

Good News Daily

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Sunday, June 1

Matthew 10:24-33, 40-42 *"Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows."* (v.31 RSV)

I can't read these words from Jesus without thinking of a great old gospel singer (now in heaven) who used to sing "His Eye Is on the Sparrow." Ethel Watters' raspy voice took flight as she sang about how the Lord is always watching me.

Now that I'm older I can't read these verses without smiling. Jesus reminds us that the Father knows how much hair we have. I don't have as much as I used to. I'm at that stage in life where I'm glad God is watching the birds because I don't have much time for them. My girls will soon be needing college tuition. I don't have the energy I once had to keep up with younger colleagues at work. My mom's health is not so good. My doctor tells me I need to have a P.S.A. test every year.

Today's passage encourages me not to surrender to my worries. It tells me "not to fear." And then it tells me why. I am valued by God. He loves me. At every season of life (including the unique stresses of mid-life) God is not only aware of me, He cares for me. I'm grateful for a mother who watched over me when I was a kid. I'm even more grateful for a Father in heaven who never closes His eyes (or needs bifocals).

Ezekiel 3:16-27; Psalms 66, 67; Ephesians 2:1-10

Monday, June 2

Luke 9:51-62 *Jesus said to him, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."* (v.62)

Several weeks ago on Mother's Day we spent time thinking about our moms and recounting special memories of when we were still at home. I wonder if our moms recalled the same memories...or different ones.

There were many times when I gave my mom cause for pause. It frustrated her to no end when I started project after project only to quit when I lost interest. What had seemed irresistibly interesting soon lost its fascination. Fortunately, I had a mom and a dad who taught me I would never succeed if I always quit.

Jesus is not interested in baptizing followers who are simply curious. Those who would shadow the Savior must be serious about his call on their life. Commitment is the currency in which disciples spend their lives. Granted, as we read Jesus' responses to these 'want-abees,' it appears at first glance that he is insensitive. Nothing could be further from the truth. (Remember the lesson of the sparrow from yesterday?)

What we are to make of these verses is the fact that there will always be reasons why we feel we cannot commit our lives fully to Christ. But, commitment demands we "fish or cut bait." Unless he is Lord of all, he is not Lord at all.

Ezekiel 4:1-17; Psalm 89:1-18; Hebrews 6:1-12

Tuesday, June 3

Luke 10:1-17 *And he said to them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; pray, therefore, the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."* (v.2)

Where our family lives in northern Illinois, cornfields are being harvested with bulldozers and land movers, not tractors and combines. The fruit of those that labor is not eating-corn or seed-corn, but condominiums and townhouses. Farmland, once plentiful in middle America, is disappearing fast.

Likewise, we live in a nation where there is an unprecedented hunger for spiritual fulfillment. While some sow wild oats, others can be seen planting "faith." The current fascination with the supernatural is evidence that the fields around us are ripe and ready to be harvested.

As I contemplate Jesus' challenge to his followers embarking on a short-term mission trip, I think I can hear his heartbeat. It pulsates louder and louder. Jesus' heart is beating faster and faster. His heart beats for those who long for a relationship with him. His desire is that our hearts would beat in sync with his. Not only does he call us to reach out to the spiritually hungry around us, we are to pray that God will sensitize other Christians to help us reap.

Just like the cornfields around my home, "the fields" now ripe won't always be farmable. Ask the Lord to show you how to "work the fields." Friendship? Letters? An invitation to a Bible study? Reading a Christian book as a group?

Ezekiel 7:10-15, 23b-27; Psalms 97, 99, 100; Hebrews 6:13-20

Wednesday, June 4

Luke 10:17-24 *The seventy returned with joy, saying, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!"* (v.17)

Be honest. Would you say that joy accompanies you to work as often as your cell phone does? Is joy even on the shelf where you shop? Do you long to have more joy in your life? I do!

Happiness is (by definition) an emotional response to what happens to us. In contrast, joy is a response of our spirits to the presence of the Holy Spirit within us. When Jesus' colleagues returned from their outreach project, they were genuinely "pumped up." Can't you see their broad smiles? Can't you picture them slapping each other on the back as each pair of disciples shared the remarkable things that God had done through them?

According to verse 21, even Jesus was filled with joy. I'll bet as he prayed to the Father his words were punctuated with laughter and peaceful sighs. But there is another reference to joy in Luke's account. In verse 20, Jesus helps us understand how we can be joyful more than we are. He says that whereas a Christian's joy is connected to their ministry, it is based in their identity. Apart from the thrill that comes from letting the Holy Spirit flow through us, our hearts can be content and filled with praise just knowing that we belong to God. When we remember that the One who claims us will care for us, we can face whatever "happens" with a joyful heart!

