

Daily Devotions

June 19-24, 2023

Monday June 19

Exodus 19:2-8a

²They had journeyed from Rephidim, entered the wilderness of Sinai, and camped in the wilderness; Israel camped there in front of the mountain. ³Then Moses went up to God; the Lord called to him from the mountain, saying, "Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the Israelites: ⁴You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. ⁵Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine, ⁶but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the Israelites." ⁷So Moses came, summoned the elders of the people, and set before them all these words that the Lord had commanded him. ⁸The people all answered as one: "Everything that the Lord has spoken we will do."

For Reflection

Lutheran theology gives high importance to the idea of "the proper distinction between Law and Gospel." Luther recognized that God speaks in two ways through Scripture: the commands (and demands) of the Law, and the promises (or gifts) of the Gospel. The Law is "if-then" in its structure: "if you do what God commands, you will be blessed." The Gospel is simply the unconditional promise of God's grace: "I declare to you the entire forgiveness of all your sins." "You belong to the Lord." Both forms of God's speech are necessary for Christian life. The Law reveals God's will for our conduct. But, as Luther put it, "the law always accuses." In our fallen nature, we cannot follow God's Law. And so we will always find ourselves condemned by our failure to obey. The Gospel, then, assures us when we despair of our own ability that, despite our sin, God is merciful and forgives us. The Gospel sets us free from our need to justify ourselves, so that our energy can go where God always wanted it to go in the first place: serving our neighbor. The Law convicts us and puts to death our sin, while the Gospel gives us new life by the power of the Holy Spirit to glorify God and bear spiritual

fruit for the Kingdom.

In this reading, there is both Law and Gospel. “If you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession.” This “if-then,” conditional language, is Law. It leaves us anxious. What if we don’t satisfy God’s expectations? But God’s words also give us a promise to trust: “Indeed, the whole earth is mine, but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation.” Even Israel’s unfaithfulness would not prevent God from claiming the people as his own and making them into a truly holy nation.

In our own Christian lives, we face the demands of God’s Law to love him perfectly and love our neighbors as ourselves. This means resisting temptations and pursuing holiness. But we live in the confidence that in Christ, God forgives our sins and makes us his own. The Gospel fills us with love and grace. As these two “voices” of God have their way with us, we are made new, and we become people who can say, along with ancient Israel, “Everything that the Lord has spoken we will do.”

Questions for Reflection

1. When you have failed, or when you struggle, how does remembering that, in your baptism, Jesus has borne you on eagles’ wings and brought you to himself” give you confidence and joy?
2. How is God’s Law speaking to you to convict you? None of us perfectly obeys God’s voice and keeps his covenant. If we are open to hearing God’s Law, we can discover where we need to repent and how to seek God’s help. Where are you finding God calling you to change?

Read Psalm 107

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 20

Read Psalm 108-109

Today's Prayer Focus: Pray for all those who travel over the summer, and for all who offer hospitality to travelers. Ask God to be with students and teachers on summer break, and for workers in every profession to find times of rest and refreshment during this season. Pray that young people and their families will experience joy together, that neighbors will get to know each other better as they spend time outdoors, and that people everywhere will delight in and care for God's creation.

Wednesday June 21

Psalm 100

¹Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth.

²Worship the LORD with gladness; come into his presence with singing.

³Know that the LORD is God. It is he that made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.

⁴Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise. Give thanks to him, bless his name.

⁵For the LORD is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations.

For Reflection

This psalm is a simple, beautiful celebration of God's goodness. We are invited to "make a joyful noise to the Lord" and "enter his gates with thanksgiving" because of his love and faithfulness. This isn't just general "goodness," but a specific covenant relationship: "we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture." For Israel, this pointed back to the Sinai covenant and even further back to the call of Abraham. For Christians, we can claim this promise because of Jesus. He is God's promise to us, rescuing us for himself from the powers of sin and death.

If you read the psalms much, you will know that they do not shy away from the realities of those powers. But despite all the sufferings of this world, we are still called to worship, to praise, and to rejoice, because God, in his infinite goodness, has overcome all evil. Suffering still remains, but not forever. The Lord's final victory will come, sin and

death will be no more, and his steadfast love will endure forever. Until then, we can rest securely in his promise that we are the sheep of his pasture. Life will bring trials, but the Lord will not abandon us.

Questions for Reflection

1. What memories help you to celebrate God’s faithfulness?
2. When you face struggles, how does worship comfort or strengthen you? Have you ever sought encouragement by praising God with fellow believers?

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 June 22

Romans 5:1-8

Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ²through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. ³And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, ⁴and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, ⁵and hope does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

⁶For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person— though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die.

⁸But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.

