

Daily Devotions

Monday October 2

Ezekiel 18:1-4, 25-32

The word of the LORD came to me: ²What do you mean by repeating this proverb concerning the land of Israel, “The parents have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge”? ³As I live, says the Lord GOD, this proverb shall no more be used by you in Israel.

⁴Know that all lives are mine; the life of the parent as well as the life of the child is mine: it is only the person who sins that shall die. ²⁵Yet you say, “The way of the Lord is unfair.” Hear now, O house of Israel: Is my way unfair? Is it not your ways that are unfair? ²⁶When the righteous turn away from their righteousness and commit iniquity, they shall die for it; for the iniquity that they have committed they shall die. ²⁷Again, when the wicked turn away from the wickedness they have committed and do what is lawful and right, they shall save their life. ²⁸Because they considered and turned away from all the transgressions that they had committed, they shall surely live; they shall not die. ²⁹Yet the house of Israel says, “The way of the Lord is unfair.” O house of Israel, are my ways unfair? Is it not your ways that are unfair?

³⁰Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, all of you according to your ways, says the Lord GOD. Repent and turn from all your transgressions; otherwise iniquity will be your ruin. ³¹Cast away from you all the transgressions that you have committed against me, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! Why will you die, O house of Israel? ³²For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, says the Lord GOD. Turn, then, and live.

For Reflection

Ezekiel’s prophetic job was difficult in the extreme. He was called to convince the people of Judah that their defeat and exile at the hands of the Babylonian Empire was a consequence of their sins so that they would repent, but also to lift up the hope of God’s mercy so they would not despair. In the first part of the reading, Ezekiel challenges the idea that any fault belongs to the previous generations (“the parents”) while the current generation (“the children”) is innocent. The exiles felt their lot was unfair, while being unwilling to face and confess their own idolatry and unfaithfulness.

The passage then continues with Ezekiel telling them that even though they are sinners themselves, change is still possible. The door to repentance is open. "I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, says the Lord God. Turn, then, and live." The Lord is not vengeful; he is ready to forgive.

But there is more to it than that! "Turn, then, and live," says the Lord. He not only allows repentance, he calls us to repentance. In fact, the desire to repent can only come as a gift of the Spirit. What that means is that we do not repent in order to get God to forgive us. We repent as a response to the forgiveness God has already given us! Repentance isn't something we do to please God. It is a gift God creates for us because he already loves us.

And for Christians, repentance is our life-long calling. This doesn't mean we have to keep on trying harder and harder to get things right. It means that more and more, we rely on God's strength and not our own. We trust in Jesus' ways and not our own efforts or opinions. We follow God's truth and not the whims of the culture. This is not our accomplishment, it is the gift of God who desires us to live. Let us trust in him, for he is both perfectly just and unfailing in his mercy.

Questions for Reflection

1. Do you ever feel like God is unfair, letting people off the hook? Or maybe allowing negative consequences to cause some people to suffer but not others? How does this passage help you trust in God's mercy?
2. It would be easy to read the Lord's command, "get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit" as an impossible command. How can we truly reinvent or recreate ourselves? But, what if that new heart and spirit were a gift of God's grace? How can you look to Jesus to give you a new heart and new life?

Read Psalm 35-36

Today's Prayer Focus: Pray for farmers, students learning about agriculture, and those who work in parks and natural resources. Pray for an abundant harvest and for all people to have healthy food and clean air and water. Pray that the Holy Spirit would encourage people throughout the world to live as good and faithful stewards of the world God made.

Tuesday October 3

Read Psalm 37

Today's Prayer Focus: Pray for students, teachers, and schools staff beginning a new academic year. Pray for God's wisdom and joy to fill all those who work with young people in schools, day care centers, and other youth activities. Ask God to bless Reformation's Kids' Inc. program and the work of our Growing Young Team, that we might touch the lives of the young people in our day care and our congregation with the love and hope of Jesus.

Wednesday October 4

Psalm 25:1-9

¹To you, O LORD, I lift up my soul.

²O my God, in you I trust; do not let me be put to shame; do not let my enemies exult over me.

³Do not let those who wait for you be put to shame; let them be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous.

⁴Make me to know your ways, O LORD; teach me your paths.

⁵Lead me in your truth, and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all day long.

⁶Be mindful of your mercy, O LORD, and of your steadfast love, for they have been from of old.

⁷Do not remember the sins of my youth or my transgressions; according to your steadfast love remember me, for your goodness' sake, O LORD!

⁸Good and upright is the LORD; therefore he instructs sinners in the way.

⁹He leads the humble in what is right, and teaches the humble his way.

For Reflection

This section of Psalm 25 ends with the confident statement, "[The Lord] leads the humble in what is right and teaches the humble his way." The preceding verses show us what this kind of humility looks like. A humble person lifts up his or her soul to the Lord, trusts in God, and asks God for forgiveness. The psalm also gives voice to our longings for God's direction and guidance. Psalm 25:1-9 is a helpful

passage to memorize or turn to often. It speaks to God directly and prays for God to show his steadfast love in our everyday lives. The psalmist also recognizes that God's answer or direction might not come immediately. He is prepared to wait for the Lord "all day long." Trust and patience are helpful qualities to foster when it comes to our faith!