Ezekiel 11:14-25; Psalms 101, 109:1-30; Hebrews 7:1-17

Thursday, June 5

Luke 10:25-37 *"But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was; and when he saw him, he had compassion."* (v.33)

Corrie ten Boom was a young Dutch woman imprisoned by the Nazis during World War II. Her heinous crime? Harboring Jews in her home. While in a concentration camp, she wondered if she could survive emotionally. Then she recalled something her father had told her when she was a child: "God never gives us our ticket until it's time to get on the train." She found that when she needed faith and courage, she received it in adequate supply.

I'm impressed by the phrase in Luke's account of the Good Samaritan that says, "when he saw him he had compassion." Not until the Samaritan traveler came upon the injured victim did he discover that compassion had been packed in his knapsack.

I've traveled that stretch between Jerusalem and Jericho. It's a tricky series of switchbacks. Two thousand years later it remains a risky road. The path of Christian discipleship is dotted with risks and challenges, too. Taking our relationship with Jesus seriously includes circumstances which test our faith and our love. When we read about the hero in today's lesson, it is fair to wonder if we would have had the courage to help (let alone have compassion—remember there was no love lost between a Samaritan and a Jew). I take comfort in taking one step at a time. Trying to guess what we'd do before we are faced with a test isn't as accurate as looking for the ticket when we hear the train approaching.

Ezekiel 18:1-4, 19-32; Psalm 105:1-22; Hebrews 7:18-28

Friday, June 6

Luke 10:38-42 *"Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone."* (v.40)

Life isn't fair! The sooner we accept that fact, the overcast of unrealistic expectations burns off. We live in an imperfect world that is infected with a virus first discovered in a Garden a long time ago. Injustice. Imperfection. Unfairness. Those are the triplet sisters of the sin-stained human family.

Martha was upset (and rightly so). It was unfair that she be left to do all the work in the kitchen to prepare for Jesus and his friends. Her sister Mary was fully capable of lending a hand. But Martha was probably the first born and Mary most likely the last born. Each with the tendencies associated with each. Even though it would have been loving and kind for Mary to have helped Martha, Jesus affirmed Mary's decision to lounge at his feet and listen to his words. In fact, he calls Martha to quit keeping score and pull up a chair.

In other words, in the midst of life's unfair situations we can take comfort in "time alone with God." There will always be work to do in the kitchen. There will always be those who should help, but don't. Being a Christian doesn't mean we are as considerate as we might be. But being a Christian does mean we can find understanding and hope in the One who cherishes our attention and prayer.

Ezekiel 34:17-31; Psalm 102; Hebrews 8:1-13

Saturday, June 7

Luke 11:14-23 *"When the demon had gone out, the dumb man spoke and the people marveled."* (v.14)

The first time I heard the word "dumb" used in a sentence to refer to a person, I laughed. "What do you mean that man is dumb?" I asked. "I thought you weren't supposed to call people names!" Little did I realize that "dumb" was the correct term for someone who could not speak. I was just a kid and had much to learn about vocabulary...and life.

I had much to learn about spiritual realities as well. Not until I was a teenager with a growing understanding of what it meant to have a "personal relationship with Jesus" did I understand the consequences of being a Christian. Being assured that my sin was forgiven and that my eternal destination was assured, I found my voice. I had reason to speak out and speak up about the Lord. I wasn't tongue-tied anymore. My mouth found motion. My lips found language. In my daily quiet time and in Sunday worship and in conversations with friends and family I could praise God and witness to His love. The demon of fear was gone.

Ezekiel 43:1-12; Psalms 107:33-43, 108; Hebrews 9:1-14

by Greg Asimakoupoulos

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Sunday, June 8

1 Corinthians 2:1-13 *Who knows a person's depths except their own spirit that lives in them? In the same way, no one has known the depths of God except God's Spirit. We haven't received the world's spirit but God's Spirit so that we can know the things given to us by God.* (vv.11-12 CEB)

Today, the Day of Pentecost, commemorates when God gave His Holy Spirit to ordinary people—not only to kings and prophets as in ancient Israel—but also emboldening Jesus' followers to spread the gospel, endure persecution and hardship, be discerning in prayer, and rejoice in all circumstances.

The Lord still gives His Spirit to all who believe in Christ. In the Anglican tradition, we believe that those being baptized—even if they are only infants—receive the Holy Spirit. I liken this to a pilot light that must be maintained, then gets turned up to a higher flame as faith increases.

As a new believer, I received the Holy Spirit at a charismatic church. Through that gift I became an intercessor; was called to a ministry of healing and deliverance; and eventually discerned God inviting me to serve Him as a priest. Thankfully, the Holy Spirit is our GPS—God's Purposes Shown. We just have to follow His directions!

Isaiah 11:1-9; Psalm 118; John 14:21-29

Monday, June 9

Luke 18:31-34 *Jesus stopped and called for the man to be brought to him. When he was present Jesus asked, "What do you want me to do for you?" He said, "Lord, I want to see."* (vv.40-41)

Since Jesus is God in person, he certainly knew what the blind man wanted—and needed. So why did he ask him? I think it's because our Lord knows that part of effective healing is a positive will. Many of us know people whose health improved—sometimes after a terrible diagnosis—because they wanted to heal. And we know others who could feel better but are too dependent on the sympathy and help they receive because of their ailment.

