

# Daily Devotions

Monday July 24

## **Isaiah 44:6-8**

<sup>6</sup>Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel, and his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts: I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god.

<sup>7</sup>Who is like me? Let them proclaim it, let them declare and set it forth before me. Who has announced from of old the things to come? Let them tell us what is yet to be. <sup>8</sup>Do not fear, or be afraid; have I not told you from of old and declared it? You are my witnesses! Is there any god besides me? There is no other rock; I know not one.

### ***For Reflection***

Israel had lost its land, its sovereignty, and, most disastrously, its Temple. The dwelling place of God on earth had been destroyed. It appeared that the Lord's promises to his people had failed. The people were faced with staggering alternatives: either the Lord had abandoned his people or he had been defeated by the gods of Babylon. But into this despair, the Lord speaks through the prophet Isaiah with power and hope. He is still "the Lord of hosts." He alone is the one true God, and no other god can compare to him. His purposes might be obscured in the moment, but he is in control of "what is yet to be." Therefore he tells the people not to fear, because he is their "rock," the one who can be trusted with their future.

It is easy for us to lose sight of God's faithfulness when we face challenging circumstances. But if the Lord was still God even after the victory of the Babylonians, then he still reigns even when we face our deepest fears. He is the One who raised his Son to glory out of the most inglorious death imaginable! Your present reality may be challenging, but your future is secure in the Lord; he is the rock you can always trust.

### **Questions for Reflection**

1. How have you seen God's faithfulness in the past? Has God ever surprised you with how he has provided for you? How does that give you courage in the present?
2. What is a challenge you are facing now? How can you pray for God to bring a "resurrection" into your circumstances?

## **Read Psalm 35-36**

**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 25**

### **Read Psalm 37**

**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 26**

### **Psalm 86:11-17**

<sup>11</sup>Teach me your way, O LORD, that I may walk in your truth; give me an undivided heart to revere your name.

<sup>12</sup>I give thanks to you, O Lord my God, with my whole heart, and I will glorify your name forever.

<sup>13</sup>For great is your steadfast love toward me; you have delivered my soul from the depths of Sheol.

<sup>14</sup>O God, the insolent rise up against me; a band of ruffians seeks my life, and they do not set you before them.

<sup>15</sup>But you, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.

<sup>16</sup>Turn to me and be gracious to me; give your strength to your servant; save the child of your serving girl.

<sup>17</sup>Show me a sign of your favor, so that those who hate me may see it and be put to shame, because you, LORD, have helped me and comforted me.

### ***For Reflection***

Psalm 86 is titled "A Prayer of David." It's very personal in tone, as David confides his innermost thoughts to God and asks for his help. In this section of the psalm, David focuses on his desire for God to shape him into someone who is 100% committed to the Lord. The prayer, "give me an undivided heart to revere your name" (v. 11) shows that David doesn't want anything to distract him from their relationship.

As he prays, David describes the challenges he's facing from his enemies. He knows that only the strength and love of God will help him move past those challenges. We often say that the psalms give us permission to freely express our emotions to God. This psalm is a good example of that freedom, as we listen to David's cry, "Turn to me and be gracious to me...show me a sign of your favor" (v. 16-17). What is the cry of your heart that you want to pray to God today?

### **Questions for Reflection**

1. What are your favorite ways to give thanks to God with your whole heart (see v. 12)? What titles for God or what words do you use when you offer your thanks and praise to God?
2. Read the words David uses to describe God in verse 15: merciful, gracious, slow to anger, and so on. Which of these words speaks to you the most as you reflect on your relationship with God and why?
3. In what areas of your life would you like God to "teach me your way" (v. 11) right now? Spend a moment in prayer listening for God's guidance, and then after this time of prayer and reflection, keep your ears open for God's continuous teaching.

