

# Daily Devotions

## June 12-17, 2023

### Monday June 12

#### **Hosea 5:15-6:6**

<sup>15</sup>I will return again to my place until they acknowledge their guilt and seek my face. In their distress they will beg my favor:

<sup>6:1</sup>“Come, let us return to the LORD; for it is he who has torn, and he will heal us; he has struck down, and he will bind us up. <sup>2</sup>After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him. <sup>3</sup>Let us know, let us press on to know the LORD; his appearing is as sure as the dawn; he will come to us like the showers, like the spring rains that water the earth.”

<sup>4</sup>What shall I do with you, O Ephraim? What shall I do with you, O Judah? Your love is like a morning cloud, like the dew that goes away early. <sup>5</sup>Therefore I have hewn them by the prophets, I have killed them by the words of my mouth, and my judgment goes forth as the light.

<sup>6</sup>For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.

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

What does God truly desire of his people? This reading begins with God speaking through the prophet Hosea and expressing how frustrated God is with them. God declares he will even withdraw from his people until they come to their senses, turn back toward him, and repent. Then Hosea speaks to try and rally the people to listen to God and return to him. The prophet acknowledges that God won't be easy on them, and rightfully so, because they weren't faithful to God. But in God's time, he will show them mercy.

God then gets the last word in this passage, sounding like a parent who has put up with his children's foolishness for long enough. After recounting how the people have turned away from him, God declares what he longs to see in his people: steadfast love and the knowledge of God.

This passage is a useful tool for us to diagnose where we are in our relationship with God. Are we as faithful to God as God is to us? Are we

falling away from God and trying to make ourselves look good on our own, or are we focused on repenting of our sin and receiving God's mercy? The words of the prophet challenge us, but if we work through them and examine our own hearts and our own faith, we will find God waiting for us at the end of that process with his love, mercy, and blessing.

### **Questions for Reflection**

1. When have you experienced a back-and-forth conversation with God or a time of wrestling with God? What was the outcome? How did you grow in your faith as a result?
2. What are some ways that you enjoy growing in your "knowledge of God" (v. 6)? Do you find yourself growing closer to God through Bible reading, prayer, worship, giving, conversation with your brothers and sisters in Christ, or in other ways? With the new summer season, how can you re-commit to deepening your love of God and the role that your faith plays in your daily life?

### **Read Psalm 95-97**

**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 June 13**

### **Read Psalm 98-101**

**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 June 14**

### **Psalm 50:7-15**

<sup>7</sup>"Hear, O my people, and I will speak, O Israel, I will testify against you. I am God, your God.

<sup>8</sup>Not for your sacrifices do I rebuke you; your burnt offerings are continually before me.

<sup>9</sup>I will not accept a bull from your house, or goats from your folds.

<sup>10</sup>For every wild animal of the forest is mine, the cattle on a thousand hills.

<sup>11</sup>I know all the birds of the air, and all that moves in the field is mine.

<sup>12</sup>“If I were hungry, I would not tell you, for the world and all that is in it is mine.

<sup>13</sup>Do I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats?

<sup>14</sup>Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving, and pay your vows to the Most High.

<sup>15</sup>Call on me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me.”

### ***For Reflection***

This psalm tells the people of God that they’re focusing on the wrong things. God wants their loyalty, faithfulness, and love, but that’s not what his people are offering to him. They’re focusing on their sacrifices. They think that going through the motions of sacrifice is all they need to do.

It’s humorous that when the people think they’re doing God a favor by sacrificing their animals to him, God points out that he made every creature that lives on the earth! Everything in creation first belonged to God. The people’s focus on the act and object of sacrifice is making them miss the point. God longs for them to return to him, repent, and seek the gift of his mercy. God promises to help and deliver them when they call on him with sincere faith.

### **Questions for Reflection**

1. Have you found yourself merely “going through the motions” when it comes to worship, praise, or prayer to God? Reflect on why that happens. Is it because of a lack of intention, being busy, procrastination, or inertia? Reading this psalm, how can you ask the Holy Spirit to spark in you a renewed sense of longing for God? What would you like to be different in your daily faith practices, or in your relationship with God?
2. God invites us to “call on me in the day of trouble” (v. 15). When have you done that? How did God help you? How did you sense God’s loving presence during that experience? How did God show you his faithfulness?

## **Read Psalm 102-103**

**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 June 15**

#### **Romans 4:13-25**

<sup>13</sup>For the promise that he would inherit the world did not come to Abraham or to his descendants through the law but through the righteousness of faith. <sup>14</sup>If it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. <sup>15</sup>For the law brings wrath; but where there is no law, neither is there violation. <sup>16</sup>For this reason it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his descendants, not only to the adherents of the law but also to those who share the faith of Abraham (for he is the father of all of us, <sup>17</sup>as it is written, "I have made you the father of many nations") —in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist. <sup>18</sup>Hoping against hope, he believed that he would become "the father of many nations," according to what was said, "So numerous shall your descendants be." <sup>19</sup>He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was already as good as dead (for he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb. <sup>20</sup>No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, <sup>21</sup>being fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. <sup>22</sup>Therefore his faith "was reckoned to him as righteousness."