Even if we are well, "Lord, I want to see," is a wonderful request. I love the old Sunday School prayer we taught our kids: "Good Morning, Lord, this is Your day. I am Your child, show me Your way." Amen!

Deuteronomy 30:1-10; Psalms 56, 57, 58; 2 Corinthians 10:1-18

Tuesday, June 10

Deuteronomy 30:11-20 *"This commandment that I'm giving you right now is definitely not too difficult for you. It isn't unreachable. Look here! Today I've set before you life and what's good versus death and what's wrong."* (vv.11, 15)

This text is part of many chapters in which God lays out His covenant with the nation of Israel. If they observe it faithfully, all will go well for them. But when you read forward in the Old Testament, you find out they did not follow God's laws and were eventually sent into exile to teach them a lesson. Yet the Lord tells us His commandments aren't difficult or out of reach, and they all come down to life vs. death/good vs. evil. It doesn't get any clearer than that.

Oh, but enter free will—along with money that leads to greed, politics that leads to division, animosity, and violence—and quickly we lose sight of God's simple equation: Life or death? Good or evil? An old Buddhist adage says, "If it's not true, kind, or necessary, don't say it." I would add, "or think, or do it." Works for Christians, too.

Psalms 61, 62; 2 Corinthians 11:1-21a; Luke 19:1-10

Wednesday, June 11

Psalm 72 *The kings of Tarshish and of the isles shall pay tribute, and the kings of Arabia and Saba offer gifts. For he shall deliver the poor who cries out in distress, and the oppressed who has no helper.* (vv.10, 12 BCP)

I love that this psalm is used at Epiphany because of its prophetic vision of the kings (wise men, Maji) bringing gifts to the Baby Jesus. However, their generous visit was not simply because Jesus was a cute child and his less-than-wealthy parents needed financial help. They came to honor the Messiah, the Savior of the World, who would indeed bring God's *shalom*—peace and justice—to the poor and the oppressed.

Frankly, I am disturbed by wealthy, self-centered “Christians” who lack compassion for the needy. Our goal as followers of Christ is to become more like him in every way, and we know from Jesus' life that he had a huge heart for “the least of these brothers and sisters of mine” (Matthew 25:40b). Maybe all of us need to re-evaluate our priorities in light of those held by the ancient visitors to Bethlehem.

Deuteronomy 31:30—32:14, 2 Corinthians 11:21b-33, Luke 19:11-27

Thursday, June 12

Luke 19:28-40 *Some of the Pharisees from the crowd said to Jesus, “Teacher, scold your disciples! Tell them to stop!” He answered, “I tell you, if they were silent, the stones would shout.”* (vv.39-40 CEB)

I can identify with this passage. Although I was raised a church-going Christian—who also attended Sunday School, Wednesday evening prayer services, Vacation Bible School, church camp, and revivals—I didn't come to truly know Jesus Christ in a life-transforming way until I was 33. At that time, I attended a well-known, radically free-thinking, intellectual church. When, with great excitement over my conversion, I went to tell one of the pastors, she tried to hush me up: “Don't say that kind of thing here. We have many refugees from fundamentalism who are hurting!” I reminded her that if we try to deny Christ, “the very rocks would cry out” (RSV). I was asked to leave that church.

Understandably upset, I wandered into the Episcopal cathedral nearby, where I found the worship and reverence toward God I was seeking. Two years later I was confirmed in that same sanctuary, and ultimately became an Episcopal priest. I was glad my hard-headed “rock” cried out!

2 Chronicles 6:18-31; Psalms 70, 71; 2 Corinthians 12:1-10

Friday, June 13

Luke 19:41-48 *As Jesus came to the city and observed it, he wept over it. He said, “If only you knew on this of all days the things that lead to peace. But now they are hidden from your eyes. The time will come when your enemies will... attack you from all sides. They will crush you completely, you and the people within you. They won't leave one stone on top of another within you, because you didn't recognize the time of your gracious visit from God.”* (vv.41-44)

As I'm writing this, the war between Israel and Hamas—along with ancillary conflicts with Lebanon's Hezbollah and Iranian proxies—has been raging for 9 months and is destroying lives, property, and the natural environment on every side. How Jesus (Yeshua)—Israel's Messiah and ours—must weep over Jerusalem and its environs now! Why did October 7, 2023 have to happen, setting the entire Middle East on fire? I cry to Adonai (God) daily in prayer, asking for peace and justice, or else, “Return and fix all the suffering!” The people did not recognize their “gracious visit from God” that first Palm Sunday. They will, when he returns. Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!

