

Good News Daily

Volume XXVI

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Number 9

Sunday, March 1

Psalm 24 *Who shall stand in his holy place? Those who have clean hands and pure hearts.* (vv.3b-4a NRSV)

Stationed in her rocking chair by the entrance, Iris greets me every time I pay a visit to her nursing home. Of course, Iris greets everyone, assuming they have all come to call on her. After a big hug, a smile and sometimes a few tears, she grabs my hand and begins a long rambling prayer. I'm never quite sure where her mind is, but I know her heart is certainly in the right place.

Today's Psalm 24 is thought to be part of the Hebrew liturgy used in entering the temple, perhaps in connection with carrying the Ark of the Covenant. Some must have seen the worship requirement—clean hands and pure hearts—as a ritual cleansing accomplished through animal sacrifice. Yet YHWH was always calling His people beyond this, to the deeper cleansing that comes from the heart and subsequent right actions with the hands. That perfect righteousness of heart and hand could never quite be pieced together by men, no matter how carefully they tried to follow the Law. So God sent Jesus to be the perfect sacrifice for our sins, to cleanse our hands and hearts with his purity.

Who can stand in his holy place in prayer? Iris and all the saints who have put their trust in the clean hands and pure heart of Jesus.

Genesis 41:14-45; Psalm 29; Romans 6:3-14; John 5:19-24

Monday, March 2

Mark 3:7-19a *He appointed twelve, whom he also named to be apostles, to be with him and to be sent out.* (v.14)

“Just because the other kids are fooling around in the cafeteria line doesn't mean you have to. I expect you to be a leader, to set a good example,” her father intoned.

Yes, Ellen had heard that before. It was the second verse to the discourse on self-control, obeying the rules, and doing the right thing. Her folks were always pressuring her to be a leader. She knew what she was supposed to be like, but when push-came-to-shove—literally in the lunchroom lineup—Ellen was a follower.

That Sunday the youth group talked about being a disciple called to follow Jesus. After passing out “WWJD” bracelets, the youth minister explained the “what would Jesus do” approach to life: “Since Jesus is always with us, we can just watch him in our minds, do what Jesus does, follow him.”

“Hey!” Ellen piped up, “It's alright to be a follower so long as I'm following Jesus? So I don't need to be a leader.”

“Yeah, that's it,” the youth minister came back at her, “but Jesus is a tough act to follow. You'd better get plugged into God in prayer, in the Bible, and in the support of other Christians. Remember Christ's words to potential followers? ‘Let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.’”

Genesis 41:46-57; Psalms 56, 57, 58; 1 Corinthians 4:8-21

Tuesday, March 3

Mark 3:19b-35 *He casts out demons.* (v.22)

“There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them” (C. S. Lewis, *Screwtape Letters*).

The very idea of casting out demons seems archaic at best. Surely there were just a few mentally deranged folks that Jesus straightened out. *Not!* Such an assessment flies in the face of what Jesus actually does and says. In reading Mark this week, please note that Jesus' attack on evil spirits is no side line, but a primary part of his mission that we just can't minimize.

In yesterday's reading when Jesus called his disciples, he charged them "to proclaim the message and to have authority to cast out demons." This he repeats at the close of Mark as he leaves his ministry with these men.

In today's lesson, the only things that Jesus and the scribes agree on is that (1) there are evil spirits and (2) Jesus did drive them out of people. What they are disputing is (1) who Jesus is and (2) from whence his authority over evil comes—two questions that the demons themselves have no trouble answering! "Whenever the unclean spirits saw him, they fell down before him and shouted, 'You are the Son of God!'" (Mark 3:11). Now that's authority!

Genesis 42:1-17; Psalms 61, 62; 1 Corinthians 5:1-8

Wednesday, March 4

Mark 4:1-20 "*Listen! A sower went out to sow...some seed fell on the path...on rocky ground...among thorns, and...other seed fell into good soil and brought forth grain.*" (vv.3-8)

A Wheat Field in Palestine Speaks Out

Waylon: It's springtime and that dern clod-hopper's gonna be out here.

Richie: Yep, spreadin' that everlastin' seed.

Waylon: Well, I got better things to do than root seed. I been a path all my life and I'm stayin' one.

Stoney: Waylon, you're haaard ground. You let them ravens flat carry off what seed lands on ya'. Now me, I takes to that seed right off....

Thorny: Then you flat give up if it don't rain soft and nice for ya. One hot day and that seed's done for.

