

Daily Devotions

May 22-27, 2023

Monday May 22

Acts 1:6-14

⁶So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?” ⁷He replied, “It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. ⁸But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” ⁹When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. ¹⁰While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. ¹¹They said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”

¹²Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a sabbath day’s journey away. ¹³When they had entered the city, they went to the room upstairs where they were staying, Peter, and John, and James, and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. ¹⁴All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers.

For Reflection

This passage tells the story of the Ascension, which happened forty days after Christ’s resurrection. Jesus is no longer bodily present with us. He is “lifted up... out of our sight.” Now, Jesus didn’t ride some divine elevator “up to heaven.” A cloud is, often in the Bible, a symbol of God’s presence. The pillar of cloud led Israel by day through the desert; a cloud descended on Sinai when the Lord appeared to give the covenant through Moses. On the mountain of Transfiguration, a cloud of God’s glory surrounded Jesus and the disciples. So this story is not telling us that if we got into a fast enough rocket ship and launched

straight up, we'd eventually catch up with Jesus. It is trying to convey that somehow, the human being Jesus of Nazareth (who is also fully God) is now fully present in the glory of God, even though we cannot see or touch his body now.

Now, this naturally leads us to all sorts of "heavenly" speculation: where is Jesus? Is he even in a "place" as our limited human minds understand it? When will he return? But the story wants to discourage this kind of thinking. Angels ask, "why do you stand looking up toward heaven?" In other words, why are you focusing on otherworldly things? Didn't Jesus say that we would be given power to be his witnesses? Oddly enough, the story of the Ascension tells us to set our minds on the here-and-now. Jesus is ascended and exalted as Lord, but instead of gazing into the heavens or trying to figure out when he will return, we are called to be witnesses, in this time and place, of what Jesus has done.

So, do the disciples run out and start telling the world? No. They pray. They wait. Jesus told them that power would come to them when the Holy Spirit came. And so, instead of rushing ahead of God's timing, they waited and prayed. Jesus had a task for them, to share the Gospel with the world. But they knew to wait for his power to come.

Questions for Reflection

1. When you think of the troubles in the world, or the difficulties you face, how does knowing that Jesus is Lord of all help you deal with day-to-day struggles?
2. The disciples were given an urgent task, and it is still the Church's calling, the job of all Christians: spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Where does that task fit in your priorities? How can you pray for the Holy Spirit's power to lead you in your part of this mission?

Read Psalm 50-52

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 23

Read Psalm 53-55

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 24

Psalm 68:1-10, 32-35

¹Let God rise up, let his enemies be scattered; let those who hate him flee before him.

²As smoke is driven away, so drive them away; as wax melts before the fire, let the wicked perish before God.

³But let the righteous be joyful; let them exult before God; let them be jubilant with joy.

⁴Sing to God, sing praises to his name; lift up a song to him who rides upon the clouds—his name is the LORD— be exultant before him.

⁵Father of orphans and protector of widows is God in his holy habitation.

⁶God gives the desolate a home to live in; he leads out the prisoners to prosperity, but the rebellious live in a parched land.

⁷O God, when you went out before your people, when you marched through the wilderness,

⁸the earth quaked, the heavens poured down rain at the presence of God, the God of Sinai, at the presence of God, the God of Israel.

⁹Rain in abundance, O God, you showered abroad; you restored your heritage when it languished;

¹⁰your flock found a dwelling in it; in your goodness, O God, you provided for the needy.

³²Sing to God, O kingdoms of the earth; sing praises to the Lord,

³³O rider in the heavens, the ancient heavens; listen, he sends out his voice, his mighty voice.

³⁴Ascribe power to God, whose majesty is over Israel; and whose power is in the skies.

³⁵Awesome is God in his sanctuary, the God of Israel; he gives power and strength to his people. Blessed be God!

For Reflection

These exuberant words could have been an invitation for God's people to sing and praise in a procession at the Jerusalem temple. Whatever the exact setting might be, the psalm recalls the power and goodness of God to save his people, protect orphans and widows, and provide for the desolate. According to this psalm, there is no limit to what God can do! God deserves all of our accolades and singing.

