

Daily Devotions

Monday August 28

Isaiah 51:1-6

Listen to me, you that pursue righteousness, you that seek the LORD. Look to the rock from which you were hewn, and to the quarry from which you were dug. ²Look to Abraham your father and to Sarah who bore you; for he was but one when I called him, but I blessed him and made him many. ³For the LORD will comfort Zion; he will comfort all her waste places, and will make her wilderness like Eden, her desert like the garden of the LORD; joy and gladness will be found in her, thanksgiving and the voice of song.

⁴Listen to me, my people, and give heed to me, my nation; for a teaching will go out from me, and my justice for a light to the peoples. ⁵I will bring near my deliverance swiftly, my salvation has gone out and my arms will rule the peoples; the coastlands wait for me, and for my arm they hope. ⁶Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look at the earth beneath; for the heavens will vanish like smoke, the earth will wear out like a garment, and those who live on it will die like gnats; but my salvation will be forever, and my deliverance will never be ended.

For Reflection

Through the prophet Isaiah, the Lord speaks to a people who seem uncertain and worried about God's goodness. The Lord reminds his people of all that he has done for them. First of all, God created them! Like stones dug out of a quarry, God formed and made every living being. Then God multiplied his chosen and beloved people through the family of Abraham and Sarah.

Just as God has blessed his people in the past, he will continue to do so in the future. This section of Isaiah is bursting with promises of what God will accomplish, through Israel, for all peoples. The passage concludes with a promise we can cling to no matter what questions we still carry, or what uncertainty we face. God declares through Isaiah, "my salvation will be forever, and my deliverance will never be ended" (v. 6). Thanks be to God!

Questions for Reflection

1. Throughout this passage, God says, “Listen to me,” “Look,” and “Lift up your eyes...” Why do you think God needs to repeat these commands to the people of Isaiah’s day?

What about us? How often does God tell us to “listen” and “look” before we pay attention? How can you listen to and look for God more than the other competing scenes and voices all around you?

2. What are some places in our world or in the lives of people you care about that seem like a wilderness or a desert right now? How can you ask God to act on his promises to transform those places into “the garden of the Lord” (v. 3)? How can you serve as an instrument of that transformation for the sake of your neighbor?

Read Psalm 107

Today’s Prayer Focus: Pray for those suffering from wildfires and extreme heat in our country and around the world. Pray for God to strengthen those who have lost their homes and businesses in Maui, and for all who do the good work of restoring their communities and caring for their neighbors.

Tuesday August 29

Read Psalm 108-109

Today’s Prayer Focus: Pray for students, teachers, and schools staff beginning a new academic year. Pray for God’s wisdom and joy to fill all those who work with young people in schools, day care centers, and other youth activities. Ask God to bless Reformation’s Kids’ Inc. program and the work of our Growing Young Team, that we might touch the lives of the young people in our day care and our congregation with the love and hope of Jesus.

Wednesday August 30

Psalm 138

¹I give you thanks, O LORD, with my whole heart; before the gods I sing your praise;

²I bow down toward your holy temple and give thanks to your name for your steadfast love and your faithfulness; for you have exalted your name and your word above everything.

³On the day I called, you answered me, you increased my strength of soul.

⁴All the kings of the earth shall praise you, O LORD, for they have heard the words of your mouth.

⁵They shall sing of the ways of the LORD, for great is the glory of the LORD.

⁶For though the LORD is high, he regards the lowly; but the haughty he perceives from far away.

⁷Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you preserve me against the wrath of my enemies; you stretch out your hand, and your right hand delivers me.

⁸The LORD will fulfill his purpose for me; your steadfast love, O LORD, endures forever. Do not forsake the work of your hands.

For Reflection

This psalm of David exudes confidence in the power of the Lord. David strikes a fascinating balance between being sure of God's protection and guidance, while remaining humble himself. The psalm acknowledges that "the Lord is high" (v. 6) and none is above the Lord. David is certain that even though the kings of the earth might not recognize the Lord now, one day they will. The word of God will sink into their hearts like it has for David, and the kings of the earth will join him in praising the one true God.

It's also important to notice that while David trusts completely in the power of God, that doesn't mean that he never faces trouble in life. The psalm ends with David declaring his confidence in God to deliver him from the wrath of his enemies. Beyond trusting in God's power to save him, David also believes that God will help him fulfill God's purpose for his life. God's "steadfast love" (v. 8) will be on display in David's life as he does the Lord's work and continues to praise God's holy name forever!

Questions for Reflection

1. Read verse 6 about the the "lowly" and the "haughty." What makes someone lowly or haughty in the language of 2023? For example, does money, popularity, political power, status, or something else determine if someone is lowly or haughty? Does power or worldly success tend to make someone immune to their need for God's presence and love? Why or why not? Does

lowliness or humility make someone more aware of God's gifts in their life? Why or why not?

2. How have you experienced God's "steadfast love and faithfulness" lately (v. 2)?
3. Reading verse 8 again raises a question: how do you think God has helped you fulfill the purpose he has for you? Sometimes that's challenging to discern. You can also think of it this way: when have you felt like your actions, your work, or your service aligned with what God desired for you? How were you and others blessed by the Lord fulfilling his purpose for you and through you?

Read Psalm 110-113

Today's Prayer Focus: Pray for the ministry of Reformation Lutheran Church, that we would be devoted to serving God, bearing witness to the Gospel so that others may come to believe, and serving our community so that we may bless others.

Thursday August 31

Romans 12:1-8

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. ²Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect. ³For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. ⁴For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, ⁵so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. ⁶We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ⁷ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; ⁸the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.