Waylon: Face it Stoney, you just ain't got no depth and you can't stick with nothin'.

Thorny: Well, I'm figurin' on doing right well this year, seein' those brambles been cleared.

Stoney: Them briars'll come right back on ya. Good intensions you got but you ain't got the will power to have done with them worrisome thorns.

Thorny: And then there's ol' Richie yonder. He's just simple soil, humble ground, waitin'...

Waylon: Dumb as dirt, I'd call it.

Stoney: Now me, I'm so full up with rocks that I can't endure a whole season.

Thorny: And, I got the briars to worry 'bout.

Waylon: And I'm a path and I ain't about to change!

Stoney: But Richie's your open field, fertile soil type. He takes pretty well to what's laid on him 'cause he knows he's empty and he's waitin' to be filled.

Waylon: Shush, boys! That farmer comin' down my path.

Genesis 42:18-28; Psalm 72; 1 Corinthians 5:9—6:8

Thursday, March 5

Mark 4:21-34 "*For to those who have, more will be given; and from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away.*" (v.25)

Ouch! This painful verse is repeated four places in the gospels and it's the punch line to both the Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14-30) and of the Ten Minas (Luke 19:11-27). From these two parables, we can say that God has given every one of us spiritual gifts, talents and resources of many kinds for which we will be held accountable at the Final Judgment. Some folks won't use their gifts. Like high school French that's never practiced, spiritual gifts and spiritual tools (praying, confessing, forgiving, worshiping, and even loving) can waste away.

Other folks will gladly use all they have been given in the service of the kingdom; yet in true heavenly economics, their gifts aren't used up but multiplied. In trying to serve God, these saints willingly cross comfort zones to go beyond what they can do with their own abilities. This forces them to depend on God, who then supplies spiritual treasures in abundance. In hardship and suffering, these saints allow God to turn pain into positive gifts of maturity and empathy. So, both through servanthood and suffering, God will increase our gifts, not because we're worthy, but simply because we're in need and we ask.

At the final accounting, He'll know what we were given to work with, how we used it, and what we have returned... because all of it is His.

Genesis 42:29-38; Psalms 70, 71; 1 Corinthians 6:12-30

Friday, March 6

Psalm 69 *Save me, O God, for the waters have come up to my neck.* (v.1)

“Helmet, life preserver, paddle— we’ll pass those out shortly. Whitewater rafting is a thrill, but it can be dangerous, so listen up. Worst case: raft capsizes. Don’t panic. Don’t call out; we know you’re in there and you’ll just swallow the water. Don’t swim—you’re no match for the Ocoee river. Never stand up on the rocks; you’ll only get bashed up in the rapids.

“So what do you do? Lie back, cross your arms over your chest and float feet first down the river. That way your guide can get a line or a paddle to you easily.”

The whitewater rafting instructor’s words are similar to those of a spiritual counselor.

“Christian living is thrilling, but there’s bound to be temptation, sin, and suffering along the way. So start by putting on the whole armor of God (Ephesians 6:13-17). In the whirlpools of life, don’t fight. Admit that you are powerless in your own strength. Believe in God’s power to save you and to redeem the situation. Then prayerfully turn your will and life over to God’s care. Let go and let God. He’ll be able to reach you best in that position.”

Genesis 43:1-15; 1 Corinthians 7:1-9; Mark 4:35-41

Saturday, March 7

Mark 5:1-20 *They saw the man who had been possessed by the legion of demons, sitting there, dressed and in his right mind.* (v.15)

“The reason the Son of God came was to destroy the devil’s work” (1 John 3:8). Jesus is at it again, so let’s follow up on Tuesday’s discussion with a quote from Francis MacNutt’s book, *Deliverance from Evil Spirits*: “The flip side of preaching that the Kingdom of God is at hand is preaching that the kingdom of Satan is being destroyed. For that reason, Jesus’ first act of ministry in Mark was casting out an unclean spirit from a man he met in the synagogue... ‘Deliver us from evil.’ A still more accurate translation...renders it, ‘Deliver us from the evil one’ (that is, Satan). Consequently, delivering people from evil spirits is, along with forgiving sins and healing the sick, an essential part of the Gospel.”

Very dramatically Jesus delivers from evil this possessed man of the tombs. In John 10:10 Jesus said, “The thief [Satan] comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they [this man and every tortured human being] may have life, and have it abundantly.” Be assured, Jesus is the strong deliverer! He delivers us from evil and then he delivers us to abundant life.