2 Chronicles 26:1-22; Psalm 69; 2 Corinthians 12:11-21

Saturday, June 14

Psalm 76 *In Judah is God known; his Name is great in Israel. At Salem is his tabernacle, and his dwelling is in Zion. There he broke the flashing arrows, the shield, the sword, and the weapons of battle.* (vv.1-3 BCP)

Yesterday, I mentioned the dreadful conflagration engulfing the Holy Land. When we are tempted to despair about all the suffering and injustice in the world, we can find comfort in the Scriptures, especially

the Book of Psalms. In today's Psalm 76, we read about God ending wars—and we trust that somehow He will do this for those whom He loves.

Part of what has brought me closer to Jesus and to Israel at this time is listening to praise music by Messianic Jews. These are Jews that have come to believe Yeshua (Jesus) is indeed Israel's Messiah and they keep his laws and Jewish customs—without needing to become cultural Christians. I now wear a Star of David pendant with a cross at the center, to remind me daily of the Jewish faith of Jesus, Mary, Joseph, all the disciples and most of the Early Church—as well as believers in Israel. Since tomorrow is Sunday, “Shabbat Shalom!” (Peaceful Sabbath). *Hallelujah!*

2 Chronicles 31:2-10, 20-21; Psalm 75; 2 Corinthians 13:1-14; Luke 20:1-8

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Sunday, June 15

Matthew 18:1-14 *“Unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.”* (v.3 NRSV)

(And our Lord hoisted the small, warm, earnest, and probably smelly boy onto his knee where the child sat quietly within the circle of Jesus’ arm and looked up at him rapt, listening to his story.) How does our Lord want us to become like children? Surely not in a child’s state of ignorance of creation and human relationships, not even ignorant of the difference between good and evil. Surely, He wants us to grow into the full capacity of our God-given minds and bodies and souls. And God has given us the curiosity to learn and the spirit to question, even the freedom to disobey Him. We can never recover a child’s innocence though we are forgiven hundreds of times over.

In every good human father, there are shadows of our heavenly Father. In the child of a good human father, we can find what Jesus wants us to recover: trust. That child knows that his father will stay by his side in strange places, will hear him calling in the dark. Because he trusts his father, he will accept his father’s teaching and find comfort in his discipline. He is happy by his father’s side in the shadow of his love.

Human fathers fail at times from weariness and ignorance and fear. Our heavenly Father does not weary. We can trust Him to teach us, to correct us, to find us in the dark, and be with us where we are, at home.

2 Chronicles 32:1-23; Psalms 93, 96; Revelation 15:1-8

Monday, June 16

Acts 1:1-14 *As they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight.* (v.9)

A small boy was asked by his Sunday School teacher to draw a picture of Jesus’ ascension into heaven. He found no problem with that and worked on the picture earnestly. At the bottom of his picture were twelve men (one erased) looking skyward, noses up. At the top of the picture were two large brown shoes—all that could still be seen of Jesus on his way to heaven.

Human souls, God knows, are dwellers in time and space. Our visions of heaven have to be described in terms of things we can touch and see here— thrones and banquets, shepherds and fishermen, bread and wine. They are all good pictures for now. But as we grow in God in Christ, these forms and symbols aren’t good enough. We are like creatures that grow too large for their skins, too cramped for their shells. Our concepts of God grow too great to be contained in earthly vessels. God draws us out into deeper understandings.

The Hubbell telescope has shown us a creation beyond our present powers to comprehend, galaxies beyond galaxies, worlds beyond worlds, and they may be only a corner of God’s mind. He is here by our sides, speaking to us in words we understand, but we cannot presume to confine Him within any human form or definition.

“Do flaming suns his footsteps trace through corridors sublime,
the Lord of interstellar space and Conqueror of time?”

Howard Chandler Robbins

1 Samuel 1:1-20; Psalm 80; Luke 20:9-19

Tuesday, June 17

Psalms 78:1-39 *Their heart was not steadfast toward him; they were not true to his covenant.* (v.37)

Two very large components of our original sin must be greed and very bad memories. God is abundantly generous. He pours out over us everything we need to live and move, breathe and love. But we

gobble up His gifts, take more than we need and keep them from others who suffer without them. We destroy His gifts through our perverted use of them.

The sons of Eli seized the sacrifices of others for themselves; in Jesus' day, the scribes took the best seats in the synagogue and devoured widows' houses. Judas sold his friend for a handful of coins. "Yet (God) being compassionate, forgave their iniquity and did not destroy them; he restrained his anger often, and did not stir up all his wrath"

We forget so easily. God gives us water in our wilderness, and we complain because we do not have better meat and bread for our tables. He brings us out of the deserts and wars of our own making and into His promised land, but we can still be like those of old: "Their heart was not steadfast toward him; they were not true to his covenant." Remembering must be a primary element of our prayers, remembering what we have been given through every generation, through all the years of our lives, for the treasures we possess today. God's mercy is a profound mystery. We discover it when we remember.