For Reflection

What is the "therefore" there for? Romans 12:1 starts, "I appeal to you, therefore..." Paul has just spent the previous 11 chapters outlining the fundamental human dilemma: we have fallen under the

power of sin, and can do nothing to save ourselves from it. Thankfully, God has set us free through the death and resurrection of his Son, Jesus, and has given the Holy Spirit to lead us into new life. Since all of that is true, Paul now turns to the question of how we should live.

He starts by calling on us to “present our bodies as a living sacrifice.” There’s a lot that is strange about this. First, the whole point of “sacrifices” is that they don’t live, isn’t it? A sacrifice is slain. But not here. Here, Christians are called to offer our “bodies” to God in the trust that we are truly alive only when our lives are fully in God’s hands. (“Bodies” is Paul’s way of saying our entire earthly life.) When we entrust ourselves to the Lord, we do not lose anything, except sin and death.

The second strange thing is that he calls us to present our “bodies,” plural, as a “living sacrifice,” singular. Remember, he is writing to a Christian community. Christian life is deeply communal. This is why Paul says, later in this reading, “we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another.” We belong to each other. Because we worship and pray together, and most importantly because we receive Holy Communion together, our lives are profoundly woven together. This means we impact each other deeply, and when we hold back in our walk of faith, when we hesitate to offer our bodies, then that doesn’t just hinder our own faith life. It hinders the faith lives of those we are in Christian community with. So a whole Christian community’s life is one living sacrifice in which we all participate.

This means that the life of faith is a life of surrender, which is another way of calling it a life of love. We surrender ourselves to the Lord who has rescued us from sin and death, and we surrender ourselves to the Christian community around us. But Paul is confident that in this surrender, we enter into life that is truly free, good, and beautiful.

Questions for Reflection

1. What is one area of your life where it is difficult for you to surrender to God? How can you ask God for the faith to take that step?
2. What are some ways your faith has been strengthened by other Christians? What are some ways you can encourage, serve, or bless others in our Christian community?

Read Psalm 114-115

Today's Prayer Focus: Pray for peace in the world, especially in Ukraine. Ask God to sustain those who suffer under persecution for the name of Christ. Pray that all people would have freedom and good government.

Friday September 1

Matthew 16:13-20

¹³Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" ¹⁴And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." ¹⁵He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" ¹⁶Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." ¹⁷And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. ¹⁸And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. ¹⁹I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." ²⁰Then he sternly ordered the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.

For Reflection

"Flesh and blood has not revealed this to you." Jesus is not someone we could have ever predicted. Yes, the Scriptures indicated that a Messiah, a savior king, would come. And the Lord had always promised that he would come to rescue his people and renew creation. But nobody was expecting a fully-human, fully-divine Son of God in the flesh. And certainly nobody would have ever known that God would come in the flesh to suffer and die to save the world.

There has always been a temptation to fit Jesus into conventional, human-sized boxes. Interestingly, in the early Church, there was much less difficulty with the idea that Jesus was divine than with believing he was also human. In our day, of course, it is easy to think of Jesus as human, but the idea that he is divine is considered either offensive or absurd. (Never mind trying to think that he is both fully human and fully divine!) Historically, there have been attempts to squeeze Jesus into pretty much every box there is. Albert Schweitzer, a German theologian, noted that every generation tended to remake Jesus in

their own image. (Some of you may remember “The Jesus Seminar,” mainly active in the 1980’s and 1990’s, made up of liberal academics. Not surprisingly, their vision of who Jesus “really was” lined up remarkably well with the ideal version of a late 20th-century liberal academic!) In some of the darker corners on social media, there are those trying to make Jesus into a model for white supremacy.

“Who do you say that I am?” is a question every generation, and every believer, must answer. And the temptation will always be there for us to imagine a Jesus who fits into our assumptions, our preferences, and our desires. When we think Jesus disagrees with everyone we disagree with, or affirms everything we think ourselves, we are probably creating a version of Jesus in our own image. This is why as Lutheran Christians, we read the Scriptures seeking the Holy Spirit’s guidance and with help from the whole Christian tradition. It is much easier to resist creating a “progressive Jesus” or a “conservative Jesus” or a “my best friend Jesus” or an “angry judge Jesus” when believers across the centuries inform our thinking. And for two thousand years, the Spirit has revealed Jesus as the divine Son of God and human Son of Mary, who does not fit into any society’s assumptions or expectations, but who brings grace and truth to all.

Questions for Reflection

1. Do you ever study the Bible with other people? This can be one of the most important ways to help us understand Jesus more fully. Fellow Christians bring insights and inspiration we would never have on our own. When have you been a part of a Bible study? Who could you read the Bible, or talk about the Bible, with?
2. Has Jesus ever surprised you? Ever challenged you? What is a way you have changed because of Jesus?

Read Psalm 116-118

Today’s Prayer Focus: Pray for peace in the world, especially in Ukraine. Ask God to sustain those who suffer under persecution for the name of Christ. Pray that all people would have freedom and good government.

Saturday September 2

Read Psalm 119:1-32

Today's Prayer Focus: Pray for police, fire fighters, all emergency workers, health care workers, and those who serve in the military. Pray for farmers and those who transport food. Ask God to grant well-being to all in our community, and to stir up generosity to meet the needs of those who lack food, shelter, or other needs.

The Mission of Reformation Lutheran Church is to:

Invite our neighbors as Jesus invites us.

Engage in a community of graceful discipleship.

Equip our members to grow in faith and ministry.

Embody the love of Jesus in our world.