Genesis 43:16-34; Psalms 75, 76; 1 Corinthians 7:10-24

by Martha Emerson

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Sunday, March 8

Psalm 96 *Sing to the LORD a new song....* (v.1 NAS)

Years ago, I had the privilege of chronicling faith stories for a church blog. I interviewed random members who had agreed to have their stories published. The discovery was surprising.

My early upbringing as a Christian included a time in our gatherings for lay members to share testimonies, insights, and life lessons. So, I have always been eager to probe what for many churches is that secret garden: the congregation! What I found behind this compelling gate was what appeared a quiet vineyard bursting at the seams with yield.

A young woman leaving a home, yet unsold, in faith, in a cross country move. A single man leaving a prestigious job only to find an even greater reward through a blind leap of faith. A couple battling postpartum depression and work stress, by a joint-call to midday prayer, finding their lives suddenly altered.

I would venture to say most churches are full of unassuming people quietly living out *new songs* of faith in their day to day lives. Who are you sitting next to?

Genesis 44:1-17; Psalm 93; Romans 8:1-10; John 5:25-29

Monday, March 9

1 Corinthians 7:25-31 *...those who marry will face difficult circumstances, and I'm trying to spare you such problems.* (v.28 NET)

I recall watching a situation-comedy years ago in which a wife appeared very concerned. I believe it was Archie Bunker who asked Edith what's wrong. "It's the gays," she said with worry. "Now they want to get married." "Ah jeez," Archie replied. "Haven't the gays suffered enough already?"

I roared in laughter. Ironically, it's a similar point the apostle Paul is alluding to in today's reading which implies, *be careful what you ask for.*

While Paul's addressing straight Corinthians wondering whether to marry one could argue that today gay people may weigh the very same question. One can never hear Paul's kinds of warnings while deliriously in love. The fog has to clear first. Only then can one listen to reason. A dear friend once told me, "When falling in love be more careful than in anything else you do." That's the challenge. I don't know when falling in love is ever *very careful!* Ergo, Paul's wish to spare.

Genesis 44:18-34; Psalm 80; Mark 5:21-43

Tuesday, March 10

Mark 6:1-13 *"A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and among his relatives...."* (v.4)

Scholars tell us Hindu sage Narada Muni was the first to coin the phrase "familiarity breeds contempt." Chaucer later used it in his *Tale of Melibee*. For prophets, it's a special irony just as Jesus alludes to it in today's reading.

It got me wondering about the origins of my own contempt. I think for me it is when my imaginary suspicions are stirred by ignorance and insecurities, leaving me vulnerable to error and bad assumptions.

When I took to Cognitive Behavioral Therapy to deal with anxieties, I learned the resolve was redirecting *irrational* fears to simple logic and reason. My own suspicious, ignorant feeling of contempt must find similar corrections if I am to escape them as well.

Recently I felt jealous contempt toward a friend. About the same time, I heard a Rabbi say, the essence of love is *giving*. When I realized my jealousy was based on ignorance and suspicion I thought of the Rabbi and, yes, how much better it would be to replace my contempt, with giving. What can I *give* my friend instead?

Genesis 45:1-15; Psalm 78:1-39; 1 Corinthians 7:32-40

Wednesday, March 11

1 Corinthians 8:1-13 *Knowledge makes arrogance, but love edifies.* (v.1b NAS)

Using *Strongs Concordance* to measure this reading, “knowledge inflates with self-conceit whereas love builds and encourages.” Some argue this reflects the contrasts of early Greco-Roman cultural values of pride and honor versus the new Christian emphasis of humility and service. Paul further threads an even finer line, telling me if my spiritual knowledge allows me to eat temple food, celebrate secular holidays, or drink pagan wine—with a free conscience—but that freedom somehow offends my brother that I do well to re-consider and, perhaps, abstain. I may be “free” but my “freedom” may cause a loved one offense. Paul’s advice: be careful with liberty, consider others.

If I am reading this correctly, I am okay with this version of loving my neighbor. Spiritual knowledge is something I explore and relish and celebrate. But it too can make me inflated, give me that exaggerated sense of self-importance. It feels right that if I must weigh spiritual protocol over love that the latter should always prevail.

