

Daily Devotions

June 26-July 1, 2023

Monday June 26

Deuteronomy 6:1-9

Now this is the commandment—the statutes and the ordinances—that the Lord your God charged me to teach you to observe in the land that you are about to cross into and occupy,² so that you and your children and your children’s children, may fear the Lord your God all the days of your life, and keep all his decrees and his commandments that I am commanding you, so that your days may be long.³ Hear therefore, O Israel, and observe them diligently, so that it may go well with you, and so that you may multiply greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, as the Lord, the God of your ancestors, has promised you.

⁴Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone.⁵ You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.⁶ Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart.⁷ Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise.⁸ Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead,⁹ and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

For Reflection

This is a key Old Testament passage and a wonderful one to commit to memory. Parts of it are similar to the Creeds that we say in worship that plainly state our faith, especially verse 4, “Hear, O Israel: the Lord is our God, the Lord alone.” When we say this, it helps us focus on our heavenly Father who created us, who loves us, and who redeemed us through his Son, Jesus. Why would we look to anyone or anything else to be our God, when we have the Lord Almighty as our God?

Then this passage gives instructions for how to hold onto that statement of faith with one’s whole being: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might” (v. 5). It all comes down to love: God’s love for us, and then our response to that great love. We love God for his goodness, mercy, and

grace, because he first loved us.

To help us remember that we are loved, this passage instructs us to always keep the words of Scripture and all the promises of our faith in our minds and hearts. We are blessed when we review them with our children, and when we talk about our faith with others, at all times of day and night, and everywhere we go. When is a good time to meditate on God's great love for us? When is a good time to share that the Lord alone is our God? All the time!

Questions for Reflection

1. Have you heard this passage or studied it over the years? If it's familiar to you, what memories are associated with it for you? If it's new to you, how does it strike you as a statement of faith?
2. How do you keep God's word in your mind and heart? Through daily Bible reading? Or by having quotes from the Bible hanging in your home? Through prayer or writing in a journal as you hear God speaking to you through Scripture? By talking about Scripture with other believers? Reflect on all the ways God speaks to you, and on what you do with the messages that you hear from the Lord.

Read Psalm 119:33-72

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 27

Read Psalm 119:73-104

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 28

Psalm 69:7-18

⁷It is for your sake that I have borne reproach, that shame has covered my face.

⁸I have become a stranger to my kindred, an alien to my mother's children.

⁹It is zeal for your house that has consumed me; the insults of those who insult you have fallen on me.

¹⁰When I humbled my soul with fasting, they insulted me for doing so.

¹¹When I made sackcloth my clothing, I became a byword to them.

¹²I am the subject of gossip for those who sit in the gate, and the drunkards make songs about me.

¹³But as for me, my prayer is to you, O LORD. At an acceptable time, O God, in the abundance of your steadfast love, answer me. With your faithful help

¹⁴rescue me from sinking in the mire; let me be delivered from my enemies and from the deep waters.

¹⁵Do not let the flood sweep over me, or the deep swallow me up, or the Pit close its mouth over me.

¹⁶Answer me, O LORD, for your steadfast love is good; according to your abundant mercy, turn to me.

¹⁷Do not hide your face from your servant, for I am in distress—make haste to answer me.

¹⁸Draw near to me, redeem me, set me free because of my enemies.

For Reflection

When David cries out to God in this psalm, things are not going well, to put it mildly. He talks about shame covering his face, the flood sweeping over him, and deep waters causing him to sink. David is plagued by the insults and mockery of his enemies. It's so bad, that they are even making up drinking songs about him! But still, through it all, David trusts in God.

David complains, and he asks for help. He laments, and he believes that God will rescue him from everything, in God's own time. David asks for God's help, and he trusts that God will deliver him. His faith in God rests in this statement at the end of today's passage, "your

steadfast love is good” (v. 16). No matter what any of us are facing, we can trust, along with David, that God’s love is good. God pours out his steadfast love on us, no matter what challenges or difficulties we face.

Questions for Reflection

1. How does David’s prayer encourage you to be bolder in how you talk with God or share your deepest concerns and troubles with God?
2. How would you like God’s help today, for yourself or for someone you care about?
3. David says to God in this psalm, “it is zeal for your house that has consumed me” (v. 9). Have you ever been made fun of because of your faith? Has your faith ever put you at odds with people in your life? How did God help you through that situation? What was the outcome?

Read Psalm 119:105-144

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 29

Romans 6:1b-11

Should we continue in sin in order that grace may abound? ²By no means! How can we who died to sin go on living in it? ³Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. ⁵For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. ⁶We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. ⁷For whoever has died is freed from sin. ⁸But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. ⁹We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. ¹⁰The death he died, he died to sin, once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. ¹¹So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

For Reflection

The Apostle Paul often got himself in trouble with his preaching. But it was a specific kind of trouble. He passionately wanted the world to know that God had done everything needed to rescue creation from sin and death by the death and resurrection of Jesus. For thousands of years, God's people had been set apart by their devotion to the covenant the Lord had made with Israel at Sinai. In Christ, though, God had done a new thing. The Law of Sinai did indeed train people for holiness. But, because the deep root of human sin is in our hearts, external rules could never actually make us holy. So Christ came to break the power sin has over us and to make us new.

