

Daily Devotions

Monday July 3

Jeremiah 28:5-9

⁵Then the prophet Jeremiah spoke to the prophet Hananiah in the presence of the priests and all the people who were standing in the house of the Lord; ⁶and the prophet Jeremiah said, "Amen! May the Lord do so; may the Lord fulfill the words that you have prophesied, and bring back to this place from Babylon the vessels of the house of the Lord, and all the exiles. ⁷But listen now to this word that I speak in your hearing and in the hearing of all the people. ⁸The prophets who preceded you and me from ancient times prophesied war, famine, and pestilence against many countries and great kingdoms. ⁹As for the prophet who prophesies peace, when the word of that prophet comes true, then it will be known that the Lord has truly sent the prophet."

For Reflection

The events leading up to this verbal duel between the prophet Jeremiah and the prophet Hananiah were devastating to Israel. The Babylonian empire had descended upon Jerusalem and carted the leaders of Israel away into exile. The people of Israel were afraid and uncertain about what would happen to them and to their country. The prophet Hananiah said not to worry, that within two years the King of Israel and all the precious objects the Babylonians stole from Israel would be returned.

When today's passage begins, Jeremiah challenges Hananiah in front of all the people in the Temple. He calls Hananiah out on his wishful thinking and his false message of peace. Keep that in mind as you read Jeremiah's words. When he says to Hananiah, "'Amen! May the Lord do so; may the Lord fulfill the words that you have prophesied...'" it's important to realize that Jeremiah is saying something like, "I wish that were true, but you're only saying what you and the people want to hear. What God is actually going to do is different from your false promises and untrue prophecy."

Jeremiah tells Hananiah in verse 15 (after today's passage), "'you made this people trust in a lie.'" Sometimes the truth is hard to hear, but this story of the dueling prophets reminds us that it's better to listen to the voice of truth and face reality than it is to listen to false

prophets and cling to illusory hope. Who are you listening to these days?

Questions for Reflection

1. Have you ever had two different messages coming at you, and you had to decide which to believe? How did your faith in Jesus guide you in that situation?
2. How do you hear the Lord's voice best: through reading Scripture, preaching, prayer, silence, or some other way?
3. In what areas of your life or the lives of people you love are you praying for peace, comfort, or hope? Take a few moments and talk with God about that now.

Read Psalm 132-135

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 July 4

Read Psalm 136-138

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 July 5

Psalm 89:1-4, 15-18

¹I will sing of your steadfast love, O LORD, forever; with my mouth I will proclaim your faithfulness to all generations.

²I declare that your steadfast love is established forever; your faithfulness is as firm as the heavens.

³You said, "I have made a covenant with my chosen one, I have sworn to my servant David:

⁴“I will establish your descendants forever, and build your throne for all generations.”

¹⁵Happy are the people who know the festal shout, who walk, O LORD, in the light of your countenance;

¹⁶they exult in your name all day long, and extol your righteousness.

¹⁷For you are the glory of their strength; by your favor our horn is exalted.

¹⁸For our shield belongs to the LORD, our king to the Holy One of Israel.

For Reflection

“Ecstatic” is a word we use for “extreme happiness.” But its roots are in Greek words for being “outside of yourself.” Ecstasy is almost an out-of-body experience. We can use it in a slightly different sense to capture what this reading from Psalm 89 tells us about faith. There is extreme happiness going on: “Happy are they people who know the festal shout... they exult in your name all day long.” But the reason for this joy is external: it is the Lord’s “steadfast love” and “faithfulness to all generations” that is “established forever.” This character and promise of God creates the joy of the psalmist. What does this have to do with ecstasy? Our joy, our confidence, and our hope are outside of ourselves. They find their source in God. Faith takes us, in a sense, out of ourselves. Our life comes from God.

And what a relief this can be! It’s not up to us to create our own righteousness, our own strength, our own future. God has promised to be our righteousness, to be our strength, and to lead us into his future through his love and mercy. Our sinful nature resists this because we want to feel like we’re in control. We want to be in charge of our own lives. But the truth is, we need something greater than ourselves. We can’t overcome sin by our willpower. We can’t navigate confusing ethical and spiritual times with our own instincts. We can’t escape the realities of death by our own determination. The great news that the psalmist knows is that in his mercy, God has done what we cannot. We can be “beside ourselves” with joy because the source of our joy is outside of ourselves, in the love and goodness of God.

Questions for Reflection

1. What areas of life are hardest for you to give up control over? What would it look like to let the Lord be your strength and your guidance in those areas?

2. What helps you to focus on God's grace when your own circumstances, either external or internal, are difficult? Is it worship? Conversation with other Christians? Prayer? What most helps you?