For Reflection

“Therefore, since we are justified by faith... God proves his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us.” This passage in Paul’s letter to the Christians at Rome is bookended by powerful assurances: God has done what was needed to “justify” us, to repair our broken relationship with him, through the death and resurrection of Jesus. That solid foundation is especially important in this reading because Paul brings a challenging insight into the Christian life. Being a

follower of Jesus does not make us immune to suffering. In fact, being a Christian causes us to “boast” in our sufferings. Why? Because the cross of Jesus Christ has revealed that the pattern for Christian life is dying to ourselves. And in our suffering, the Holy Spirit works to transform us more and more into the likeness of Christ.

This is not an easy process. But the road of suffering isn't necessary because God wants us to suffer. It's because sin clings so tightly to us, and frankly, we cling so tightly to sin. The purifying work of God's Holy Spirit feels painful because of sin, not because God wants to hurt us. But as sin is put to death in us, we become more and more spiritually alive.

Questions for Reflection

1. Have you ever had the experience of suffering giving you deeper character or stronger faith or more powerful hope? How did it happen? How does that give you encouragement now?
2. By the same token, have you ever gone through trials that have just involved suffering? There is no magic formula for how our struggles can help us grow. Sometimes, we simply suffer, and we can come up with no reason or purpose. But, we can endure. And we can hope. This is what the Holy Spirit makes possible. Are there situations in your life right now where you could ask the Spirit for help in enduring and hoping? What would that look like?

Read Psalm 114-115

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 23

Matthew 9:35-10:20

³⁵Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness. ³⁶When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. ³⁷Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; ³⁸therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.”

^{10:1}Then Jesus summoned his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to cure every disease and every sickness. ²These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon, also known as Peter, and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; ³Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; ⁴Simon the Cananaean, and Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed him.

⁵These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: “Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, ⁶but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. ⁷As you go, proclaim the good news, ‘The kingdom of heaven has come near.’ ⁸Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. You received without payment; give without payment.

⁹Take no gold, or silver, or copper in your belts, ¹⁰no bag for your journey, or two tunics, or sandals, or a staff; for laborers deserve their food. ¹¹Whatever town or village you enter, find out who in it is worthy, and stay there until you leave. ¹²As you enter the house, greet it. ¹³If the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it; but if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you. ¹⁴If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet as you leave that house or town. ¹⁵Truly I tell you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that town.

¹⁶“See, I am sending you out like sheep into the midst of wolves; so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. ¹⁷Beware of them, for they will hand you over to councils and flog you in their synagogues; ¹⁸and you will be dragged before governors and kings because of me, as a testimony to them and the Gentiles. ¹⁹When they hand you over, do not worry about how you are to speak or what you are to say; for what you are to say will be given to you at that time; ²⁰for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.”

For Reflection

This passage begins with Matthew describing how Jesus was interacting with the crowds who flocked to him, and summarizing his ministry of teaching, preaching, and healing. But the majority of this story focuses on Jesus sending out his disciples to join him in this work.

Notice how Jesus was deeply moved by the people he saw. He had compassion for them because they seemed lost and aimless without the care and guidance of a loving shepherd. Jesus could tell that whatever spiritual guidance the Pharisees were offering wasn't giving the people the peace and freedom they longed for. So Jesus asked the disciples to pray for more laborers to go out, do God's work, preach the good news of God's kingdom, and help bring the harvest of believers home.

As you may have experienced in your own life, sometimes when you pray for "someone to do something," God ends up choosing you to be the one to do it! That's what happened in this story. Right after Jesus tells the disciples to ask the Lord of the harvest to send out workers, Jesus sends them out. The disciples go from being those who listen to Jesus and observe his ministry, to becoming those who fan out to the surrounding area and carry out his ministry. We have the privilege of being in a similar role today. Jesus sends us out to our workplaces and neighborhoods as his ambassadors. We get to share his love and grace with the people who are lost, lonely, searching, or stressed out. Isn't it amazing that Jesus trusts us with the good news of his resurrection? Who will you share his love with today?

Questions for Reflection

1. Jesus offers detailed instructions about how the disciples are to pack and travel as they go out as laborers for God's harvest. Are you a "travel light" kind of person, or do you like to bring everything with you when you go somewhere?
2. Jesus' instructions also have to do with hospitality. When have you experienced wonderful hospitality from a friend, family member, or a simple hotel or Airbnb, a campground, or some other kind of lodging? How does hospitality connect people and strengthen relationships? How is hospitality a form of generosity?
3. How does Jesus encourage the (likely nervous or apprehensive) disciples at the end of this passage? Take a look at verses 19-20 one more time. How is the Holy Spirit present and active with the disciples as Jesus sends them out?

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 June 24

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.