

Daily Devotions

Monday August 7

Isaiah 55:1-5

Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you that have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. ²Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food. ³Incline your ear, and come to me; listen, so that you may live. I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David. ⁴See, I made him a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander for the peoples. ⁵See, you shall call nations that you do not know, and nations that do not know you shall run to you, because of the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has glorified you.

For Reflection

Today's passage from the second half of the Book of Isaiah (chapters 40 – 66) continues to reflect the change in God's tone to His people. No longer are there persistent warnings to Israel about her impending downfall and God's harsh judgment as one reads in the first half of Isaiah's book (chapters 1 – 39). The downfall indeed occurred, the people were forced into exile and God's judgments had been rendered. Now, in this section of the prophet's writing often called 'Second Isaiah,' words of comfort to Israel and promises of her restoration abound! Today's reading, beginning as it does with a description of a joyful banquet, free of charge to 'everyone' (verses 1-2), *extends the invitation to this banquet beyond Israel* to include all the nations. The God of the Bible ready does mean to invite 'everyone!'

When these verses were first received, God's people were likely still in exile, just on the verge of returning to their homeland. And while the people of God might have already begun to rejoice, envisioning their return to rebuild the temple, the walls of Jerusalem and to reestablish themselves as a political kingdom again as of old, their imagination would prove to be too narrow for Israel's God who had a much more expansive role in mind for them. In verse three God says, 'I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David.' Yes, this everlasting covenant will demonstrate God's steadfast love for David but would not be limited to David's house alone. The promises earlier made to David's house to rule over Israel are now applied in an expansive way to the whole of Israel. Now, Israel herself is to become the vessel of God's drawing power to the nations of the world! 'See, you shall call nations that you do not know, and nations that do not know you shall run to you (v. 5a). Historically speaking, one might say that the promise originally made to David was an early iteration of God's everlasting covenant, how God

would use David and his lineage to accomplish the divine plan. By the time of the exiled peoples' return, all of Israel becomes the instrument whereby the promises of God would eventually be fulfilled. What a feast it will be when 'everyone' who thirsts from all the nations is welcomed to the waters!

Questions for Reflection

1. The awaited Messiah from old did, of course, come in the fullness of time. Christians profess Jesus to be God's Messiah (the anointed one) whose single fixed purpose was to pour himself out for the sake of the whole world. While this understanding of Messiah usually runs counter to our human expectations of Messiah, it synchronizes perfectly with the God of Israel who sends this Jesus to cultivate and empower the divine purpose among those called to follow him. This is what Holy Baptism is actually all about. In Baptism God's mission to envelope all people with His love has been given to us through the Spirit of Christ poured out over us. When you consider the many benefits of being baptized (forgiveness of sins, release from death and the devil, eternal salvation), do you regard being entrusted with God's mission as a benefit, as well? Why or why not?
2. The God of the Bible has a penchant for entrusting His plan and purpose to individual human beings. From Noah to Abraham, Moses to David, God designates human beings, despite their frailties, to accomplish His plan. As God's story with us advances, His penchant only increases, including more and more individuals, prophets and kings! Finally, God enters the story Himself as a human being and then, not to be satisfied with that, pours out Christ's very Spirit over all people with reckless abandon. Our God cannot help Himself! God desires to include us in extending the love of Christ to all people. Think about how you are the most recent iteration of God's everlasting covenant. How does that make you feel about yourself and your value to God?
3. Being entrusted with God's mission as the mere human beings we are is humbling at least, often overwhelming. Yet in today's reading the word of the Lord has spoken it! God does not entrust us with His mission without equipping us to be effective. How has God equipped you personally for sharing the love of Jesus with more and more people?

Read Psalm 68

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 August 8

Read Psalm 69-70

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 August 9

Psalm 145:8-9, 14-21

⁸The LORD is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

⁹The LORD is good to all, and his compassion is over all that he has made.

¹⁴The LORD upholds all who are falling, and raises up all who are bowed down.

¹⁵The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food in due season.

¹⁶You open your hand, satisfying the desire of every living thing.

¹⁷The LORD is just in all his ways, and kind in all his doings.

¹⁸The LORD is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth.

¹⁹He fulfills the desire of all who fear him; he also hears their cry, and saves them.

²⁰The LORD watches over all who love him, but all the wicked he will destroy.

²¹My mouth will speak the praise of the LORD, and all flesh will bless his holy name forever and ever.