### **Read Psalm 38-40**

**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 27

### **Romans 8:12-25**

<sup>12</sup>So then, brothers and sisters, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh— <sup>13</sup>for if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. <sup>14</sup>For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. <sup>15</sup>For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, “Abba! Father!” <sup>16</sup>it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, <sup>17</sup>and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

<sup>18</sup>I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. <sup>19</sup>For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; <sup>20</sup>for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope <sup>21</sup>that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. <sup>22</sup>We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; <sup>23</sup>and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. <sup>24</sup>For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? <sup>25</sup>But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

### ***For Reflection***

Each section from Paul’s letter to the Romans that we’re reading this summer deserves careful attention. It’s all rich food for thought for our faith and for our relationship with God as his beloved children. In this devotion, we’ll focus on the second part of today’s reading. Paul firmly roots us in the reality of our flawed world when he writes about “the sufferings of this present time” (v. 18). In the same breath, he looks ahead to “the glory about to be revealed to us.” Paul expresses his confidence in God’s promises to set us free from our present reality of sin and death, and set us free for the wonderful future he is preparing for us. At the right time, God will transform us with his resurrection power and love, just as he transformed his Son, Jesus, through the cross and empty tomb. That promise gives Paul hope and

it gives us great hope, too! No matter what challenges we are facing today, we can live with joyful expectation that God will fulfill his promises and give us a glorious future, in his time.

### **Questions for Reflection**

1. Paul ends this section with the assertion that we can “wait with patience” as we hope for God’s glorious future, which is yet unseen. What do you think of when you hear the word, “patience”? Are you a patient person? Does it depend on what you’re waiting for? Have you ever asked God to help you become more patient? If so, what happened?
2. Do you tend to reflect on God’s time horizon, as Paul expresses it in this passage? Does the thought of a future glory for God’s children give you hope? Or does it seem too remote to consider? Take some time to wrestle with Paul’s images of longing, childbirth, and waiting in this passage. How does it help you deepen your understanding of your place in God’s salvation story?

### **Read Psalm 41-43**

**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 28**

#### **Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43**

<sup>24</sup>[Jesus] put before them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field; <sup>25</sup>but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away. <sup>26</sup>So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared as well. <sup>27</sup>And the slaves of the householder came and said to him, ‘Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where, then, did these weeds come from?’ <sup>28</sup>He answered, ‘An enemy has done this.’ The slaves said to him, ‘Then do you want us to go and gather them?’ <sup>29</sup>But he replied, ‘No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. <sup>30</sup>Let both of them grow together until the harvest; and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Collect the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.’”

<sup>36</sup>Then he left the crowds and went into the house. And his disciples approached him, saying, “Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field.” <sup>37</sup>He answered, “The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man; <sup>38</sup>the field is the world, and the good seed are the children of the kingdom; the weeds are the children of the evil one, <sup>39</sup>and the enemy who sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. <sup>40</sup>Just as the weeds are collected and burned up with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. <sup>41</sup>The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, <sup>42</sup>and they will throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. <sup>43</sup>Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Let anyone with ears listen!”

### ***For Reflection***

The devil does not, indeed cannot, create. In interpreting this parable, we must remember that no human being is created a “child of the evil one.” But the evil one does corrupt and deceive, and those he harms can go on to harm others. And so we can understand the temptation to want to be rid of the weeds as quickly as possible. But we cannot necessarily tell wheat from weed. In this life, the Church is a “mixed body,” not a pure assembly of the righteous. Indeed, Jesus specializes in transforming weeds into wheat, so we should not try to short-circuit his work.

Two themes present themselves from this parable: one is patience. We do not get to decide who is worthy to be in the church and who is not. And when we (inevitably) do something that “should” warrant our exclusion, we can know that Jesus is not looking to kick us out. There is time for his grace to work.

But the other theme is a mix of warning and hope. We can look forward to a future free not only from sin, but from all causes of sin. This is our destiny, to be utterly free in the love and goodness of God, when there will no longer be even the temptation to evil. But the warning is that we all have “weeds” that we cling to, things that cause us to sin. We do not want to be found either clinging to or being the cause of sin. Even though the grace of God is infinite, our sins have consequences.

### **Questions for Reflection**

1. Is there someone you are convinced is a “weed?” How does this parable challenge you to greater patience, but also give you hope?
2. Many of the early Church Fathers (and Mothers) insisted that we interpret this parable with the weeds and wheat referring not to individual persons, but to the either sinful or holy inclinations within every person’s soul. One of my seminary professors echoed this idea by saying, “if you kill your demons, you’ll probably end up killing your angels, too.” How does this idea help you to be more patient and gentle with yourself? How can you ask Jesus to transform your weeds into wheat?

### **Read Psalm 44-46**

**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 29**

### **Read Psalm 47-49**

**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.