1 Samuel 1:21—2:11; Acts 1:15-26; Luke 20:19-26

Wednesday, June 18

Luke 20:27-40 *"Now he is God not of the dead but of the living; for to him all of them are alive."* (v.38)

We waste too much of our lives waiting for heaven. Old hymns (happily not often used these days) describe our life on earth as "a veil of sorrow," "a place of toil and woe," "the weary way," a place of banishment. There were stalwart old saints who lived their lives aloof, holding life at arm's length while they yearned for the Golden Shores, who closed their eyes to the glories God heaped around them even in their veil of tears.

But the earth is the Lord's and all that therein is; He Himself has made us and set us down in this place. This life is part of our eternity with God. He is present with us now as He will be in eternity. The Celtic people's steady awareness of God's presence is in their prayers. He is their constant companion even in the most mundane circumstances. He keeps the weave even on the loom, He hastens the butter on the cream. He walks their fields with them, hauls in their nets with them. He talks with them by their firesides. In sleep, His arm is beneath their heads.

We are walking the way Jesus walked; our calling is to do his work here and now, taking up pain and sorrow and transforming it into good. With Jesus as Lord of our lives, heaven is not a distant promise. It is woven into our earthly sojourn. "Take hold on life," a good Methodist hymn sings. "Take hold on life, and it shall be thy joy and crown eternally!"

1 Samuel 2:12-26; Psalm 119:97-120; Acts 2:1-21

Thursday, June 19

Acts 2:22-36 *"Know with certainty that God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified."* (v.36)

"This Jesus" was all over the place in the Presbyterian and Roman Catholic homes of my childhood. I averted my eyes from the pictures of the Sacred Heart with their pale, thin, sad Jesus peeling off his shirt to show me the blood dripping from the burning heart inside his ribs. The Presbyterian Sunday School Jesus was reproachful, never satisfied with me. His clothes were an irritation, glistening white instead of the disciples' serviceable brown. He dragged his robe about on the ground but it never got dirty; it didn't get wet when he walked on water. I was always content with God, but Jesus was an embarrassment about whom I was reluctant to speak.

How did I come to love him? I read about him in a book—the Bible, for a fact—all in one evening without stopping for chapter and verse. I saw him there with my soul's eye. I saw a magnet for souls, friend of stern mercy, incorruptible truth, indestructible power, comfortable with us, walking the common way with us, dying with incredible courage.

Our pictures cannot contain him; our words cannot describe him. Perhaps we need new words for him, words that we will stumble over so that we will look at him again, discover him anew.

1 Samuel 2:27-36; Psalms 34, 83; Luke 20:41—21:4

Friday, June 20

1 Samuel 3:1-21 *Then the LORD called, "Samuel! Samuel!" (v.4a)*

In very ordinary times eternity breaks through. C. S. Lewis called it "surprised by joy." We look up from a homely task, and the room is filled with eternity. The light doesn't change, but there is a new dimension to commonplace things. We look at a tree we have looked at a thousand times, and suddenly it is radiant with God. We look out at a familiar congregation and for a moment feel the power of people who believe in God; we hear the songs of old heroes.

The moment passes even as it comes. We have done nothing to bring it; we can do nothing to bring it back. We don't know what to do with it, so like Samuel we go about our ordinary work. But we have seen it, a memory of loveliness we have never known, of a place where we have never been. We wait for it to come again. We live as though it will.

Psalm 88; Acts 2:37-47; Luke 21:5-19

Saturday, June 21

Psalm 90 *For we are consumed by your anger; by your wrath we are overwhelmed. You have set our iniquities before you, our secret sins in the light of your countenance. (vv.7-8)*

We would like to leave the God of Wrath to Old Testament people all of whom had not been blest with the concept of a God of infinite mercy. Unfortunately for us, the idea of God's wrath persists into the New Testament. Even today, when cruelty, corruption, and vice rule in so many places, we still cry, "How long, O Lord, how long until your anger destroys them?"

God's wrath is not likely to come in fire and brimstone, in the terrible horsemen, or in the great dragon or beasts from the sea. It may be at work already in His tough love, letting His disobedient children experience the results of their sin.

God does not tolerate evil. He does not tolerate the tolerance of evil. He is incorruptible. He has, He does, and He will destroy evil, but He does not abandon those whom evil has entangled and deformed.

On the anvil of His love, He remakes us.

1 Samuel 4:1b-11; Psalm 87; Acts 4:32—5:11; Luke 21:20-28

by Lydia Dorsett

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Sunday, June 22

Matthew 19:23-30 *But many who are first will be last, and the last, first.* (v.30 NASB)

Years ago, PBS revisited the 1956 Australian National Championships. At the third lap of the 1500 meters final, Olympian John Landy was trailing fellow athlete Ron Clark who suddenly fell. Landy stumbled over Clark then did something unheard of. He stopped to help his fellow athlete get back up. Seeing Clarke was okay, Landy quickly resumed the race—now 35 yards behind the pack. I sat spellbound. What runner, in their right mind, would stop in the middle of a race that is measured in milliseconds to do such a thing? Could I do such a thing?!