Genesis 45:16-28; Psalm 119:97-120; Mark 6:13-29

Thursday, March 12

1 Corinthians 9:1-15 *...those who proclaim the gospel...receive their living by the gospel. But I have not used any of these rights.* (vv.14-15 NET)

Paul goes at great length to point out to Corinthians that while he would be fully justified to receive compensation for his ministry, he purposely forfeits it. His motive? So as not to be a hindrance to the gospel.

I recall both my Muslim mother and my Episcopalian grandmother were equally repelled by the idea of religious coffers. To them money and religion were an odious mix. They would be quite thumbs-up with today’s reading.

Perhaps it is why I was also taken by my early church elders. My first exposure to Christianity was in private home gatherings in the late 60s in the Bay Area. Our host was a dear widow who gave of her home generously. Our three elders, disciples of Watchman Nee, all worked day jobs. We gathered three nights a week for years. Neither the host nor the elders ever asked for money. Ever.

Maternal influences certainly impacted my life. But my early elders choosing to abstain from compensation also added to the credibility of the gospel of Christ to me. Cheers to them!

Genesis 46:1-7, 28-34; Psalms 42, 43; Mark 6:30-46

Friday, March 13

Genesis 47:1-26 *“Since I have bought you and your land today for Pharaoh, here is seed for you. Cultivate the land.”* (v.23)

What I like about today’s reading is that Joseph is a great problem solver. In addressing a relentless famine, he proves to be both clever and compassionate—and, repeatedly. As the famine morphs, Joseph navigates each surprise proactively.

I had a boss when I was young who amazed me. He was head of a college Physical Plant with over a hundred employees. He had seven children and was Pastor of his church. How on earth did he get through the week, I wondered. Not only did he but he did so seamlessly with grace, kindness, drive, and humor. He taught me how to keep a tight ship with the scheduling of my staff but also to be compassionate. It was the first time in my life I learned what self-esteem felt like thanks to his compliments that were both generous and sincere.

As a result, I began to recognize so many people weighed down with criticisms and starved of compliments. Like Joseph, my boss taught me that maybe I too could help change that for others.

Psalm 88; 1 Corinthians 9:16-27; Mark 6:47-56

Saturday, March 14

1 Corinthians 10:1-13 *...let the one who thinks he is standing be careful....* (v.12)

In addressing the evils of arrogance, Rabbi Dovid Rosenfeld of Torah.org wrote, “The one who values himself above all else lives in the center of his own universe.” A description so like solipsism—that

ultimate worship of self. Paul seems to sound the alarm when the human mind takes that solipsism and justifies it. In contrast, humility and self-effacement are of supreme value to rabbinic teaching as both Rabbis would argue.

But Rosenfeld goes on to say that while there is no room for arrogance neither is there for openly carrying yourself about like a born loser, suggesting there can be an extreme in either direction with pride and confidence.

I have an old friend who sometimes pummels himself so far into the ground as though there seems nothing left. Frankly, sometimes I do the same. It is interesting that one thing solipsism and self-annihilation have in common is that neither bear fruit. Jesus said lose life, find life—clearly implying promise as an end. If I find no promise I should expect, one way or another, something's up.

Genesis 47:27—48:7; Psalms 87, 90; Mark 7:1-23

by William Bacon

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Sunday, March 15

Romans 8:11-25 *For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.* (v.13 NIV)

It should be a great comfort to us to know that upon accepting Jesus as our personal savior, God gave us a gift in the form of the Holy Spirit. He guides our thoughts and decisions. He is a comfort in all of our situations. But how often do we succumb to the thoughts heard so often: it's my life, it's my money, it's my body, and I should be able to do what I want.

Having the power of the Spirit is not a guarantee that we will make the right decisions. The power of the flesh often prevails and leads us to a separation from God. Be comforted with the knowledge that the Spirit is within you but be ever aware that Satan will antagonize you with the power of the flesh.

Genesis 48:8-22; Psalms 66, 67; John 6:27-40

Monday, March 16

Mark 7:24-37 *Jesus commanded them not to tell anyone. But the more he did so, the more they kept talking about it.* (v.36)

In choosing friends or in deciding how much I want to share when talking with friends, I think about whether they will keep confidentiality. When I am told something, I always process the thought, "Is this information my information to share or is this something that is not meant to be shared." Finding friends that will not openly share everything you tell them is not easy. Even the disciples found it difficult not to discuss what Jesus was doing. He wanted to avoid the scrutiny of followers that wanted to trap him for what he was preaching.

