

# Daily Devotions

## Monday July 17

### **Isaiah 55:10:13**

<sup>10</sup>For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there until they have watered the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, <sup>11</sup>so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it. <sup>12</sup>For you shall go out in joy, and be led back in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall burst into song, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. <sup>13</sup>Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress; instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle; and it shall be to the Lord for a memorial, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.

### ***For Reflection***

Isaiah 55 was composed either during Israel's exile in Babylon or shortly after their return. The people's faith was tenuous. So here the Lord speaks to encourage them. His people will again know joy and peace; nature itself will be restored to beauty and wholeness. This will happen through the great power of the Lord's word. This is our source of hope: when God speaks, it is not merely sound, but his very power at work. When God created the heavens and the earth, he did so by speaking "let there be..." John's Gospel names Jesus the Son as the "Word" made flesh. This word "shall not return... empty, but it shall accomplish" what God intends. And Isaiah wants his hearers to know that God's purposes are to rescue and redeem his people. As we hear this, we can know that in Christ, our salvation is secure, for the Lord has said it!

### **Questions for Reflection**

1. During times when you have faced trials or struggles, have there been particular Bible passages that have encouraged you? Where do you turn in God's Word for strength?
2. Protestant Christians often tend to think about God's Word as "information about God." But his Word is actually his self-giving. He is staking his own identity on his promises to save us. For Luther, God's Word was, therefore, something to hold onto, like a

life raft in a stormy sea. How do you cling to God's Word? What would help you rely on it more?

### **Read Psalm 19-21**

**Today's Prayer Focus:** Pray for victims and communities grieving from gun violence. Pray for the safety of all people, for reasonable laws, and for resources to combat the mental health crisis in America.

## **Tuesday July 18**

### **Read Psalm 22-23**

**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 19**

### **Psalm 65**

<sup>1</sup>Praise is due to you, O God, in Zion; and to you shall vows be performed,

<sup>2</sup>O you who answer prayer! To you all flesh shall come.

<sup>3</sup>When deeds of iniquity overwhelm us, you forgive our transgressions.

<sup>4</sup>Happy are those whom you choose and bring near to live in your courts. We shall be satisfied with the goodness of your house, your holy temple.

<sup>5</sup>By awesome deeds you answer us with deliverance, O God of our salvation; you are the hope of all the ends of the earth and of the farthest seas.

<sup>6</sup>By your strength you established the mountains; you are girded with might.

<sup>7</sup>You silence the roaring of the seas, the roaring of their waves, the tumult of the peoples.

<sup>8</sup>Those who live at earth's farthest bounds are awed by your signs; you make the gateways of the morning and the evening shout for joy.

<sup>9</sup>You visit the earth and water it, you greatly enrich it; the river of God is full of water; you provide the people with grain, for so you have prepared it.

<sup>10</sup>You water its furrows abundantly, settling its ridges, softening it with showers, and blessing its growth.

<sup>11</sup>You crown the year with your bounty; your wagon tracks overflow with richness.

<sup>12</sup>The pastures of the wilderness overflow, the hills gird themselves with joy,

<sup>13</sup>the meadows clothe themselves with flocks, the valleys deck themselves with grain, they shout and sing together for joy.

### ***For Reflection***

This psalm debunks two stereotypical ideas about God. First, there is the idea that we should hide in terror of a God who is ready to condemn us for our slightest faults. According to this psalm, though, “all flesh” shall come to the Lord precisely because he is the one who forgives. Another way to translate verses 2-3 into English is “to you who that hear prayer shall all flesh come *because of their transgressions*. Our sins are stronger than we are, but you will blot them out.” In other words, the mercy of God will actually draw sinners to him, because in him we find rescue from our sins.

The other idea this psalm challenges is the idea that God is somehow opposed to human beings enjoying life and he wants us to be miserable. But look at verses 9-13 again. They paint a picture of a God who is abundant in generosity, who gives to create joy. It is true that in this sinful world, we do not yet always experience that joy. But our hope goes beyond this world. God will pour out life and blessing on his creation. In his Son, Jesus, he overcame even death itself to make that a reality.

### **Questions for Reflection**

1. When you struggle, or doubt, or sin, how would it change your thinking if you saw those as reasons to run *to* God and not *away from* him? What would it look like for you to trust more fully that God is always seeking to forgive, rescue, and heal you?
2. Have you ever encountered the idea that God prefers us to be miserable? While we do not believe in a “prosperity Gospel” (where if you “really” trust God, you will have lots of

money, never be sick, and have success in everything you do), how does it encourage you to know that God's intention is for you to experience abundance and blessing?

