost 12 – Joshua 24:1-2a, 14-18

Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel to Shechem and summoned the elders, the heads, the judges, and the officers of Israel. And they presented themselves before God. <sup>2</sup> And Joshua said to all the people...<sup>14</sup> “Now therefore fear the LORD and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness. Put away the gods that your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. <sup>15</sup> And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the LORD, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.”

<sup>16</sup> Then the people answered, “Far be it from us that we should forsake the LORD to serve other gods, <sup>17</sup> for it is the LORD our God who brought us and our fathers up from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, and who did those great signs in our sight and preserved us in all the way that we went, and among all the peoples through whom we passed. <sup>18</sup> And the LORD drove out before us all the peoples, the Amorites who lived in the land. Therefore we also will serve the LORD, for he is our God.”

*“Pastor!” said the eager voice on the other end of the phone. It was a young woman I had confirmed nearly two decades ago. She had looked me up and given me a call out of the blue. She had grown up, went to college, got married, had children of her own. She was thinking about those days we had spent with her little confirmation class and decided to give me a ring.*

*She was attending church, in another state from where we had met. I was glad of that, very glad. It is a rare thing to find that to be so. A study I remember from some years ago suggested that less than ten percent of the confirmands in the Northwest District were attending church when they were 25. That should give all of us an occasion for circumspection and introspection, along with a strong vocation to pray for parents, young people, pastors and others who teach them, and the church which they are abandoning. Something is happening and it needs Jesus to fix it.*

*Joshua, in his farewell sermon the people of Israel, challenges the people of his day. He will follow the Lord, but they need to decide what they will do. Will they follow the Lord or one of the local deities or one of the deities their forefathers worshiped in Egypt or Mesopotamia? Joshua says he and his family will follow the Lord. Like everyone of the confirmands who stand before the altars of our churches, the people of God in Joshua’s day pledge their undying allegiance. If you have read the rest of that history in Judges, Samuel, and Kings, you know that they did not keep that promise. They ran after the other gods of the Arameans, the Baals and Asheroth.*

*But if you have read the rest of that story, you know something else. God never stopped loving them and never stopped calling them home to Himself. Even when He sent them into exile, He was calling them to Himself. I pray for all the young people I have confirmed, but I never pray that God loves them and is searching for them with the diligent love of a shepherd. I know He is. I count on it.*

### **Wednesday of Pentecost 12 – Psalm 34:12-22**

<sup>12</sup> What man is there who desires life  
and loves many days, that he may see good?

<sup>13</sup> Keep your tongue from evil  
and your lips from speaking deceit.

<sup>14</sup> Turn away from evil and do good;  
seek peace and pursue it.

<sup>15</sup> The eyes of the LORD are toward the righteous  
and his ears toward their cry.

<sup>16</sup> The face of the LORD is against those who do evil,  
to cut off the memory of them from the earth.

- <sup>17</sup> When the righteous cry for help, the LORD hears  
and delivers them out of all their troubles.
- <sup>18</sup> The LORD is near to the brokenhearted  
and saves the crushed in spirit.
- <sup>19</sup> Many are the afflictions of the righteous,  
but the LORD delivers him out of them all.
- <sup>20</sup> He keeps all his bones;  
not one of them is broken.
- <sup>21</sup> Affliction will slay the wicked,  
and those who hate the righteous will be condemned.
- <sup>22</sup> The LORD redeems the life of his servants;  
none of those who take refuge in him will be condemned.

*I reached out to the young woman in my History and Literature of the Old Testament class. She had not shown up for a couple of class periods. I wondered what had happened. She tearfully told me her story. It was not new or unusual, but bitter in its familiarity. She had wanted so much to go to college. Her parents had urged her, she believed the marketing rhetoric of the schools, and she knew the statistic that said a college degree meant higher income levels for graduates. But she was leaving. She could not do it for one reason or another. She felt like a failure and a great disappointment to so many people, including her parents and this professor.*

*I find this psalm hard to pray sometimes. I think of this young woman and the many others who did not complete their degrees but did complete too many loan applications. The psalmist says that God has his eyes on the righteous and turns his face against the wicked. He takes care of his faithful and condemns those who hate righteousness. But so often the world I see does not look like what the psalmist sees. It looks quite the opposite. Those who make the predatory loans buy vacation homes in the Caribbean and my former students work menial jobs to pay off those loans.*