For Reflection

If some of the words of this Psalm sound familiar, it could be because a portion of Psalm 145 was also an appointed reading for the week of July 9th, just one month ago. Familiar or not, I invite you to read the entire Psalm right now as you reflect on its meaning. It is the best way to receive the full impact of its message. Psalm 145 is abounding with praise of God and overflowing with gratitude for all God's benefits. Verse after verse, the psalmist extols the God of Israel for goodness and compassion (v. 9), feeding and satisfying hunger (vs. 15,16), justice and kindness (v. 17), hearing the people's cry and saving them (v. 19). It is a literary tour de force of God's wonderful ways!

Two phrases contained in today's psalm have been plucked from their original position here and employed as 'stand-alone' verses in our worship and prayer life. Verse 8, 'The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding

in steadfast love,' is used in our current worship book, ELW, as the Lenten verse during Sundays in Lent (settings 3,4,7). It might sound familiar to you. Likewise, verses 15 and 16 in today's Psalm have been used by many as a mealtime prayer. 'The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food in due season. You open your hand, satisfying the desire of every living thing.' Have you ever heard these words invoked at the time of mealtime prayer?

So, whether it be as creator, provider, savior or righteous judge, the broad reach of Israel's God can do no wrong! Truly, the Lord is enthroned on the praises of Israel!

Questions for Reflection

1. The Bible's God uses His power, authority and sovereignty to embrace 'all' and 'every' part of creation He has formed. Sentences like the one in verse 9, 'The Lord is good to all, and His compassion is over all that He has made,' and the climactic phrase in verse 21, 'and all flesh will bless His holy name forever and ever,' are two examples of many sprinkled throughout the Psalm in which the words 'all' and 'every' are invoked. Just considering the verses of Psalm 145 appointed for today, there are as many as fourteen times when the words 'all' and 'every' are used. There are even more examples if you read and tally the entire Psalm. What does that tell you about the creation's standing with this God? What does it tell you about your own standing with this God?
2. While this Psalm reads like a tour de force of God's wonderful ways, there are plenty of instances among the Psalms (and in our own lives) when our praise of God is muted, and we are downtrodden by life's circumstances. Not every day can be a smiley face day! When you're having one of those 'turn down days' do you search out a type of Psalm that most closely converges with your own sentiment or mood? Or does reading Psalm 145 on those 'down' days provide a balm to soothe your troubled soul and possibly uplift your spirit? In all life's circumstances, God reigns over you for good, after all!

Read Psalm 71-72

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 August 10

Romans 9:1-5

I am speaking the truth in Christ—I am not lying; my conscience confirms it by the Holy Spirit— ²I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. ³For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake

of my own people, my kindred according to the flesh. ⁴They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises; ⁵to them belong the patriarchs, and from them, according to the flesh, comes the Messiah, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen.

For Reflection

If you are a regular participant in Reformation's weekly devotions, you have likely noticed that we have been reading through the Apostle Paul's Letter to the Romans all summer long (June 11 – September 17). In the first half of the Letter (chapters 1 – 8), Paul builds the case for the power of God's own righteousness to activate faith in Christ within the lives of those who hear the message of salvation. Today, Paul begins a new section of his Letter (chapter 9 -11) with a consideration of Israel's continued unbelief in Christ. It is a most vexing issue for Paul. If the God of Israel's plan for salvation is determined by trust in Jesus, why does this message not take root among God's own chosen people? I urge you to read the entirety of chapters 9,10 and 11. While the next two Sundays provide a brief snippet of both chapter 10 (week of August 13) and chapter 11 (week of August 20), these snippets do not adequately capture the thinking and logic of Paul's argument. I can tell you, these three chapters of Romans (9,10,11) when read as a unit, are an extraordinary piece of groundbreaking theology, relying heavily on Paul's understanding of the Hebrew scripture (Old Testament) to propose an answer to the question: How can God's chosen people (Israel) reject God's Son without losing the hope of their own destiny as chosen ones?

All of this by way of background to today's excerpt reading. Romans 9:1-5 is but the introduction to Paul's innovative response to the unfaithful rejection of Christ by his own people. And make no mistake. This is personal for Paul. He shares a kinship with Israel, referring to them as 'my own people.' And his anguish is real. 'For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my own people.' The height of the offense is that Israel - the elected people of God, privileged to receive the covenants, the Law, the patriarchs – has rejected God's Christ. And, as if to intensify the heartbreak, the Messiah Himself is one of their own, born of Mary! How can all this be reality and what is the God of Israel to do about it?

