

## Devotions for the fifteenth Week after the Festival of Pentecost: Sept 6-10, 2021

### Monday of Pentecost 15 – Prayer of the Week

O Lord, let Your merciful ears be open to the prayers of Your humble servants and grant that what they ask may be in accord with Your gracious will; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

*My first real boss had a wonderful gift and was a wonderful gift to me. I still cannot believe he entrusted me with so much at such a young age. I was untested and truly in over my head. But he trusted me and more importantly he heard me with a merciful ear. I was placed in charge of a small group of workers, but we were far from any immediate oversight. We were given assignments, driven to fields at some distance, and given specific instructions. It might be afternoon before we saw anyone else.*

*One day, after a particularly trying day of recalcitrant workers, getting lost on the way to a field, and a grumpy seed corn representative, I made a call to my boss. I do not know what exactly I was looking for. I am not even sure I had a specific request. I just needed to talk to him. I did, the emotions were on the surface of that conversation. I was weary, angry, more than a little afraid. He listened to me. He paid close attention to what I said. He helped me see my mistakes for what they were and helped me do a better job tomorrow. He assured me that it would be OK. He would talk to the seed company rep. for me and smooth things over. But most of all, he listened to me.*

*Today we pray that God hears us with His merciful ears. I think of Larry and his patient hearing of my youthful and insecure self when I hear those words. I am sure that I was a bit of a headache for him at times. But he always listened to me. What I said was important to him and I was important to him, for reasons which transcended the profitability of my crew. I pray as you think of your many experiences in life, that somewhere you too have been heard with merciful ears. God listens to every one of your prayers with such tenderhearted mercy.*

### Tuesday of Pentecost 15 – Isaiah 35:4-7a

<sup>4</sup> Say to those who have an anxious heart,

“Be strong; fear not!

Behold, your God

will come with vengeance,  
with the recompense of God.

He will come and save you.”

<sup>5</sup> Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,  
and the ears of the deaf unstopped;

<sup>6</sup> then shall the lame man leap like a deer,  
and the tongue of the mute sing for joy.

For waters break forth in the wilderness,  
and streams in the desert;  
<sup>7</sup> the burning sand shall become a pool,  
and the thirsty ground springs of water;

*There is a great deal of satisfaction in a film when the bad guy finally gets his just rewards. I remember watching the “Jurassic Park” film in a theater. When the conniving attorney got munched by the T-rex, everyone cheered.*

*Isaiah tells the anxious of heart to cheer up. God is coming with His vengeance. Does that strike you as a little odd? God coming with vengeance does not normally alleviate fear. It tends to increase it. But if God comes to set things right, to fix the wrongs, and to punish the evildoers, then God’s vengeance might be a very good thing indeed. The only problem is if you are numbered among the evil-doers.*

*Isaiah is clear in this passage. God comes to save us, not destroy us. The Hebrew word for “God Saves” is Jeshua or as you know it better: Jesus. Isaiah was really looking at two days, two comings of God as he prophesied. He saw the day of God’s judgment and wrath, the day when the vengeance of God is unleashed upon the earth. Ezekiel, Daniel, Peter, and John have all filled our imaginations with those images. But Isaiah also had his eyes firmly fixed on another coming of Christ, a coming which was to save us. As John says in 3:16-17 of his Gospel account: God sent His Son to save the world in love.*

*We have known the first coming, the saving arrival of Christ. Now we await the second coming, the revelation of God’s vengeance. But we know that the first and second coming are intricately tied together. Because he first came in humility and love, we have no fear of the day when comes in power and vengeance. Say to those who have an anxious heart: be strong; fear not!*

### **Wednesday of Pentecost 15 – Psalm 146**

<sup>1</sup> Praise the LORD!

Praise the LORD, O my soul!

<sup>2</sup> I will praise the LORD as long as I live;

I will sing praises to my God while I have my being.

<sup>3</sup> Put not your trust in princes,

in a son of man, in whom there is no salvation.

<sup>4</sup> When his breath departs, he returns to the earth;

on that very day his plans perish.