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

The background for this passage, and for much of Paul's letter to the Romans (and, indeed, for many other parts of the New Testament) is the question of how Gentiles can be a part of God's people in Christ. Do they have to obey all of Torah? (No, they don't.) If they don't, does that mean that all the moral guidance of the Old Testament is irrelevant, like Paul's critics said it did? Can we just do whatever we please because God will be merciful? (Again, no.) But, for centuries, "the people of God" was defined by circumcision, keeping kosher,

sabbath observance, and the celebration of appointed festivals, not to mention codes of ceremonial cleanliness and moral obligations.

Paul makes a lengthy, sophisticated argument, on Old Testament terms, for why faith in Christ as Lord (and baptism in the Triune name) is God's new criterion for membership in his covenant people. Here, we see two parts of Paul's thinking. First, "the law brings wrath." The rules of the Law inevitably expose human sin. Nobody is righteous by the standards of God's law.

Now, before that sounds too depressing, Paul's other emphasis here is that human relationships with God were never meant to be grounded in the Law. Abraham was "reckoned as righteous" centuries before the Law was even given! And if the covenant of the Law somehow becomes more important than faith, then the promises made to Abraham can no longer be trusted.

The point here is that God has always called on people to trust in him. The only fitting response to his unconditional love is faith. This faith will change us, surely. But obedience flows out of faith, and faith is created by God's promise of love. The sinful human tendency is to reverse that: obedience leads to God loving us which leads to us trusting him. But Paul wants us to see that God put an end to that kind of thinking in the death and resurrection of Jesus. He "was handed over to death" for the forgiveness of our sins "and was raised" to be the one who makes us righteous with God. Because of Jesus, we can trust God's loving, saving will for us. And that faith makes us a part of his new community.

### **Questions for Reflection**

1. Is it easy for you to get caught up in "obey the rules" thinking to define your relationship with God? How does the example of Abraham, chosen by God before the law was given, help you to remember it's always about faith?
2. Even when we understand our own relationship with God doesn't depend on us keeping the rules, it is easy for us to fall into the temptation of seeing *other people's* status based on how they keep, or don't keep, the rules we think are important. Who are the people who are easiest for you to write off because of their behavior? How does the reminder that "the law brings wrath" help you see them differently?

## Read Psalm 104

**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 June 16

#### **Matthew 9:9-13, 18-26**

<sup>9</sup>As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth; and he said to him, "Follow me." And he got up and followed him. <sup>10</sup>And as he sat at dinner in the house, many tax collectors and sinners came and were sitting with him and his disciples. <sup>11</sup>When the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" <sup>12</sup>But when he heard this, he said, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. <sup>13</sup>Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have come to call not the righteous but sinners." <sup>18</sup>While he was saying these things to them, suddenly a leader of the synagogue came in and knelt before him, saying, "My daughter has just died; but come and lay your hand on her, and she will live." <sup>19</sup>And Jesus got up and followed him, with his disciples. <sup>20</sup>Then suddenly a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years came up behind him and touched the fringe of his cloak, <sup>21</sup>for she said to herself, "If I only touch his cloak, I will be made well." <sup>22</sup>Jesus turned, and seeing her he said, "Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well." And instantly the woman was made well. <sup>23</sup>When Jesus came to the leader's house and saw the flute players and the crowd making a commotion, <sup>24</sup>he said, "Go away; for the girl is not dead but sleeping." And they laughed at him. <sup>25</sup>But when the crowd had been put outside, he went in and took her by the hand, and the girl got up. <sup>26</sup>And the report of this spread throughout that district.

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

Jesus comes to call sinners. We can probably handle that idea. But he also says he came "to call *not* the righteous." In other words, if you're righteous, Jesus isn't calling you. How can that be? Jesus is subverting our assumptions. We tend to think we can be righteous. He wants us to see that nobody is righteous on their own. We all need mercy. We all need grace. "Not calling the righteous" is Jesus' way of shocking us

out of our complacency. If we think we are righteous, we are only lying to ourselves.

There's another assumption that Jesus contradicts in this set of stories. In biblical times, the status of being "unclean" meant that you were not fit for worship in the Temple until you had been cleansed. It could be the result of sinful associations (such as Matthew would have had as a collaborator with Gentile Romans) or of medical realities (the unnamed woman's bleeding). The whole role of "clean vs. unclean" is too much to attack in a short devotion or sermon. What's important for us here is that in biblical times, "uncleanness" was seen as contagious. Association with the unclean made you unclean. Being touched by a bleeding woman, or touching a dead body, made you unclean. But look at what Jesus does: he shares table fellowship with sinners, heals the bleeding woman who touches him, and brings a dead girl back to life with a touch. Jesus reverses the "contagion." With Jesus, his life and his righteousness are contagious. He spreads mercy and forgiveness and wholeness.

So when we are forced to admit our brokenness and sin, we can turn to Jesus with hope and confidence. He is the source of righteousness for us. He is the giver of life and healing. He takes sin and death onto himself and gives us new life in return. You can trust him. His mercy will never fail.

### **Questions for Reflection**

1. How do you feel when you hear Jesus say that he did not come to call "the righteous?" Remember, Jesus pushes us to admit our own unrighteousness so that he can heal us. If we don't admit our need for grace, we won't accept it when he offers it! As one of my seminary professors once said before Holy Communion, "Jesus died for sinners! You qualify! Now come and feast!"
2. We may think that we have gotten "beyond" thinking in terms of "clean" and "unclean." But look at how partisans of the two political parties talk about each other. Think about how many sick and dying people are isolated away from community. What does it mean for us that Jesus spreads healing and life and connection? How can we let him work through us?

## **Read Psalm 105**

**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 June 17**

## **Read Psalm 106**

**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.