Read Psalm 139-140

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 July 6

Romans 6:12-23

¹²Therefore, do not let sin exercise dominion in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions. ¹³No longer present your members to sin as instruments of wickedness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and present your members to God as instruments of righteousness. ¹⁴For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace. ¹⁵What then? Should we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! ¹⁶Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? ¹⁷But thanks be to God that you, having once been slaves of sin, have become obedient from the heart to the form of teaching to which you were entrusted, ¹⁸and that you, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness. ¹⁹I am speaking in human terms because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to greater and greater iniquity, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness for sanctification. ²⁰When you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. ²¹So what advantage did you then get from the things of which you now are ashamed? The end of those things is death. ²²But now that you have been freed from sin and enslaved to God, the advantage you get is sanctification. The end is eternal life. ²³For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

For Reflection

One of Martin Luther's most controversial writings is *The Bondage of the Will*. He writes that there is no such thing as a "free" human will. Paul's reasoning in this part of Romans is one of the main sources for Luther's thinking. In verse 22, we see that Paul says we are either enslaved to sin or enslaved to God. This is probably counterintuitive to us. We can understand being enslaved to sin. But doesn't Jesus set us free? Yes, he does. But here's the thing: *freedom* is not merely "doing whatever I want." Freedom means living the life that God created you for. We are most free when the Holy Spirit is most in control of us. Even our choice to, as Paul puts it, "present ourselves to God," isn't a decision we can take credit for. It is possible only because Christ has first broken sin's hold on our hearts.

When we surrender to Christ, or as Paul puts it, "present our members to God as instruments of righteousness," we find our hearts and minds being changed. We become more sanctified, more holy. This isn't a "holier-than-thou" self-righteousness, but a new kind of life, one that is eternal and aligned with God's purposes for us. Our role isn't to improve ourselves. It is to surrender ourselves to the leading of Christ through the Holy Spirit. This leap of faith opens us to the work of God in our lives to transform us more and more into the image of Christ, and to make us more and more into the people he always intended us to be.

Questions for Reflection

1. What is an area of your life where you feel like you are still a "slave to sin?" Is there a habit you can't shake, an attitude you can't change, or something you know you should do but can't? Ask God to set you free, and to lead you in the direction he wants you to go.
2. It goes against our American and "Western" values to think that we aren't free on our own. After all, isn't freedom one of our highest values? Especially as we celebrate Independence Day? But in the spiritual realm, being in charge of our own destiny is a burden too heavy for any of us to carry. How can you find comfort in knowing that the responsibility for your righteousness belongs to Christ?

Read Psalm 141-143

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 July 7

Matthew 10:40-42

⁴⁰[Jesus said,] "Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. ⁴¹Whoever welcomes a prophet in the name of a prophet will receive a prophet's reward; and whoever welcomes a righteous person in the name of a righteous person will receive the reward of the righteous; ⁴²and whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple—truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward."

For Reflection

If we want to put ourselves in the shoes of the twelve disciples as we read this passage, we have to remember that Jesus is wrapping up his instructions for the mission he has for them. Back in 10:1 & 2 (our gospel reading two weeks ago), Matthew named the "apostles" or "sent ones" who Jesus called as laborers for God's harvest. Now, in today's passage, Jesus is reminding the twelve apostles that they will go out as double ambassadors—as representatives of Jesus and also as representatives of the one who sent Jesus, his Father in heaven.

Jesus concludes his directions for the disciples' mission with the promise that whoever welcomes the disciples, hears the good news, and puts their faith in Jesus will be rewarded. Not because they've earned God's love, but because they've received it as a pure gift. As believers in Jesus and as his disciples today, we can be encouraged by this passage. We can trust the good news that we belong to Jesus. Nothing can ever change that. His love is a gift, and all we have to do is open our hearts and hands to receive it.

Questions for Reflection

1. Have you ever had the experience of being warmly welcomed by someone as a fellow believer, simply because you shared the Christian faith? Have you ever visited a church and felt like you

belonged as soon as you walked in the door? Reflect on ways that you've been welcomed before anyone got to know you or found out what you could do for them. What did that feel like?

2. Jesus gives the striking image of offering a cup of cold water to someone, a detail that reminds us that small acts of kindness and love matter to God and to other people. When have you been the recipient of a small act of love like that? When have you offered kindness to someone in a small, yet powerful way?
3. How do you think Reformation is doing at welcoming others? What is your role in welcoming new people to church? Sometimes just going up to someone and asking their name and how they found out about Reformation is enough to establish a connection and begin a friendship. What could you do the next time you're in worship to reach out to someone new and welcome them?

Read Psalm 144-146

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 8

Read Psalm 147-150

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.