

# Daily Devotions

## Monday September 25

### **Jonah 3:10-4:11**

<sup>10</sup>When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed his mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them; and he did not do it.

<sup>4:1</sup>But this was very displeasing to Jonah, and he became angry. <sup>2</sup>He prayed to the Lord and said, "O Lord! Is not this what I said while I was still in my own country? That is why I fled to Tarshish at the beginning; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and ready to relent from punishing. <sup>3</sup>And now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live." <sup>4</sup>And the Lord said, "Is it right for you to be angry?" <sup>5</sup>Then Jonah went out of the city and sat down east of the city, and made a booth for himself there. He sat under it in the shade, waiting to see what would become of the city. <sup>6</sup>The Lord God appointed a bush, and made it come up over Jonah, to give shade over his head, to save him from his discomfort; so Jonah was very happy about the bush. <sup>7</sup>But when dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the bush, so that it withered. <sup>8</sup>When the sun rose, God prepared a sultry east wind, and the sun beat down on the head of Jonah so that he was faint and asked that he might die. He said, "It is better for me to die than to live." <sup>9</sup>But God said to Jonah, "Is it right for you to be angry about the bush?" And he said, "Yes, angry enough to die." <sup>10</sup>Then the Lord said, "You are concerned about the bush, for which you did not labor and which you did not grow; it came into being in a night and perished in a night. <sup>11</sup>And should I not be concerned about Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also many animals?"

### ***For Reflection***

When you hear "Jonah" you probably picture a big fish or a whale. The part of Jonah's story where he gets swallowed by a big fish and then spit back out onto land has been made famous by countless children's Bibles. In the beginning of the story, Jonan is running away from God's call. He ran in the opposite direction in response to God saying, "Go to

the great city of Ninevah and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me” (1:2, see also 3:2). When we catch up with Jonah in today’s passage, he’s survived being thrown off a ship and being thrown onto land by a big fish. Finally, he walked to Ninevah and delivered God’s message.

Then something surprising happened. The people of Ninevah repented! They heeded God’s command through Jonah. They gave up their violence and evil ways. So God changed his mind and spared everyone. Nothing bad happened to the people of Ninevah after all. But that’s not the end of the story. The action turns back to Jonah. He is grumbling and pouting about God’s grace. He’s angry. Jonah tells God he’d rather die than see his enemies receive God’s mercy.

This story has humor in it, and also a good word of wisdom for us today. We can talk all we want about how good and merciful God is. But do we feel that way only when God is good and merciful to us? How do we respond when people who we think “don’t deserve it” also receive God’s steadfast love? Even as we might think Jonah is reacting in a strange and selfish way to the grace of God, this story is a powerful reminder for us that God’s mercy is for everyone. Ultimately God gets to choose how he pours out his mercy on every people. Things will work out better for us when we don’t get in the way.

### **Questions for Reflection**

1. How do you feel when you read “God changed his mind” in verse 10? Does that surprise you or does it fit your image of God? Do you imagine God’s thoughts and plans as fixed and certain, or do you picture God changing his mind often?
2. What do you make of Jonah’s attitude in this part of his story? Can you empathize with him wanting his enemies in the city of Nineveh to get what they deserved? Or do you think he’s missing the point that God’s mercy is for everyone?
3. Have you ever been in a situation when you’ve been angry, while deep down you knew that there were possibly healthier and more mature ways to respond to what was happening? How has anger, conflict, conflict resolution, or reconciliation been a part of your life and especially your faith life?

## **Read Psalm 19-21**

**Today's Prayer Focus:** Pray for farmers, students learning about agriculture, and those who work in parks and natural resources. Pray for an abundant harvest and for all people to have healthy food and clean air and water. Pray that the Holy Spirit would encourage people throughout the world to live as good and faithful stewards of the world God made.

## **Tuesday September 26**

### **Read Psalm 22-23**

**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 September 27**

### **Psalm 145:1-8**

<sup>1</sup>I will extol you, my God and King, and bless your name forever and ever.

<sup>2</sup>Every day I will bless you, and praise your name forever and ever.