The trouble for Paul came when people heard him say that our relationship with God is based on trusting in Christ, not on our obedience to God's Law. He was accused of having no ethics, and no moral standards for believers. In fact, reading between the lines, his opening question in this reading gives us the sense that people were saying, "OK, Paul, if God is glorified by showing mercy, does that mean we should keep on sinning so that God has more to forgive and therefore is glorified more?"

He responds "by no means!" Then, he turns questions back on his accusers. Don't they know that when we were baptized into Christ, we died to sin and were raised up to new life? God's grace creates a different life for us to live. Our situation changes externally in that sin and death no longer rule over us. And we change internally in that we have been united with Jesus, and his life now dwells in us. Obedience to the Law was a way to manage sin that we could not overcome. But now that sin has been defeated on the cross, Christ's resurrection power heals and teaches our souls to walk in the ways of God.

When we are tempted, then, the answer isn't to fall back into obedience. It is to see that the ways of sin are a part of our old life. We have been given a new life, one filled by the glory of God. When we feel the desire to indulge in sin, we can say, "that is the old life; it doesn't work anymore. I have a new life through my baptism into Christ." Throughout the rest of Romans, Paul will help us see how the love of God, the power of Jesus, and the presence of the Holy Spirit all help us in our struggles against temptation and in our discovery of God's will for our lives.

Questions for Reflection

1. How often do you think of your baptism? According to this passage, it should be something we recall every day! Martin Luther famously dealt with temptation by yelling out loud, “I am baptized!” How can you help yourself remember, every day, that Jesus has created a new life for you in your baptism, a life where the old ways of sin no longer have a place?
2. One of my seminary professors liked to tell us things like, “if nobody ever accuses you of saying that obeying God doesn’t matter, you’re probably not really preaching the Gospel.” Our conduct *does* matter deeply. When we indulge our sinful inclinations, we harm others and ourselves; most worryingly, sin makes us think that what we’re doing is actually harmless or even good. It can even twist the Law to reinforce that delusion. But our conduct does not create or sustain our relationship with God. That connection was made eternally secure by the death and resurrection of Jesus. So, do you see the mercy of God as being so radical, so free, that it almost makes you think that you can just do whatever you feel like and God will forgive you? How does this idea of being given a new life help you see that yes, God’s mercy is always unconditional, but that his mercy also gives us the gift of a way of life that glorifies him?

Read Psalm 119:145-176

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 30

John 8:12, 31-3

¹²Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.”

³¹Then Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, “If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; ³²and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.” ³³They answered him, “We are

descendants of Abraham and have never been slaves to anyone. What do you mean by saying, ‘You will be made free’?”³⁴ Jesus answered them, “Very truly, I tell you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin.³⁵ The slave does not have a permanent place in the household; the son has a place there forever.³⁶ So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.”

For Reflection

Last week, we celebrated “Stellar” VBS at Reformation. Each night, families learned about shining the light of Jesus. Like stars in the night sky, the love of Christ always shines brightly. And, in any darkness in our world, followers of Jesus can shine like stars in the night.

The thing is, though, that our eyes are so accustomed to the darkness. The world thrives on greed, fear, anger, and selfishness. Our media generates anxiety and ramps up our desires, telling us that if we just have, or experience, one more thing, we will finally be satisfied. Of course, we never are. Social media feeds us with comparisons to others. It will take more than brief flashes of light to illuminate the truth and set us free.

That is why Jesus uses words like “follow” and “continue” to describe our relationship to him and his word. “Whoever *follows* me... will have the light of life.” “If you *continue* in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.” These are statements of duration. They are an invitation to spend time in the presence of Jesus. They are a call to let our eyes adjust to his light so that finally, we can see ourselves, each other, the world, and God clearly.

The hard reality is that not only is our world good at deceiving us, but we are also good at deceiving ourselves. It takes long-term exposure to the light of Jesus to make our vision clear. But the good news is that he is always with us, and he is always shining on us. His light is grace, mercy, truth, and healing. It is the light of God’s perfect love, and it is yours as a gift. Follow it. Continue in it. And Jesus will open your eyes and make you free.

Questions for Reflection

1. What is one area where you need the light of Jesus to show you the truth or the right way to go? How can you “continue” in his word until that light shines for you?
2. How do you set aside time to “follow” Jesus in prayer, worship, Bible reading, fellowship, and serving others? What makes it challenging to prioritize this in your life? What would help you?

Read Psalm 120-125

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 July 1

Read Psalm 126-131

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.