One of the greatest gifts that we can provide a friend is to be a good listener and to keep confidentiality about the discussions. It is always tempting to be the one that has the latest information but keep asking yourself whether this is your information to spread. Normally it is not. Be a good friend and don't share information that is not intended to be shared.

Genesis 49:1-28; Psalm 89:1-18; 1 Corinthians 10:14—11:1

Tuesday, March 17

Psalms 100 *Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name.* (v.4)

During times of struggle, I often lament about not getting speedy answers to my prayer requests. Patience does build strength of faith, but I find that discipline difficult. It is also hard for me to offer praise in a time of need. I tend to focus on what I need or don't have as compared to all of the blessings already in my possession.

Perspective might be the anecdote for my concerns. In times of need or stress, let's try to give thanks for what we already have and find a way to enter his gates with thanksgiving rather than with a longer list of requests.

Genesis 49:29—50:14; Psalms 97, 99; 1 Corinthians 11:17-34; Mark 8:1-10

Wednesday, March 18

1 Corinthians 12:1-11 *There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them.* (v.4)

The Holy Spirit comes to us at the time of our acceptance of Christ as our savior. He becomes an inner voice helping us to navigate our relationship. Sometimes forgotten is the conveyance of individual gifts. We become unique with these gifts and need to become aware of what has been given to us. Everyone does not receive the same gifts thus it becomes relevant and important to discern our individual gifts. Scripture tells us to carry our own burdens and that we are responsible to use what has been given. I

have found joy in becoming aware of my own gifts and have found satisfaction in using them. I encourage you to identify your own gifts and find ways to put them to good use. You will find comfort and joy in doing so.

Genesis 50:15-26; Psalms 101, 109; Mark 8:11-26

Thursday, March 19

Exodus 1:6-22 *The midwives, however, feared God and did not do what the King of Egypt had told them to do; they let the boys live.* (v.17)

When confronted with difficult decisions, how quickly might we lose perspective of what is right and what might not be pleasing to God. Sometimes we are just saving face or don't want to be criticized by our friends with our words or actions. It reminds me of the saying, "Easy to say but tough to do." As we think through our actions let us reflect on what Jesus would have us do. The reward of doing what is pleasing to him is far greater than any other form of acceptance. Join me in becoming more grounded in biblical perspective and to acquiring the discipline to make those beliefs a daily part of every decision we make.

Psalms 69; 1 Corinthians 12:12-26; Mark 8:27—9:1

Friday, March 20

Psalms 102 *Hear my prayer, LORD; let my cry for help come to you. Do not hide your face from me when I am in distress. Turn your ear to me; when I call, answer me quickly.* (vv.1-2)

When I read these verses, I am reminded of my prayers and my thought that He is not listening. Is the Lord too busy or did my request not get through? While I have learned to be more patient, I still prefer quick answers. In this psalm the writer seems to be in a similar position. When answers finally become apparent, I realize that some of the answers are better than I could have dreamed or are quite different than what I had expected. Sometimes the Lord just needs the time to move the pieces. And in the right time he just might provide a better or different answer.

Exodus 2:1-22; 1 Corinthians 12:27—13:3; Mark 9:2-13

Saturday, March 21

Mark 9:14-29 *He replied, "This kind can come out only by prayer."* (v.29)

Well, I have tried everything else so maybe I will pray. Or as one of my teachers used to say, "Pray last, get nowhere fast." I find it interesting in this verse that Jesus has indicated the only way to rid the demon was through prayer. It reminds me of this significant form or way of communicating with our savior. I am so often ready to move into action in anticipation that the outcome is totally dependent on my actions. While we are not called to just sit without action we should not be about our work without committing our thoughts in prayer. I find better resolution with the balance of prayer and individual action. And, as indicated in this verse, sometimes prayer alone could be the right step.

Exodus 2:23—3:15; Psalms 107:33-43, 108; 1 Corinthians 13:1-13

by Jim Rogers

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Sunday, March 22

Romans 12:1-21 *Be transformed by the renewal of your mind.* (v.2 RSV)

A Christian counselor friend of mine says she first asks her patients about the condition of their hearts, not their minds, heads, brains, or emotions. The heart, she says, drives the brain, muscles, and bones. Quiet the heart and you quiet the patient, setting the stage for spiritual healing.

Many years ago, when I attended my first prayer conference, a friend said he was “glad I had joined the ‘renewal’ movement.” I was shocked by this. I had not come for “renewal” nor did I think I needed it. If that was the agenda of the conference, I would have have stayed home.

