

# Daily Devotions

## May 15-20, 2023

### Monday May 15

#### **Acts 17:22-31**

<sup>22</sup>Then Paul stood in front of the Areopagus and said, “Athenians, I see how extremely religious you are in every way. <sup>23</sup>For as I went through the city and looked carefully at the objects of your worship, I found among them an altar with the inscription, ‘To an unknown god.’ What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. <sup>24</sup>The God who made the world and everything in it, he who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by human hands, <sup>25</sup>nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mortals life and breath and all things. <sup>26</sup>From one ancestor he made all nations to inhabit the whole earth, and he allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live, <sup>27</sup>so that they would search for God and perhaps grope for him and find him—though indeed he is not far from each one of us. <sup>28</sup>For ‘In him we live and move and have our being’; as even some of your own poets have said, ‘For we too are his offspring.’ <sup>29</sup>Since we are God’s offspring, we ought not to think that the deity is like gold, or silver, or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of mortals. <sup>30</sup>While God has overlooked the times of human ignorance, now he commands all people everywhere to repent, <sup>31</sup>because he has fixed a day on which he will have the world judged in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.”

#### ***For Reflection***

The entire book of Acts is filled with fascinating stories of how the good news of Jesus started spreading through the world, starting in Jerusalem and reaching to the ends of the earth. In today’s passage, we glimpse a scene with Paul engaging the Greeks in Athens. He speaks to them in their terms, the terms of philosophy. Paul tailors the message of the good news of Jesus by meeting his listeners where they are. He introduces a people who have altars to “an unknown god” to the one true God.

Notice how Paul emphasizes that God isn't far away. He comes close to his people. Humans everywhere are "God's offspring." Finally, Paul gives his listeners in Athens the opportunity to repent, turn away from false gods, and devote themselves to the God who sent Jesus and raised him from the dead. His speech becomes an invitation to trust in God's resurrection power and follow the risen Jesus, just as Paul himself has done.

### **Questions for Reflection**

1. Are there times in your life when you felt like you were searching for God? Where did you seek God? What helped you realize that God was close to you all along?
2. Paul quotes a line of poetry as he declares that in God "we live and move and have our being" (v. 28). How is that true for you? How does your faith in God influence all aspects of your life and your being?
3. If you were a skeptical Athenian, hearing Paul and the message about Jesus being raised from the dead for the first time, would Paul convince you with this speech? Why or why not?

### **Read Psalm 35-36**

**Today's Prayer Focus:** Pray for victims and communities grieving from gun violence. Pray for the safety of all people, especially in schools, for reasonable laws, and for resources to combat the mental health crisis in America.

## **Tuesday May 16**

### **Read Psalm 37**

**Today's Prayer Focus:** Pray for all students. Ask God to grant them learning, growth, friendships, and fun. Pray that they would increase not only in knowledge, but in wisdom and character.

## **Wednesday May 17**

### **Psalm 66:8-20**

<sup>8</sup>Bless our God, O peoples, let the sound of his praise be heard,

<sup>9</sup>who has kept us among the living, and has not let our feet slip.

<sup>10</sup>For you, O God, have tested us; you have tried us as silver is tried.

<sup>11</sup>You brought us into the net; you laid burdens on our backs;

<sup>12</sup>you let people ride over our heads; we went through fire and through water; yet you have brought us out to a spacious place.

<sup>13</sup>I will come into your house with burnt offerings; I will pay you my vows,

<sup>14</sup>those that my lips uttered and my mouth promised when I was in trouble.

<sup>15</sup>I will offer to you burnt offerings of fatlings, with the smoke of the sacrifice of rams; I will make an offering of bulls and goats.

<sup>16</sup>Come and hear, all you who fear God, and I will tell what he has done for me.

<sup>17</sup>I cried aloud to him, and he was extolled with my tongue.

<sup>18</sup>If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened.

<sup>19</sup>But truly God has listened; he has given heed to the words of my prayer.

<sup>20</sup>Blessed be God, because he has not rejected my prayer or removed his steadfast love from me.

### ***For Reflection***

The spirituality of the Psalms is incredibly rich. These poetic prayers contain incredible theological, psychological, and emotional complexity. In these few verses, we have assured, almost boastful confidence in God, alongside a sure belief that God had allowed (or even caused) great sufferings and trials. How can this work?

Beneath all of the psalms is a deep conviction that (a) God is perfectly good, (b) God is Almighty, and (c) God, in his love, desires us to grow in goodness. God's ultimate will is the salvation of his people. And God's power is enough to achieve that will. What this means is that for the psalmist, God is completely trustworthy. Even if his will seems to bring suffering or struggle, the psalmist remains convinced that God is faithful and good.

(Of course, there are psalms where the questions and the struggles overwhelm the psalmist. Faith gets stretched to the breaking point. "How long, O Lord?" is a cry. These complaints, fears, and even anger at God are a legitimate part of the faith experience.)

The key word in this passage is "tried." This is a term for both proving something is pure and for the act of purifying it. The psalmist believes

that in all of their struggles, God's people can find the Lord at work to purify, strengthen, and deepen their faith. Yes, life has its profound challenges. But the psalmist is confident that God will "[bring] us out to a spacious place." In other words, there will be deliverance. And in the process, the believer will be transformed. It's not just that circumstances will be changed; the believer will be changed.