<sup>3</sup>Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised; his greatness is unsearchable.

<sup>4</sup>One generation shall laud your works to another, and shall declare your mighty acts.

<sup>5</sup>On the glorious splendor of your majesty, and on your wondrous works, I will meditate.

<sup>6</sup>The might of your awesome deeds shall be proclaimed, and I will declare your greatness.

<sup>7</sup>They shall celebrate the fame of your abundant goodness, and shall sing aloud of your righteousness.

<sup>8</sup>The LORD is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

### ***For Reflection***

One of the great gifts of the psalms is that they tend to get our attention off of ourselves, our problems, and sometimes even our supposed greatness, and onto God. This psalm moves our minds to consider the greatness and goodness of God. In a world of constant distraction, where silence can be almost impossible to find and where advertisers, politicians, pundits, and entertainers (not to mention phone app developers) are doing everything they can to grab our attention, we need all the help we can get setting our minds on God.

The psalmist knows that this precisely where our focus needs to be. It is how we are spiritually wired: to be centered on God. In our fallen state, our minds are scattered, unfocused, or hyperfocused on the wrong things. Meditating on the psalms brings us back to where we need to be.

It also reminds us of one of the most vital functions of the community of faith: “one generation shall laud your works to another.” The reason why we emphasize intergenerational learning, and why our Growing Young team is structuring events to foster connection across the generations, and that we encourage families, including those with young kids, to be together in worship, is that faith needs to be handed down across the generations. Our elder saints have lifetimes of wisdom and the experience of God’s faithfulness to share. The psalms invite us to be immersed in the goodness of God, and then to share that goodness with others. This is our calling.

### **Questions for Reflection**

1. What distracts you? Television? Social media? Your phone? Video games? Sports? How does this psalm inspire you to set aside time to focus solely on God? What steps can you take to reduce the distractions on your heart?
2. Who is someone you could tell about what God has done for you in Jesus Christ? Pray for an opportunity to share the good news!

### **Read Psalm 24-26**

**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 September 28

### **Philippians 1:21-30**

<sup>21</sup>For to me, living is Christ and dying is gain. <sup>22</sup>If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which I prefer. <sup>23</sup>I am hard pressed between the two: my desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better; <sup>24</sup>but to remain in the flesh is more necessary for you. <sup>25</sup>Since I am convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with all of you for your progress and joy in faith, <sup>26</sup>so that I may share abundantly in your boasting in Christ Jesus when I come to you again.

<sup>27</sup>Only, live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that, whether I come and see you or am absent and hear about you, I will know that you are standing firm in one spirit, striving side by side with one mind for the faith of the gospel, <sup>28</sup>and are in no way intimidated by your opponents. For them this is evidence of their destruction, but of your salvation. And this is God's doing. <sup>29</sup>For he has graciously granted you the privilege not only of believing in Christ, but of suffering for him as well— <sup>30</sup>since you are having the same struggle that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.

### ***For Reflection***

For decades now, church leaders and theologians have warned about “consumer Christianity,” where the focus is on the churchgoer getting the religious (or social, or emotional, or entertainment) experience they desire without having anything expected of them. It is the vision of the churchgoer as a customer, ordering the kind of music, the kind of sermon, and the kind of programming they want, and having “the church” provide it for them. This is nothing short of spiritual poison. It puts the emphasis completely on “me:” my wants, my fulfillment, my experience, my preferences.

Here's the thing, though: our culture is a 24-7 celebration of this “all about me” mentality. It is ubiquitous. It's the air we breathe, to the point that we can so easily not even realize how much it is influencing us. This passage from Philippians is a strong antidote. “For me, living is Christ and dying is gain,” Paul writes. Life, for him, is all about Jesus. Losing his own life would actually be a blessing, because it would be “far better” to die and be with Christ!

Then Paul puts one more wrinkle into it. Even though he would prefer to be with Christ, he is convinced that he will stay. Why? Because it will

be better for the Philippians! It isn't all about what he wants for himself, but how he can be a blessing to others. This is Christ-like love. This is spiritual depth and maturity. It is so counter-cultural in our day.