Over time, I began to realize that the essence of prayer is the renewal of your heart, mind, soul, and body. As the power of the Holy Spirit keeps washing the waves of eternity on the shores of our hearts and souls, our minds become “renewed.” This is the only way God can activate that divine breath, wind, and spirit He installed in each of us at birth. It is the only way our minds can be renewed to become faithful, obedient, living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God.

Exodus 3:16—4:12; Psalm 118; John 8:46-59

Monday, March 23

Mark 9:30-41 *“Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me; and whoever receives me, receives not me but him who sent me.”* (v.37)

My wife and I love to have our 2 1/2-year-old grandson spend a weekend with us. We always enjoy taking him to church. “It’s fun,” he says. He loves the hymns and processions. Our happiest moment is when we take communion. He stands on the altar cushion, between us, wide-eyed and dazzled, with our arms surrounding him as our priest blesses him.

Recently, as the three of us knelt at the altar rail, I had a feeling of not wanting to leave. I had a sense the three of us were just where God wanted us to be. Then, I realized I had to get up and go back into the real world. God had entered our souls and bodies. We were blessed and energized as a family, and we now were ready to re-enter the world.

The simple, innocent posture of amazement and expectation that our little boy assumed at the altar was a perfect picture of “receiving one child in my name.” If all grown-ups could experience the joy and amazement that we saw in our grandson at the altar, we would return to the world employing only plowshares, no swords.

Exodus 4:10-31; Psalm 31; 1 Corinthians 14:1-19

Tuesday, March 24

Psalm 122 *Pray for the peace of Jerusalem!* (v.6a)

Phrases from the psalms are so deeply imbedded in our liturgical worship that most of us don’t realize how much a part of our daily lives they can become. As our knowledge and personal experience with the psalms grows, they become the woven fabric of our personal understanding of who God is.

Psalm 122:6 became locked into my spiritual fabric one cold November Sunday, while attending worship at the Garden Tomb in Jerusalem. As the crowd swelled, I stepped backwards and tripped over a little sign reading “Pray for the Peace of Jerusalem.” I liked the idea and did it. Only later did I learn it was Psalm 122:6. I will never forget it.

“My help comes from the Lord who made heaven and earth” is part of Psalm 121. I was thrilled when Astronaut Jim Irwin read it from the moon in 1971. He returned to earth and spent the next 20 years telling thousands of people how he felt God’s presence on the moon as he stood where no man had ever stood since creation.

Jim used our house as his Connecticut office, and we got to know him well and traveled with him. It is impossible for me to look at the moon and not recall Psalm 121. It's hard to improve on knowing a man who has visited another planet and found God.

Exodus 5:1—6:1; Psalms 120, 121, 123; 1 Corinthians 14:20-40; Mark 9:42-50

Wednesday, March 25

2 Corinthians 2:14—3:6 *For we are the aroma of Christ to God...* (v.15)

Paul admonishes us to be the “aroma” of Christ. The New Testament encourages us to be the image of the invisible God in the world.

I grew up in an Anglo-Catholic high Episcopal church in Baltimore, where I served on the altar as the thurifer. I loved the smell of incense, the thrill of leading the procession and swinging the thurible 360 degrees overhead. Living in New England now, where incense is almost never used in Episcopal churches, I still miss the ceremony and the fragrant, pungent smell of incense as heavenly smoke rises to the ceiling.

Originally used to herald the homecoming of a conquering hero or alert citizens that the king is about to pass by, it also masked the odor of sewage from open roadside drainage ditches. An incense crucible can distribute a heavenly aroma for 30 minutes and spread it within a 100-foot radius.

If each Christian could be a potent aroma for Christ within a 100-foot radius, we would have the job of evangelism all locked up.

Exodus 7:8-24; Psalm 119:145-176; Mark 10:1-16

Thursday, March 26

2 Corinthians 3:7-18 *And where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.* (v.17)

Joe is being released from prison at age 65, after serving five years. He spoke to our Kairos Prison Ministry group and thanked us for helping him find “total freedom” for the first time in his life, even though he was behind bars. Joe doesn't know it, but he beat the statistics that show only one person in 500,000 becomes a Christian at age 65.

How did Joe do it? He didn't, but the Holy Spirit did. Joe came to prison for abusing his family. A high school drop-out, he drank a lot and held modest jobs as farm hand and janitor.