### **Read Psalm 24-26**

**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 20**

### **Romans 8:1-11**

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. <sup>2</sup>For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. <sup>3</sup>For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and to deal with sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, <sup>4</sup>so that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. <sup>5</sup>For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. <sup>6</sup>To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. <sup>7</sup>For this reason the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law—indeed it cannot, <sup>8</sup>and those who are in the flesh cannot please God. <sup>9</sup>But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.

<sup>10</sup>But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. <sup>11</sup>If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you.

### ***For Reflection***

We've been working our way through Paul's letter to the Romans for several weeks now, and we have several more Sundays to go. Each week reveals more about Paul's confidence in God to make us right with him through the death and resurrection of Jesus.

At this point in his intricate argument, Paul describes how God’s act of taking on human flesh in Jesus has changed everything for those who believe in him. Before Jesus came to earth, lived, died and rose again, we were under the power of the law. The law exposes our sin and the consequences of condemnation. But now that Jesus has come “to deal with sin” (v. 3), we are under a different power—the power of God’s grace. Now we have the Holy Spirit dwelling in us. The Spirit leads and guides us in ways that bring “life and peace” (v. 6). That’s quite a transformation! Thanks be to God!

At Reformation, we’ve been blessed to have two baptisms over the past two weeks. Both were infants whose parents brought them to receive the gift of Holy Baptism among God’s faithful people. Seeing these two baby girls baptized in our midst reminds us that, in our baptism (no matter how long ago it was!), we are sealed by the power of the Holy Spirit. No matter how often we need to repent of our sin and seek God’s forgiveness, the Spirit of God dwells with us forever.

The presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives is powerful for today as we seek guidance for our complex lives. And the promise of the Holy Spirit is powerful and comforting for our ultimate future, when “he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies... through his Spirit that dwells in you” (v. 11).

### **Questions for Reflection**

1. As you read this passage, do you receive more hope and comfort from Paul’s promise of the Holy Spirit’s presence today, or by the promise of the Holy Spirit’s role in your resurrection to eternal life? Why do you think you’re hearing one more strongly than the other right now?
2. When you participate in a baptism as a congregation member, what thoughts, memories or feelings does the baptism evoke for you? How does it give you hope for the future of the Church in general?
3. How is the Holy Spirit giving you life and peace these days? Spend a few moments in reflection and gratitude for the Spirit’s gifts.

## Read Psalm 27-29

**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 21

#### **Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23**

That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. <sup>2</sup>Such great crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat there, while the whole crowd stood on the beach. <sup>3</sup>And he told them many things in parables, saying: "Listen! A sower went out to sow. <sup>4</sup>And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up. <sup>5</sup>Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil. <sup>6</sup>But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away. <sup>7</sup>Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. <sup>8</sup>Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. <sup>9</sup>Let anyone with ears listen!" <sup>18</sup>"Hear then the parable of the sower. <sup>19</sup>When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what is sown in the heart; this is what was sown on the path. <sup>20</sup>As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; <sup>21</sup>yet such a person has no root, but endures only for a while, and when trouble or persecution arises on account of the word, that person immediately falls away. <sup>22</sup>As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the lure of wealth choke the word, and it yields nothing. <sup>23</sup>But as for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty."

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

For this reflection, we're going to focus on the actions of the sower in the first part of today's reading. He's a farmer with seed to scatter, and a crop to plant. Notice how widely he tosses the seeds. They fall on four different kinds of ground, not just on the area, the "good soil," that's cultivated for planting. In other words, the sower isn't trying to control the outcome from the moment the seeds leave his hand. He's

scattering the seed generously and letting it fall where it may.

This is the first of many parables Jesus tells in Matthew 13 to describe what the Kingdom of God is like. It's a hopeful parable, because the sower isn't stingy with the seed. In the same way, God isn't stingy with his word. God's word goes out to all people through the stories of Jesus and his death and resurrection for the sake of the world. God's word also spreads through our words and deeds as Jesus' disciples. We don't always know how practicing our faith will make a difference, or how our words of grace or acts of generosity will affect other people. After all, as this parable shows us, the type of soil the seeds land on makes a difference for how they grow.

But like the sower, our job isn't to hold tightly to the seed of God's word and parcel it out in a stingy way, just because we can't predict the outcome. Instead, God calls us to share his word and the good news of Jesus generously. In God's time, and with God's power, it will transform into an abundant harvest of more believers, more farmers who will continue to share the word of God with the world.

### **Questions for Reflection**

1. What experience do you have with farming, gardening, planting or growing things? What connections do you find between this parable and your experience as a gardener?
2. How do Jesus' parables stir your imagination and help you understand your place in God's kingdom in a unique way?
3. What are some habits or practices of faith that allow you to care for the "good soil" of your mind and heart and make you more receptive to God's word?

### **Read Psalm 30-31**

**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 22

### **Read Psalm 32-34**

**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.