The deep conviction that allows Paul to have this perspective is that the Gospel of Jesus is the greatest treasure he could ever know, and that having the life of Jesus given to him is the greatest gift he could ever experience. The antidote to our consumer culture isn't to try harder to think about other people. It isn't to work up a more caring attitude in our hearts. The antidote is simply to focus on Jesus. To let his goodness and glory captivate our thinking. To remember that our life is made full and complete and joyful and satisfying by his loving presence. This is what our souls need. This is where joy and freedom are found: in the Lord who gives himself for us, and to us.

### **Questions for Reflection**

1. Has there ever been a time when you have been especially tempted to have a "customer mentality" at church? How does this passage help you remember that the faith isn't about making us feel satisfied, but about grounding our life in Christ and his love for others?
2. Who are the people you can bless? What gifts do you have to share? Pray for an opportunity to find the people you can bless and serve.

### **Read Psalm 27-29**

**Today's Prayer Focus:** Pray for the spiritual growth of yourself and all our members, that we would be filled with the Holy Spirit, increase in our knowledge of God's will, and overflow in love for each other and the world around us.

## **Friday September 29**

### **Matthew 20:1-16**

[Jesus said,] "For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. <sup>2</sup>After agreeing with the laborers for the usual daily wage, he sent them into his vineyard. <sup>3</sup>When he went out about nine o'clock, he saw others standing idle in the marketplace; <sup>4</sup>and he said to them, 'You also go into the vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.' So they went. <sup>5</sup>When he went out again about noon and about three o'clock, he did the same. <sup>6</sup>And about five o'clock he went out and found others standing

around; and he said to them, ‘Why are you standing here idle all day?’”  
<sup>7</sup>They said to him, ‘Because no one has hired us.’ He said to them, ‘You also go into the vineyard.’<sup>8</sup>When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his manager, ‘Call the laborers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and then going to the first.’<sup>9</sup>When those hired about five o’clock came, each of them received the usual daily wage.  
<sup>10</sup>Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received the usual daily wage.<sup>11</sup>And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner,<sup>12</sup>saying, ‘These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.’<sup>13</sup>But he replied to one of them, ‘Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage?’<sup>14</sup>Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you.<sup>15</sup>Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?’<sup>16</sup>So the last will be first, and the first will be last.”

### ***For Reflection***

“It’s not fair!” is a line we’ve all said or heard over the course of our lives. Maybe our children said it to us when one sibling got to stay up late and the other had to go to bed early. Or we said it to ourselves when we watched someone who joined the company years after us get promoted ahead of us. A sense of fairness seems to be ingrained in the human heart. We often measure ourselves and our own happiness against what others receive and how it compares to what we receive. That’s why Jesus’ parable in Matthew 20 is so effective. It puts us right in that spot where we say along with the workers hired first and paid the same as those who only worked one hour, “It’s not fair!”

But look at how the landowner responds: “Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?” This statement helps us realize the point of Jesus’ parable isn’t what’s fair according to the world’s scale. The point is that God, the one who calls us to do the work of his kingdom in the world, is generous and extravagant with his love, mercy, and grace. Isn’t it wonderful to have a God like that? Doesn’t that make us want to be generous and full of grace toward the people we encounter? Today, if you find yourself thinking, “It’s not fair!” ask God to turn your perspective around to his way of seeing. Look for the signs of the

generosity of God’s kingdom, and how you can be generous as a worker in that kingdom.

### **Questions for Reflection**

1. Put yourself in the place of those in the parable who were hired at 5:00 p.m. and received the usual daily wage (v. 9). How would you respond to the generous landowner in that moment?
2. When have you experienced God’s generosity or the generosity of another person lately? How did that affect you and your faith?
3. This parable begins with one of Matthew’s favorite phrases, “For the kingdom of heaven is like...” How do you picture the kingdom of heaven or the kingdom of God in your mind? In addition to the concept of fairness vs. generosity illuminated by this parable, how is the kingdom of heaven different from the world we currently live in here on earth?

### **Read Psalm 30-31**

**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 30**

### **Read Psalm 32-34**

**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.