For Christians, we can read this psalm with an even wider scope: the resurrection. We can have confidence that even if that "spacious place" is not found in this life, Jesus has prepared it for us in the world to come. This doesn't mean that our present life doesn't matter. Far from it; the hope of the resurrection gives us the courage to meet all of life's challenges with courage, strength, and joy.

### **Questions for Reflection**

1. Think of a time you have struggled. Can you see how, coming through it, your faith was strengthened? What made that possible?
2. How comfortable are you with the idea that God can allow, or even cause, trials? How does that influence your thinking about God's trustworthiness?

### **Read Psalm 38-40**

**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 May 18**

#### **1 Peter 3:13-22**

<sup>13</sup>Now who will harm you if you are eager to do what is good? <sup>14</sup>But even if you do suffer for doing what is right, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear, and do not be intimidated, <sup>15</sup>but in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord. Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you;

<sup>16</sup>yet do it with gentleness and reverence. Keep your conscience clear, so that, when you are maligned, those who abuse you for your good conduct in Christ may be put to shame. <sup>17</sup>For it is better to suffer for doing good, if suffering should be God’s will, than to suffer for doing evil.

<sup>18</sup>For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit, <sup>19</sup>in which also he went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison, <sup>20</sup>who in former times did not obey, when God waited patiently in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were saved through water.

<sup>21</sup>And baptism, which this prefigured, now saves you—not as a removal of dirt from the body, but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, <sup>22</sup>who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers made subject to him.

### ***For Reflection***

“Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you.” There is a very powerful assumption in these words. Christians, Peter assumes, will live in such a way that it will cause people around us to ask questions. Our lives should be marked by the power of hope, to the extent that we behave noticeably differently than our neighbors. Specifically, Peter seems to be focused on a willingness to suffer for our faith and not be intimidated when people challenge it. We can have the confidence to do this because, as Peter tells us, Christ has suffered himself, and now has all powers made subject to him. We serve the true Lord of the universe. If our neighbors don’t recognize this, we should conduct ourselves in a way that makes it clear that something is different about us. Our lives should only make sense if Jesus Christ really is raised from the dead.

But when we do face criticism or mistreatment for our faith, Peter calls on us to respond gently. We “fight” through love, knowing that we ourselves were once unrighteous before we were redeemed by Jesus. It is often claimed that Saint Francis of Assisi said, “Preach the Gospel

always; use words if necessary.” There is no proof that he actually said this. And I fear that many, especially Lutherans, take these words as permission to never speak about our faith to others. But we are called to bear witness to Christ! There are far more people around us with no meaningful faith life than there are active Christians. If we are not telling them the reason “for the hope that is in us,” we are not fulfilling our call to discipleship. We have the greatest treasure any human could desire, and which every human desperately needs. Why would we not speak of it?

### **Questions for Reflection**

1. Think of how your life is different because of Christ. Is that difference visible to people around you? How can your actions, words, and attitude demonstrate that there is something different about you?
2. Here is an exercise: write 3-5 one-sentence statements about the difference Jesus makes in your life. How does his presence give you hope, joy, love, or peace? What has changed in you because of your faith in him? Write short, one-sentence statements of these differences, and be ready to share them with other people.

### **Read Psalm 41-43**

**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 May 19**

### **John 14:15-21**

[Jesus said,] <sup>15</sup>“If you love me, you will keep my commandments. <sup>16</sup>And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. <sup>17</sup>This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.

<sup>18</sup>“I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. <sup>19</sup>In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. <sup>20</sup>On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. <sup>21</sup>They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them.”

### ***For Reflection***

This passage is part of Jesus' parting words to his disciples, after he washes their feet and they eat one last meal together, and before he is arrested and crucified. In this section of the "Farewell Discourse," Jesus gives his beloved disciples the promise of the Holy Spirit. Jesus calls the Spirit "another Advocate," which means that the Holy Spirit will be their Friend, Helper, Comforter, and Counselor from the time of Jesus' ascension onward. The Spirit will create faith in people. The Spirit will share the love of Jesus and his heavenly Father with those who believe.

It's hard to imagine how well the disciples understood what Jesus was promising at this point, before he died on the cross and rose again. Perhaps later, when the Holy Spirit appeared in the tongues of flame and the rushing wind of Pentecost, the disciples remembered Jesus' words and put it all together. It's a wonderful gift and promise for us, also. Hearing Jesus' words in this passage, we can be sure that even after his death, resurrection, and ascension, Jesus still dwells with us, his followers, through the power and presence of the Holy Spirit in our hearts and in the world.

### **Questions for Reflection**

1. When you hear Jesus talking about "keeping my commandments" in this passage, you can think of all of his teaching and proclamation about his heavenly Father, not only his guides for ethics or behavior. With that in mind, what does it mean to you to keep Jesus' word? How does his teaching about God's abundant love and grace influence your life today and every day?
2. Notice how this passage starts and ends with words about love, both our love of Jesus and his love for us. The relationship among God the Father, Jesus the Son, and God the Holy Spirit centers around love. How have you experienced that love lately? How have you shared it with the people in your life?
3. How is the Easter season going for you? From Easter Sunday, April 9, through today, how has the good news of Jesus' resurrection to eternal life given you hope and new life? How have worshipping, singing Easter hymns, and praying during this Easter season strengthened your faith in the risen Jesus?

**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 May 20**

**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.