<sup>5</sup> Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob,

whose hope is in the LORD his God,

<sup>6</sup> who made heaven and earth,

the sea, and all that is in them,

who keeps faith forever;  
7 who executes justice for the oppressed,  
who gives food to the hungry.

The LORD sets the prisoners free;  
8 the LORD opens the eyes of the blind.  
The LORD lifts up those who are bowed down;  
the LORD loves the righteous.

9 The LORD watches over the sojourners;  
he upholds the widow and the fatherless,  
but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.

10 The LORD will reign forever,  
your God, O Zion, to all generations.

Praise the LORD!

*It was not only Jewish people who were victims of Nazi terror in WWII. About 80% of Germany's protestant clergy were killed by Hitler's regime. Many were drafted and forced to the front lines in Russia. Others were rounded up and sent to concentration camps. In one of his circular letters sent to the students who had studied in his underground seminary before the war broke out, Dietrich Bonhoeffer challenged the idea that this was somehow a new situation. Bonhoeffer asserted that the war and the manifest horror of Hitler's regime had simply exposed a reality which had been there all along. Humanity was fundamentally idolatrous. We had always trusted the wrong things. The current reality brought it into stark relief.*

*I believe the last 18 months of pandemic and the recent political cycle have revealed the same thing about us. We have trusted in princes and the powers of mankind. The rhetoric which has come out of both sides of the recent political contests has been idolatrous. Neither Trump nor Biden are the help of Israel and they do not keep faith forever. Human medical knowledge and all our efforts to manage this pandemic are good tools, but that is all they are. They will eventually fail us and if we manage to escape this pandemic individually, we will each die of something else. I hate to break it to you, but the mortality rate for being a human being remains stubbornly locked at 100%. If you trust medical science to save you, it will let you down.*

*The psalmist is not advocating for us to disengage from the world, become politically apathetic, or to deny medical advice. He simply says do not place your final trust in princes or the power of human beings. They cannot solve the real and eternal problems we face. Yes, vote for the best candidate, but do not expect him to bring about the kingdom of God. Study the diseases, ameliorate the pain, lessen human suffering by whatever means you can, but know that finally it is God who executes final justice for the oppressed and feeds the hungry that they never hunger again. God alone sets us free from the bondage of death and opens our eyes to see and live eternal life.*

**Thursday of Pentecost 15 – James 2:1-10, 14-18**

<sup>1</sup> My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. <sup>2</sup> For if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in, <sup>3</sup> and if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, “You sit here in a good place,” while you say to the poor man, “You stand over there,” or, “Sit down at my feet,” <sup>4</sup> have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? <sup>5</sup> Listen, my beloved brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him? <sup>6</sup> But you have dishonored the poor man. Are not the rich the ones who oppress you, and the ones who drag you into court? <sup>7</sup> Are they not the ones who blaspheme the honorable name by which you were called?

<sup>8</sup> If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” you are doing well. <sup>9</sup> But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. <sup>10</sup> For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it.

<sup>14</sup> What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? <sup>15</sup> If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, <sup>16</sup> and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled,” without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? <sup>17</sup> So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

<sup>18</sup> But someone will say, “You have faith and I have works.” Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.

*For two Sundays in a row, Patrick walked up to the window in the foyer of the church during the services and looked in. His mother had told him that they eat people here. He did not think it was true, but he needed to be sure. They seemed normal enough. They smiled at each other. The pastor seemed to be a regular person; although, his mother would have made his alb fit better. She was a masterful seamstress. Finally, the third week, he screwed up his courage and walked in.*

*What had drawn him to this place? Patrick is a refugee from the Congo. His father, the village chief, and older brothers were dragged away by a mob and never seen again. He, his little brother, and mother fled to the city. They had to flee again, ending up in a refugee camp in a foreign country. Granted asylum status, his mother refused to come to America. “They eat people there,” she said. Finally, the camp workers put her on a plane to America without her knowing where it was headed. She and her sons showed up in Portland and were settled by Lutheran Community Services (LCS). So far no one had been eaten, but the threat loomed over their new home.*