In prison, Joe immediately became a father-figure to the 70 men in his cellblock, whose average age was 22. Previously nobody ever sought advice from Joe or wanted Joe's opinion or his help. Now, all the younger men were asking him deep, intimate, spiritual questions. Joe was “somebody.”

Joe began to attend church and Bible study. The hard heart he brought to prison began to soften, and he became free to be the man God wanted him to be. He listened and told others.

Exodus 7:25—8:19; Psalms 131, 132, 133; Mark 10:17-31

Friday, March 27

2 Corinthians 4:1-12 *But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us.* (v.7)

There are many “causes” in this world: social, political, environmental, economic, and religious. As Christians, we pursue the “cause of Christ” which under girds all other causes.

I wish I had understood this earlier in life, when conquering the world and becoming rich was my “cause.” Had I understood the cause of Christ, I would not have been so reckless in my first business, 30 years ago.

If we are serious about the cause of Christ, I believe he gives us reality-checks and wake-up calls along the way. My first reality-check was a brush with death 30 years ago, a taste of bankruptcy five years later. I re-set my compass on Christ and had a 25 year long run of steady business success.

Ultimately a minister friend nudged me to sell the business and serve the cause of Christ. I waffled until God got my attention through another illness and I decided to sell my business, pursuing the “cause of Christ” more actively.

Exodus 9:13-35; Psalm 22; Mark 10:32-45

Saturday, March 28

2 Corinthians 4:13-18 *For it is all for your sake, so that as grace extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God.* (v.15)

Very dear Jewish friends invited us to a political reception for a lawyer who wants to run for Congress. We anguished over going. We probably would not know anybody. There were far more qualified candidates for Congress. But it was clear that we had to respond to a heartfelt invitation from dear friends.

I kept wondering what the Lord wanted me to accomplish. Finally the opportunity came, just as the reception was ending.

The daughter of our hosts had undergone serious cancer surgery several years ago. She was totally cured. Although I had never met her, I prayed actively for her, carrying a card in my pocket with her name on it. Suddenly she appeared at the party. Her parents introduced me as the man who prayed for her healing, even though I did not know her. She joyfully shared the story of my prayers with several other Jewish people in the group. It was suddenly clear why God wanted me there.

Exodus 10:21—11:8; Psalms 137, 144; Mark 10:46-52

by Laird Mortimer

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Good News Daily

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Palm Sunday, March 29

Zechariah 9:9-12 Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud O daughter Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. (v.9 NRSV)

The Passover crowds did rejoice in the streets of Jerusalem, spreading their cloaks on the path before Jesus, waving palm branches and shouting “Hosanna to the Son of David.” “Who is this?” many asked and were answered “the prophet Jesus from Nazareth” (Matthew 21:8-11). They knew his name, his hometown, and his reputation. But they didn’t know him as the Son of God.

At Christmas I revel in the great gift of the Holy Child. Wrapped in swaddling clothes, heralded by angels, worshiped by wise men, it is an easy gift to accept. I accept the great teacher, the compassionate healer, the gentle shepherd. But what about a confrontational Jesus, an angry Jesus? It makes me wonder. How well do I know Jesus? Do I skip over the hard sayings? Do I accept his confrontational actions but excuse my own reluctance to confront because it wouldn’t be Christian?

Lord, help me to know you, so that I may walk in your ways.

Psalms 24, 29; 1 Timothy 6:12-16; Luke 19:41-48

Monday, March 30

Mark 11:12-25 He overturned the tables of the moneychangers and the seats of those who sold doves. He was teaching and saying, “Is it not written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations?’” (vv.15, 17)

The story of cleansing the temple is sandwiched between the cursing of the fig tree and Jesus’s response to Peter’s comment the following day that the fig tree had withered. Both events reveal a Jesus out of character with the way I like to picture him. But both events could be object lessons for those who carry on his work.

For me that poor little fig tree represents my inability to live up to the expectations of our Lord on my own. I have to tap into God’s power. It was the wrong time of year for that little fig tree to bear fruit. But it is never the wrong time to access the power of God through prayers of faith. And as with Jesus and the moneychangers, it is never the wrong time to keep God’s house holy.

“Whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours” (v.24).