Despite losing 7 seconds, Landy regained his stride. But he not only regained, he excelled. Landy began pulling farther and farther ahead of the pack to the point where he actually won the race. The second-place runner was a full 2 seconds behind.

When I hear what Jesus said, “he who will be last shall be first,” I often think of John Landy who, perhaps not surprisingly, went on to become Governor of Victoria as well.

1 Samuel 4:12-22; Psalms 66, 67; James 1:1-18

Monday, June 23

Psalms 89:1-18 *Who among the sons of the mighty is like the LORD....* (v.6b)

As an English major in college, I had the opportunity to study literature of the ages. Such a variety of style, genres, history, romance, politics, culture, and religion. There were novelists, philosophers, playwrights, biographers, and theologians.

And as a Christian I have learned from Baptists, Pentecostals, Muslims, Rabbis, Episcopalians, Methodists, and others. All providing an amazing plethora of literature and teaching. And yet, still, I have found no one who *talks* like Christ. I have studied philosophies, theories, and religious doctrines, but I have yet to hear anyone quite able to condense an entire universe into a single phrase the way Christ did—repeatedly.

My conversion was lightning-bolt caliper at age 16 despite never having heard a single Bible story. I have an active imagination. I’ve been intoxicated. My dreams are vivid. But my epiphany was none of these.

I remain a believer because of that epiphany and by subsequently discovering Jesus’ string of universes: love thy neighbor...truth shall set you free...blessed are the poor in spirit...he who will lose his life shall find it....

1 Samuel 5:1-12; Acts 5:12-26; Luke 21:29-36

Tuesday, June 24

Acts 5:27-42 *...if this plan should be of men, it will be overthrown; but if it is of God you will not be able to overthrow [it]....* (vv.38-39)

Today’s reading reveals not all Pharisees of Jesus’ time were “whitewashed tombs” as he so bluntly put it. Apparently, there were a few reasonable thinkers like Gamaliel who put today’s proposition before a Jerusalem Council considering jailing apostles.

In my early years as a believer, I was taught to have great suspicion for organized religion. Our mentor, Watchman Nee, was quite dubious of anything but home-grown church gatherings. A church’s only distinction should be of location: The church of Seattle. The church of Miami. The church of Chicago, etc. Clergy were frowned upon, and the Catholic Church itself was considered Babylon.

Needless to say, it was quite a surprise for me, decades later, to hear an Episcopal Bishop expound on grace, challenging a shaded image I had of the church and leaving me to wonder if I had been throwing the baby out with the bathwater?

After 2,000 years, the good news of Christ has yet to be overthrown. Whether I fully assimilate it is the real challenge—be it draped in robes or denim.

1 Samuel 6:1-16; Psalms 97, 99, 100; Luke 21:37—22:13

Wednesday, June 25

Acts 6:1-15 *Then they secretly induced men to say, “We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and against God.”* (v.11)

As a caretaker to a private estate in my early 30s I worked tirelessly during one hot summer maintaining nine acres of gardens, a pool, tennis courts, two resident dogs, a fleet of vehicles, a 20,000 square foot mansion and coordinating tours. I was exhausted one day after weeks without a day off only to learn the house sitter, out of the blue, had called my vacationing employer with a list of nefarious lies about me. Even of me having my way with women in the upstairs bedrooms!

With the wind knocked out of me I barely made it to the phone. Then I unleashed. She was sent packing within 24 hours. We later learned of her bouts with mental illness.

There is something about unadulterated mendacity that is very hard to fully heal from. Even now, some 40 years later, that out-of-the blue sucker punch is still felt. Scholars define blasphemy as the attempt to ruin someone’s reputation with scurrilous language. I learned it also comes with a wicked shelf life.

1 Samuel 7:2-17; Psalms 101, 109; Luke 22:14-23

Thursday, June 26

Luke 22:24-30 *For who is greater, he who sits down, or he who serves? Is it not he who sits? But I am among you as one who serves.* (v.27 Lamsa)

I often wonder what people think when they call the US a Christian nation? Does today’s reading come to mind? Ubiquitous servitude? A vast population mimicking the role of Christ? Oh my, my, my. Perhaps if you are on drugs. Today’s reading is, nevertheless, one I yearn to see. Wouldn’t it be wonderful, even to imagine such a thing? Hmm...I must settle for glimpses.

And Peter Farrelly’s 2018 *Green Book* might just serve as such a glimpse. With tables turned, this film, based on the true story of classical pianist Don Shirley, portrays a prominent black musician who is chauffeured through the American South on tour by Italian American driver and bodyguard, Tony Vallelonga. How would such an entourage navigate the South one might ask? As expected is the answer. It is a magnificent tale of the servant being the greater in so many ways. Shirley’s talent to the *sitting* audience. Sometimes the driver’s candor challenging his employer, the lonely musician. An endearing story of an unlikely duo that—in their service—come to cherish one another.