*Patrick walked by the church one day and saw “Lutheran” in the name. He was holding a document from LCS and connected the name. The people who helped him were connected to this church. He slipped nervously into a pew toward the back. My wife saw him there. One could not miss this tall and very black man sitting in that small congregation of Germans and Hispanics. She sat down beside him. They soon became friends. Patrick’s mother was wrong. They did not*

*eat people in that church. She eventually learned that herself and came to church with him sometimes. That Anglo and Hispanic congregation delighted to welcome another voice to the praises of God, even when he looked very different and spoke with a strange accent. (He could not help it; he spoke 13 languages and English was not his best. His best language was French.)*

*James asks us to view the world with the eyes of Christ and act accordingly. He has died for every human being, regardless of status, race, beliefs, or past. It is not enough to say that God so loved the world..., one must act upon that belief and love with His love. How will you love that way today?*

### **Friday of Pentecost 15 – Mark 7:24-37**

<sup>24</sup> And from there he arose and went away to the region of Tyre and Sidon. And he entered a house and did not want anyone to know, yet he could not be hidden. <sup>25</sup> But immediately a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit heard of him and came and fell down at his feet.

<sup>26</sup> Now the woman was a Gentile, a Syrophenician by birth. And she begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter. <sup>27</sup> And he said to her, “Let the children be fed first, for it is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs.” <sup>28</sup> But she answered him, “Yes, Lord; yet even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs.” <sup>29</sup> And he said to her, “For this statement you may go your way; the demon has left your daughter.” <sup>30</sup> And she went home and found the child lying in bed and the demon gone.

<sup>31</sup> Then he returned from the region of Tyre and went through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis. <sup>32</sup> And they brought to him a man who was deaf and had a speech impediment, and they begged him to lay his hand on him. <sup>33</sup> And taking him aside from the crowd privately, he put his fingers into his ears, and after spitting touched his tongue. <sup>34</sup> And looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, “Ephphatha,” that is, “Be opened.” <sup>35</sup> And his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly. <sup>36</sup> And Jesus charged them to tell no one. But the more he charged them, the more zealously they proclaimed it. <sup>37</sup> And they were astonished beyond measure, saying, “He has done all things well. He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak.”

*“I will never see these people the same way again.” The young woman who wrote those words in a paper probably could not imagine writing them even six weeks before she did. She was a student in my History and Literature of the New Testament class which I taught regularly at Concordia, Portland. Part of the class involved service. We said as a department that one could not really talk about Jesus' command to love the neighbor or even the enemy without actually being engaged in doing it. There were many eye-rolling scenes when this was announced every year. But we held firm. If you want to pass this class, you have to do your time in service. The university connected students with a great number of opportunities, and several of them involved feeding the hungry. One of them in particular did not just have them feed the hungry. They were to sit down and talk with them.*

*It was this program the young woman was involved with. She sat down and spoke with a homeless man. It was a life-changing experience for her. I could see the change in class from*

*before and after. This person who had been a problem to be solved had become a person, with wisdom and personality and value.*

*Jesus is taking his disciples on a field trip out into the region of Tyre and Sidon to teach them a lesson. He has been struggling with these guys. If you remember last week, Jesus had been frustrated with them. "It is not what goes into your mouth that is the problem, it is what comes out," He said. They did not get it. So, He finds the least likely person, a gentile, a woman, who has a demoniac for a daughter. They can only see these things about her. He goads them a bit. They think she is not quite fully human, so He uses that. He calls her a dog. I am sure they approved of that. But it was a trap for them. This woman turns Jesus' words back toward Him and speaks words of profound faith. It is what comes out of the mouth and heart that matters, you see.*

*In the next scene, Jesus opens the ears and loosens the tongue of a deaf and mute man. He opened the ears and loosed the tongues of those disciples that day when he introduced them to this precious woman whose faith he praised. He opened the ears and loosed the tongue of my student through that homeless guy in downtown Portland. How will he open your ears and loosen your tongue to speak his praise? It might be uncomfortable when he does. You will be better for it.*