Questions for Reflection

1. What line of this section of Psalm 25 do you like best and why?
2. What does it mean to you to "lift up my soul" to God? Is that a posture of prayer, praise or worship, singing or testifying to God's goodness, or something else?
3. Where are you seeking direction from God for your life right now? Spend some quiet moments in prayer, asking God to lead and guide you.

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 October 5

Philippians 2:1-13

If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, ²make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. ³Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. ⁴Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. ⁵Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, ⁶who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, ⁷but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, ⁸he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross. ⁹Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to

the glory of God the Father.

¹²Therefore, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed me, not only in my presence, but much more now in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; ¹³for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

For Reflection

This is one of the richest passages in all of the New Testament. Verses 6-11, called “the Christ Hymn,” are probably Paul’s quotation of a worship song known to the Philippians. (From a historical point of view, this means that even before any of the New Testament was written, Christians regarded Jesus as “equal with God,” and having an exalted “name that is above every name.” This flies in the face of those who try to argue that Jesus was merely a human teacher who, centuries later, was identified as the Son of God.) These verses beautifully portray Jesus surrendering to the will of his Father, despite his divine glory, to a shameful death for the sake of humanity’s salvation.

This self-giving love becomes the model for Christian life: “Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others.” We are called to focus on the blessing of others, not our own wants and desires.

But Jesus is much more than the model of our behavior. He is the one who makes our transformation possible. This is a spiritual mystery that I’m not sure can be explained, but can only be lived into: “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.” In other words, we are called to spiritually struggle against sin and temptation, and to strive to love and holiness. But the effort and the power aren’t really ours; it is the power of God at work in us. We can neither take our salvation for granted (“work out your salvation *with fear and trembling*”), nor fear that it is all up to us (“for it is God who is at work in you”). The Christ-shaped life is a gift of God’s grace, but the power to strive for it is also God’s gift.

Questions for Reflection

1. What do you make of Paul’s description of Christ (or, rather, the hymn he quotes about Christ) in verses 6-11? How does it move you to praise Jesus?

2. When are you tempted to “look to your own interests” instead of those of others? How does this passage help you to focus on the blessing of your neighbors even if it means sacrifice for yourself?
3. What is an area of your life where you need to experience God’s power working “in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure?” Pray for him to give you the desire and the strength to strive for his will.

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 October 6

Matthew 21:23-32

²³When [Jesus] entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him as he was teaching, and said, “By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?” ²⁴Jesus said to them, “I will also ask you one question; if you tell me the answer, then I will also tell you by what authority I do these things. ²⁵Did the baptism of John come from heaven, or was it of human origin?” And they argued with one another, “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ he will say to us, ‘Why then did you not believe him?’ ²⁶But if we say, ‘Of human origin,’ we are afraid of the crowd; for all regard John as a prophet.” ²⁷So they answered Jesus, “We do not know.” And he said to them, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.

²⁸“What do you think? A man had two sons; he went to the first and said, ‘Son, go and work in the vineyard today.’ ²⁹He answered, ‘I will not’; but later he changed his mind and went. ³⁰The father went to the second and said the same; and he answered, ‘I go, sir’; but he did not go. ³¹Which of the two did the will of his father?” They said, “The first.” Jesus said to them, “Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God ahead of you. ³²For John came to you in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him; and even after you saw it, you did not change your minds and believe him.

For Reflection

It's hard to tell from reading this selection alone, but Jesus' exchange with the chief priests and elders occurs after Palm Sunday and Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem. Tensions between Jesus and the religious leaders are running high. The chief priests and elders interrupt Jesus' teaching in the temple to question his authority. When Jesus responds with a question of his own about John's baptism, they don't know how to respond. Jesus is confident in his role as the Son of God, so he doesn't play by the rules of the chief priests and elders. He is on a mission from God. Jesus continues with his mission no matter how others challenge him.

With the parable Jesus tells of the two sons, he exposes that the religious leaders want to look like they're faithful and doing the right thing, but they are full of empty promises. The ones who are truly faithful to God are those who might not start out looking as respectable, but who do change their minds and turn to God eventually. With this story, Jesus exposes how the chief priests and elders are hypocritical and unfaithful to the God they claim to serve. In doing so, Jesus also lifts up the ways in which even those who are viewed as sinners are able to be redeemed when they return to God in humility and repentance.

Questions for Reflection

1. If you were a bystander for this exchange between Jesus and the chief priests and elders, how would you form an opinion of Jesus and of the religious authorities? Would you expect Jesus' opponents to be left speechless by his questions? How would you feel hearing Jesus say that tax collectors and sinners would enter the kingdom of God before those who were seen as more respectable?
2. Have you ever realized that you were wrong about doing or not doing something? Have you ever changed your mind, swallowed your pride, and done something differently after you realized you were wrong? What was the result?
3. How does knowing that this conversation and controversy takes place between Palm Sunday and Good Friday raise the stakes or heighten the tension for you as a reader of this passage? How do you think Jesus was preparing his hearers for his death and resurrection by standing up to the religious authorities in this way?

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 October 7

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.