1 Samuel 8:1-22; Psalms 105:1-22; Acts 6:15—7:16

Friday, June 27

Luke 22:31-38 *...let him who has no sword sell his robe and buy one.* (v.36 NAS)

At first glance I was puzzled by today’s reading. Jesus taught to turn the other cheek, that he who lives by the sword dies by the sword. So, why does he now say sell stuff and buy weapons? Doesn’t make sense.

But after researching, I discovered the consensus among scholars is that, in the spirit of being wise as a serpent and gentle as a dove, Christ took to smoke and mirrors to create an *appearance* of shade in order to help fulfill him being *classed among criminals*. The ultimate playwright—knowing just how to stage the furniture.

What’s unusual is that illusions are usually employed for personal gain such as the high stakes gambling farce in George Hill’s *The Sting*. Or, Cillian Murphy’s cunning enticements in *The Peaky Blinders*. Or, my own life in which I go at lengths to save. I may repeatedly fail to lose my life in order to find it, but that doesn’t stop me from wishing and hoping I could, like the One who so selflessly and cunningly did.

1 Samuel 9:1-14; Psalms 102; Acts 7:17-29

Saturday, June 28

1 Samuel 9:15—10:1 ...*Am I not...of the smallest of the tribes of Israel, and my family the least of all families....* (v.21)

Although Saul was described as unusually handsome he is, nevertheless, surprised that the great Seer Samuel would consider talking to someone of his low caliber—that is, one of “the least of all families and from the smallest of all tribes.”

God choosing the underdog is a common thread in Scripture. Gideon, Saul, Esther, Moses, David, Daniel, Mary. Everyone loves a winner, especially when they are “losers.” Jesus seemed certain that God takes great note of what the smallest grain of mustard seed can do. But underdogs eventually are tested just as everyone else. No one gets carte blanche even if you were the underdog Israel as the Book of Kings chronicles.

As a gay man the hatred I feel from the bigots of the world is real and painful and endless. It has always made me feel *least of all*. But I also grow weary of whining. There comes a time for bucking up, soldiering on, and concentrating on how to fulfill that all important commandment to *love thy neighbor*—especially the nasty ones.

Psalms 107:33-43, 108; Acts 7:30-43; Luke 22:39-51

by William Bacon

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Good News Daily

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Sunday, June 29

1 Samuel 10:1-16 *When he turned his back to leave Samuel, God gave him another heart; and all these signs came to pass that day.* (v.9 RSV)

Heart transplants are new in terms of what mankind can do, but God has always given new hearts to those willing to be obedient to Him. The key is the willingness to be obedient!

Obedience is a struggle. For me, it means not being in charge, not having control, and trusting another. I don't want to let go of the reins of power. I'm sure I have the answers to most of life's problems, if only I would be consulted and then obeyed.

Back to obedience. God has the answers to all our problems, if we but obey. I smile at those who ridicule the Old Testament rules listed by the hundreds. We've yet to really obey those rules. I wonder how our emotional health would be if we really listened to God and not our own physical desires?

I say I want that new heart only God can give me, but I'd really rather have the new heart and still be able to eat three candy bars. At times the distance from my mind saying "yes, Lord" to my heart saying "I will obey you, Lord" is such a great distance. I do want that new heart, Lord. I do want to obey. "And all these signs came to pass."

Psalm 118; Romans 4:13-25; Matthew 21:23-32

Monday June 30

Acts 7:44—8:1a *"As your fathers did, so do you. Which of the prophets did not your fathers persecute?"* (vv.51a-52b)

The more things change, the more they stay the same. "Pop" psychology tells us that humans beings are getting better and better in every way, every day. Yet, the headlines in the news scream at us that humans continue to lie, steal, cheat, and hurt each other.

The Israelites believed that a king would help them be a better people. God Himself as King wasn't good enough. They had to have that human icon of a king.

The kings didn't do for the Israelites what they had hoped for. The prophets told the people, time and again, to turn away from their evil deeds and turn to God, God being the only way to salvation. Yet, the people persecuted the prophets. Who wants to turn to God? Can't some human help us?

God heard their cry and sent His only begotten Son to be a human, to live as we do, to show us how to be better and better every day. Yet, we humans didn't listen. Peter, Jesus' faithful follower, denied Christ three times before the cock crowed. And what do we do? Are we any better than our forebearers? The example given us in Scripture from generation to generation is that of a stiff-necked people who want to do it "their own way." The only way to peace and happiness is to let God be in charge! That is the way to being better and better.

1 Samuel 10:17-27; Psalm 106:1-18; Luke 22:52-62

Tuesday, July 1

Luke 22:63-71 *"If you are the Christ, tell us." But he said to them, "If I tell you, you will not believe; and if I ask you, you will not answer."* (vv.67-68)

The magician swirls his baton over the empty top hat and a rabbit appears. The audience gasps in admiration. A rabbit pulled out of a hat. Where was it before? How did it get in the hat? A simple conjuror's trick that delights audiences of all ages. It would spoil the magic if the magician told the audience how the trick was performed.