Questions for Reflection

1. Have you ever said, 'This just doesn't make sense' when life defies your understanding? Or 'It's not right' when circumstances in life present you with an unfair outcome? While we might try to explain the unexplainable by relying on human reasoning, there are times when a satisfactory outcome is beyond our grasp. In those times how hard is it for you to trust in God knowing best, beyond what you yourself can figure out?

2. Paul appeals to the scripture he knows in probing the mind of God for an answer that is, for him, unattainable. A high stakes venture, to be sure. Yet, for people of faith, seeking to understand the ways of God by searching scripture is preferred to engaging in knee jerk reactions or operating as if we have the whole picture when we don't. Again, trusting beyond our own vantage point for guidance in living can be an ongoing challenge. Spoiler alert: God does not reject His chosen people but rather uses their rejection to include more and more Gentiles in the salvation plan. God takes what we might regard as a 'detour' to accomplish His purposes. Can you point to any times in your own experience when God has taken a longer way around to impact the direction of your life?

Read Psalm 73-74

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 August 11

Matthew 14:13-21

¹³Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a deserted place by himself. But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns. ¹⁴When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them and cured their sick. ¹⁵When it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a deserted place, and the hour is now late; send the crowds away so that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves." ¹⁶Jesus said to them, "They need not go away; you give them something to eat." ¹⁷They replied, "We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish." ¹⁸And he said, "Bring them here to me." ¹⁹Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. ²⁰And all ate and were filled; and they took up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve baskets full. ²¹And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

For Reflection

Feeding those who hunger has always been a feature of the imminence of God's Kingdom though, according to Matthew, not an early feature of the approaching Kingdom as Jesus announced it. From the time of John the Baptist's arrest (Matthew 4) Jesus began to proclaim, 'Repent, for the Kingdom of heaven has come near.' While in prison (Matthew 11), John inquired of Jesus' identity by asking, 'Are you the one who is to come, or are

we to look for another?’ Jesus’ reply enumerated many features of heaven’s kingdom (the blind see, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor receive good news) though did not mention feeding. Today, when Jesus hears of John’s beheading, feeding becomes front page news because feeding those who hunger was always intended to signal the nearness of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Of all the indicators of God’s presence among us, the feeding of the 5,000 (in Matthew it is 5,000 men, besides women and children) is the only miracle recorded by all four Gospel writers. (Matthew and Mark also report a second feeding incident of 4,000). Just so, feeding in both Testaments is a prevailing characteristic of what God does. Indeed, the image of a heavenly banquet is invoked by prophets in the Hebrew scripture and by our Lord in the Church’s Testament.

I cannot offer an empirical or scientific explanation as to *how* Jesus, with five loaves and a couple of fish, could feed and fill so many. And with leftovers at that! The thrust of Matthew’s account is that Jesus, filled with compassion to cure their sick, extended the gracious power given to Him by providing an extravagant feeding – surely an indispensable component of the Kingdom’s proximity. ‘Bring them to me,’ he said of the loaves and fishes, and the feeding began!

Questions for Reflection

1. The Sacrament of Holy Communion is often referred to as a ‘foretaste of the feast to come.’ Despite a morsel of bread and a sip of wine not being very satisfying in addressing physical hunger (a type of hunger which anyway always recurs), the Sacrament is addressing a different kind of hunger, one might say a ‘spiritual’ hunger. How would you describe what it means to you when you are fed ‘the Body and Blood of Christ?’ In what specific ways does Holy Communion sustain you, even satisfy you, unto eternal life with God?
2. The biblical accounts of feeding in this present life, as well as the passages which point to eating and drinking at the Kingdom’s table in the life to come, always connect those who are hungry with the God who provides. In today’s feeding of the 5,000, Jesus can be heard saying to his disciples, almost cryptically, ‘They need not go away; you give them something to eat.’ After bringing the loaves and the fish to Jesus, who is himself the source of the feeding, the disciples are the ones to actually perform the act of feeding. Isn’t it just like Jesus and his Father to involve others in the divine task? In your daily interactions with others, people don’t need to go somewhere else to encounter the living God. God is ever near and desires to work through you. Do you believe that? How does that make you feel? Empowered? Equipped? Unpersuaded? Take your reaction to God in prayer.

Read Psalm 75-77

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 August 12

Read Psalm 78

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.

Special thanks to Pastor Rod Kopp for preparing this week's devotions!

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.