The second set of verses from this psalm widens the scope of the call to praise. In verses 32-35, the psalmist invites all of creation to sing to God. God is awesome. His power spans the whole sky. God's enemies will lose out by not acknowledging his power, but God's people will be richly blessed by his goodness.

Questions for Reflection

1. This psalm describes the Israelites' wilderness wanderings in a unique way by focusing on God providing rain. What do you picture when you read in verse 9, "Rain in abundance, O God, you showered abroad"? When have you experienced rain as a blessing, or as an experience of God's abundance? Try to picture this psalm in your mind the next time it rains. Use it as a reminder to thank God for nourishing us and all living things with his good gifts, including rain!
2. In verse 3, the psalmist describes God's people as being "jubilant with joy." How are singing and joy connected in your experience of faith? Does singing give you joy, help you express joy you're already feeling, or both?

Read Psalm 56-58

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 25

1 Peter 4:12-13; 5:6-11

¹²Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that is taking place among you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. ¹³But rejoice insofar as you are sharing Christ's sufferings, so that you may also be glad and shout for joy when his glory is revealed.

¹⁴If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the spirit of glory, which is the Spirit of God, is resting on you. ^{5:6}Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you in due time. ⁷Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you.

⁸Discipline yourselves, keep alert. Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour. ⁹Resist him, steadfast in your faith, for you know that your brothers and sisters in all the world are undergoing the same kinds of suffering.

¹⁰And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, support, strengthen, and establish you. ¹¹To him be the power forever and ever. Amen.

For Reflection

This week we have our last reading from 1 Peter, a letter we've been reading throughout the Easter season. Today's passage addresses the question of what it means to suffer as a Christian. Then it turns to Peter's final instructions about staying humble, trusting in God, and resisting the forces that defy God.

Most of all, Peter emphasizes that we shouldn't be surprised when we are subjected to suffering in this world. Jesus experienced the same thing when he lived on the earth. Peter urges us to hold onto our faith in Jesus and trust that God will turn our suffering into something good, even if we can't see it yet. God will bring us through our suffering and he will have the last word. It will be a word of Easter: of resurrection, hope, and victory.

Questions for Reflection

1. How has the "Spirit of God" (see v. 14) helped you in times of suffering?
2. How easy or hard is it for you to "Cast all your anxiety on [God], because he cares for you" (v. 7)? If you truly could give all your anxiety over to God, how would that make a difference for your daily life?
3. What do you think of the image of the devil as a roaring lion who prowls around, searching for his next victim? How does your faith in Jesus help you resist the devil and turn your attention back to the God who loves and saves you?

Read Psalm 59-61

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 26

John 17:1-11

After Jesus had spoken these words, he looked up to heaven and said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, ²since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. ³And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. ⁴I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. ⁵So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed.

⁶"I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. ⁷Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; ⁸for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. ⁹I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. ¹⁰All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them.

¹¹And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one.

For Reflection

What is "eternal life?" Is it a place in heaven? Jesus has a strange description of it in this prayer to his Father: "this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent." Eternal life is a relationship with God. It's not a place, but a connection. When we know Jesus Christ, his life becomes our life. He has defeated death, and so if we are connected with him, we are carried out of death and into a life that cannot end.

So "eternal life" isn't something that starts when you die. It is real, now. It is a life that is changed because death no longer has power

over you. It is a life that is different because you have been given unending mercy. It is a life filled with the infinite love of God. And it is given to you freely, as a gift, by Jesus.

Questions for Reflection

1. What are the ways you best “know God?” Is it through Scripture, prayer, worship, Christian fellowship, serving, or another way? How can you be more intentional about coming to “know” Jesus more deeply?
2. Jesus says he “has been glorified” in his disciples. Who are some Christians who you see as “glorifying Jesus” by their lives? What about them inspires or challenges you?

Read Psalm 62-64

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 27

Read Psalm 65-67

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.