*But then the psalmist gives me verse 20. Did that jump out to you as well? John quotes when he speaks of what happened after Jesus died on the cross (Jn. 19:37). The soldiers broke the legs of the criminals to speed their deaths, but they did not break Jesus legs for he had already died. It fulfilled this prophecy of Christ. I think about my student and her disappointment and debt. The Lord redeems the life of his servants. She is not condemned, and her tears will be dried. The injustices done to her have been righted in another day when another human being suffered for the sins of all people, including her own. This world often seems terribly unfair. It never seemed more so than the day when Jesus died. Satan's plans for our misery have been turned on their heads. Christ lives.*

Thursday of Pentecost 12 – Ephesians 5:6-21

<sup>6</sup> Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. <sup>7</sup> Therefore do not become partners with them; <sup>8</sup> for at one time

you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light <sup>9</sup> (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), <sup>10</sup> and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. <sup>11</sup> Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. <sup>12</sup> For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. <sup>13</sup> But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, <sup>14</sup> for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says,

“Awake, O sleeper,  
and arise from the dead,  
and Christ will shine on you.”

<sup>15</sup> Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, <sup>16</sup> making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. <sup>17</sup> Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. <sup>18</sup> And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, <sup>19</sup> addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, <sup>20</sup> giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>21</sup> submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

*“Everyone does it.”*

*“You have to look out for yourself.”*

*“You’re not really hurting anyone.”*

*“You’re not breaking any laws.”*

*As you read those phrases, what do you think is happening? Is someone contemplating an affair? Perhaps they are considering letting a co-worker take the blame unfairly or buying a pre-written paper to submit for their college class. Perhaps they are looking at a link to a pornography site or ... it could be just about anything.*

*Paul urges us not to be deceived by empty words, even the words we would tell ourselves. For this reason, the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. It is easy for churchgoing types to imagine that Paul is talking about other people when he uses this language. And we are right in a sense, he is talking about all people, but we often miss the point that in God’s eyes sin is not so relative. Sin is just bad. The little old church-attending woman who bears a grudge against some member of the lady’s aide society for a snub is just as much a reason for God’s wrath to come as the flagrant sinner who parades his vices for the world to see.*

*Walk in the light, exhorts Paul. Do not walk as the foolish, but as the wise. Discern the will of God. That applies to little things, daily things, which are part and parcel of every Christian’s life as we are called to submit to one another out of reverence for Christ and to speak to one another with wholesome words. Before we think about those other people, the people it is so easy to imagine as being the triggers for God’s wrath to come upon the sons of disobedience, take a few moments to think of how you have not discerned what is good, chosen that good, and loved the people you are called to love. Beseech God for the forgiveness you need. Chastened and humbled by Him, now love the sinners around you as people for whom Jesus also has died.*

Friday of Pentecost 12 – John 6:51-59

<sup>51</sup> I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.”

<sup>52</sup> The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” <sup>53</sup> So Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. <sup>54</sup> Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. <sup>55</sup> For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. <sup>56</sup> Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. <sup>57</sup> As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever feeds on me, he also will live because of me. <sup>58</sup> This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like the bread the fathers ate, and died. Whoever feeds on this bread will live forever.” <sup>59</sup> Jesus said these things in the synagogue, as he taught at Capernaum.

*I think sometimes we have domesticated Jesus for ourselves. We have made him into the sort of fellow we might welcome into the end of our pew, smile at him, and ask how his week went while we browse the bulletin before church. Is that really Jesus? This is the third week of this conversation Jesus is having with the people in Capernaum. Jesus has been asserting that he is the bread of life, but they seem a little thick about this.*

*Jesus ramps up the language for us here, but our translations keep him appropriate for our sensibilities. In vs. 54 and 57 this translation says “Whoever feeds on me...” The Greek word is more graphic than that. This is the word for chew, gnaw, or nibble. In one place a Greek author says you can hear animals doing this when they eat. If you have ever stood by as dog munched on his chow you know what he meant. In John’s day they wanted an inoffensive Jesus who saved them spiritually but who would never have had any traffic with the physical side of life. That was just too gross, they thought, beneath God. But Jesus will not let them have that. He speaks of chewing. The word he uses for flesh here is the same word they would have used for what you buy at Safeway in those Styrofoam trays covered in clear plastic wrap: meat.*

*The people of the time were offended by Jesus’ words. If we blandly sit in church or read our bibles and are never offended, we might need to read a little harder, listen a little deeper, or back up and try again. Jesus is a shocking person who says outlandish things, truly outlandish because they come from heaven. What strange things has he said to you this week?*