Jesus is no trick. The Resurrection is no sleight of hand maneuver. Jesus tried to tell the people of God's great love. Few listened, most wanted to be entertained by signs and wonders. The desire for

entertainment seems to be the common thread for humanity. We want someone to distract us from the reality of everyday life. The magician swirls on stage and our lives are brightened by the mystery.

If we'd let Jesus work his "magic" in our hearts, then every moment we lived would be the best it could be. There would be no need to ask if he was the Christ. Our lives would be transformed, and all would know the answers without asking!

1 Samuel 11:1-15; Psalms 120, 121, 122, 123; Acts 8:1-13

Wednesday, July 2

Acts 8:14-25 *"Repent therefore of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you."* (v.22)

Mid-week, hump day, time to prepare for the weekend, rolling along, getting ready to really live it up! The boss thinks the job is getting done but my heart's not in it. That's the key to doing a great job—having your heart in it. But nobody sees your heart. It's hidden under layers of societal protection.

Putting up a good front is considered a good thing among the people of the world. Being inscrutable is a skill the poker player strives for with a passion. Passion, that which inflames the heart. It's the heart that counts. The heart of the matter. The Lord sees into our hearts with an unblinking eye. He knows better than Santa Claus if we've been good or bad. The heart pumps the blood throughout the system. When the heart isn't right, the system begins to break down. God tells us time and again through Scripture that we need to repent, to turn to Him, let Him be in charge so that our hearts may be pure. Until we repent and our hearts are cleaned, the whole system is running on half a cylinder. When the system is running on half a cylinder, it may never get over the hump!

1 Samuel 12:1-6, 16-25; Psalm 119:145-176; Luke 23:1-12

Thursday, July 3

Acts 8:26-40 *Seated in his chariot, he was reading the prophet Isaiah.* (v.28b)

What is that old saying about there being nothing new under the sun? Here, the Ethiopian is reading to make the trip a pleasant and useful experience. He's reading the prophet Isaiah. And along comes Philip to explain the true meaning of God's word to the seeker.

Audio books help pass the time in the car or while exercising. It seems easier to concentrate on the information if I listen while I'm doing something else. Summer travel is the perfect time to catch up on Scripture or teachings or new books.

It seems that every major book is being released in audio format shortly after it's released in print. My public library offers recorded books for loan. My church offers sermons and teachings online as well.

Before we go anywhere in the car, I stock up on listening material. Philip may not be running alongside to explain God's word but there are a number of wonderful preachers and teachers who can bring God's word to life while you're driving along. There really is nothing new under the sun.

1 Samuel 13:5-18; Psalms 131, 132, 133; Luke 23:13-25

Friday, July 4

Acts 9:1-9 *Now as he journeyed he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed about him.* (v.3)

Fireworks displays are de rigueur tonight! Sparklers being twirled about. Small children clutching the sparkler and dancing and waving that sparkler so it leaves a trail in the night. Bottle rockets set off. Cherry bombs exploded! All those fireworks exploding with great gusto. They bring joy to the heart. We're expecting all the sound and fury. We know that it's Independence Day, and we want to look to the sky for fiery colors.

Paul, however, wasn't expecting a flash of light. He was minding his own business (and that was the problem, it was his business and not God's business) when God created a personal fireworks display to get Paul's attention. The light flashed and Paul couldn't see anymore. The darkness overcame him.

What fireworks display has God set off to get our attention? Have we let the brightness blind us completely to the will of God? It took an obedient servant to heal Paul's eyes. What servant has God sent

to us to open our eyes? It's the Fourth of July, time to celebrate our country's freedom. It's a great time to remember the freedom we have in Christ, if we but accept him as our Lord and Savior!

1 Samuel 13:19—14:15; Psalms 140, 142; Luke 23:26-31

Saturday, July 5

Acts 9:10-19a *But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel."* (v.15a)

Ananias said, "Here I am Lord," when God called his name. Ananias was obedient when God told him to go and see the man who had persecuted so many of Ananias' friends.

It is hard to be obedient when you're not sure of the outcome. There is that fear of change, that lack of control when one says "yes" without being sure of what will happen. Ananias went ahead and did what was asked of him by God.

The key for me is that God told Ananias that this persecutor was a chosen instrument, chosen by God, to carry His name to the world. I look at the people who persecute the faithful and can't imagine that they could become God's chosen vehicle of evangelism. I wonder if I would go to help them if God asked me to do so. I wonder if I would be obedient. Lots to wonder about on a Saturday morning after all the fireworks.

1 Samuel 14:16-30; Psalms 137:1-6, 144; Luke 23:32-43

by Kathryn Stirk

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