Lamentations 1:1-2, 6-12; Psalm 51; 2 Corinthians 1:1-7

Tuesday, March 31

Mark 11:27-33 The chief priests, and scribes, and the elders came to him and said, “By what authority are you doing these things?” Jesus said to them, “I will ask you one question; answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things. Did the baptism of John come from heaven, or was it of human origin?” (vv.27-30)

What a graphic vignette! It was supposed to be a trap for Jesus, supposed to discredit him before his followers, supposed to reinstate the Sanhedrin officials as religious authorities. The Sanhedrin needed to retaliate for the ousting of the moneychangers from the temple. Imagine their smugness as they demanded an answer. Imagine their chagrin when they had to forfeit the contest because either answer they chose would strengthen Jesus and weaken them.

Jesus exerted God’s authority with great finesse and showed us how simple our choices are: God’s authority or our authority; God’s will or our will. Debates on religious matters boil down to the same two choices. The difference is in who will benefit—self or God. But when we choose God’s authority, God’s will, we always win.

Lamentations 1:17-22; Psalms 6, 12; 2 Corinthians 1:8-22

Wednesday, April 1

Mark 12:1-11 *“Have you not read this scripture: ‘The stone which the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord’s doing, and it is amazing in our eyes’?”* (vv.10-11)

Jewish officials knew that somehow Jesus was describing them as the vineyard tenants who killed the son of the landholder. What they didn’t know was that Jesus’ parable would be enacted that very week. Like the tenants, they had used their special status as God’s chosen people to serve themselves—their own prideful egos—and not God.

Now we have inherited the gift, accepted the Son as the cornerstone, and have the same problem. The history of the Christian church is filled with self-seeking “tenants.” The Lord is patient. The Lord tries to lead his children into obedience. His love endures forever.

“Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God’s sight, and like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 2:4-5).

Lamentations 2:1-9; Psalm 55; 2 Corinthians 1:23—2:11

Thursday, April 2

Mark 14:12-25 *“Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you; follow him, and wherever he enters, say to the owner of the house, ‘The Teacher asks, Where is my guest room where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?’ He will show you a large room upstairs, furnished and ready. Make preparations for us there.”* (vv.13-15)

There was nothing haphazard about this week. Jesus and his Father had made meticulous plans. First the Palm Sunday entrance into Jerusalem on a donkey the disciples found as Jesus had instructed. Next the careful goading of the temple authorities to force them to seek his life. Now the disciples follow his directions to find the upper room. It was all prearranged.

Jewish men did not carry water jars. This one was selected beforehand to be easy to identify. Upper rooms were often used by rabbis and their inner circle of disciples, and this one had already been reserved.

Jesus also prearranged our communion table. His body, broken, and his blood, poured out, completed the divine plan to make us acceptable to Almighty God.

Lamentations 2:10-18; Psalm 102; 1 Corinthians 10:14-17, 11:27-32

Friday, April 3

John 13:36-38 *Peter said to him, “Lord, why can I not follow you now? I will lay down my life for you.”* (v.37)

Charles was in ICU for five weeks and every visiting period he asked, “Why can’t I go home with you?” Nothing else he said made much sense through all the drugs, but it was clear that he wanted to be at home with his wife of 50 years. He could not understand that he was not ready to go home. Little brothers and sisters ask to tag along with their older siblings. Children complain, “Daddy, why can’t I go to work with you?” or “Mama, why can’t I go to the hospital to see Nanny? I’ll be good.”

Charles and Peter and the children weren’t ready. They had a lot of healing and learning and growing to do. And what about us? It takes a lot of discipline and maturity and love to follow Jesus. And the truth is: we’ll never be ready until we allow him to come live in us.

Look what Peter accomplished once he recognized that he didn’t have the fortitude and could only have it through the Holy Spirit.

Lamentations 3:1-9, 19-33; Psalm 22; 1 Peter 1:10-20

Saturday, April 4

Romans 8:1-11 *But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you. (vv.10-11)*

When Pa died, our world disintegrated. We had called him our rock and he was gone. Life had not always been easy, but, as long as we had Pa, we knew we would manage. We felt the way the disciples must have felt. Jesus was gone. He wouldn't be there to answer their questions, to bind them together in a strong, loving fellowship.

In time we learned that Pa was still there to advise us. He had lived before us the way we needed to go, and all his directions were living inside us. That's what the disciples learned about Jesus. He was living in them! And he lives in us the same way, giving us a new life—his life, his righteousness! What a gift!

Lamentations 3:37-58; Psalm 88; Hebrews 4:1-16

by Camilla Humber

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