

Monday, November 9

Tate Williams

Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength, and my Redeemer. ~Psalm 19:14

It is not what goes into your mouth that makes you ritually unclean; rather, what comes out of it makes you unclean. ~Matthew 15:11

I am intimately reminded of these verses in my daily life and reflect on them often.

Words are central to the liturgy and one means through which we communally respond to and participate in the sacred. Whether I am in Lutheran, Catholic, or Episcopal services the words come easily, familiarly, and lovingly. I know what to say in church. It is in the unscripted liturgy of daily life where I fail.

Words are the primary means by which we interact with one another. We talk, text, or write constantly. Others cannot read our thoughts (thankfully) and most people only know and remember us by what we say, not what we do. By this, I do not mean that what we feel, believe, or do is not important – it is. Rather, what we say is, more often than not, where the rubber hits the road.

Our kind words most commonly lift people up through acknowledgement, praise or thanks. Yet, casual rudeness and deliberate insults wound more deeply and more frequently than we may recognize. Our egos immunize us against our poisonous tongues. We may minimize or justify our insensitive words to ourselves. Even brief expressions have lasting effects.

We have all seen people work tirelessly for another only to lose that person with harsh words or none at all. Likewise, we have witnessed people overlook or forgive misdeeds simply on account of an apology or kind word. I spend most of my time somewhere between these extremes, though too often not by much. Know thyself.

And so, as part of my silent reverence and supplication in daily life I repeat the final verse of Psalm 19 and also pray,

Lord, give us the wisdom to see what is right and the strength to do it, to realize it's about what you want and not what we want, to use the most of the time and the talents you have given us in accordance with your will that we may be humble, loving, servants of your son our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, ministers of his word, examples of his sacrifice and salvation, and stewards of his creation. Amen.



Tuesday, November 10

Andy Winesett



2020 is Christ the King's 75th anniversary year but unfortunately it will probably be remembered more for global pandemic than celebration. The lucky of us have only had to endure social distancing, masks, lock-downs and quarantining; too many have been impacted by the virus in significant ways with stories of unimaginable sadness and heartbreak. The outbreak is far from over and regardless of how it concludes, it will be remembered long after 2020 is over. But exactly how will it be remembered is, in part, up to us.

My family and most of my friends have so far been lucky. Our impact from the pandemic has been more of an inconvenience and less of a trial. Compared to the stories of severe illness and economic hardship, we have been lucky. Nevertheless, the pandemic with all the forced quarantine and isolation are challenging for everyone, regardless of its severity.

A close work friend of mine once compared anxiety and stress to a gas in a closed container. No matter how few or great the number of gas molecules there are, the gas will always fill up the entire container. Just because worry or some other unpleasantness is minor compared to someone else's, it still exists and is felt impacting the walls of the container. A work deadline or expense can be all-consuming to someone, regardless of their awareness of more extreme anxiety, for example, the overwhelming pressure experienced daily by emergency room physicians.

During challenging times such as these it is so important for us to remind ourselves of all of God's blessings and joy in our lives. As Christians we will find joy even in difficult times, as 1 Peter reminds us in chapter 1:

In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

Joy can and should be identified and appreciated with the amplifying backdrop of trial. Joy can be great, such as loving family, health, prosperity, or a great church community. Often in life they are small and too often can be overlooked or forgotten when experienced with trial.

Social distancing has taken away one of my favorite weekly activities - Saturday morning long runs with my friends; but for now it has been replaced by a new Saturday morning joy – post grocery shopping family waffle breakfasts cooked by my daughter Emily. Gone this summer is the anticipation of our semi-annual trip to visit grandmothers; replaced instead by new regular Sunday afternoon Facetime calls with my mom along with my sister, brother, and 18-month-old niece. Why did it take a global pandemic to start this wonderful new family tradition? Anyone who experienced online school in the spring now appreciates and knows what a blessing our teachers are. With a depressed economy, it pains me to think of those struggling to find work or the courageous, hard-working small businesses who have failed through no fault of their own. The economic downturn, however, means fewer cars on the road, cleaner

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air, and a safer environment for me to teach my daughter Olivia how to drive. Yes, even teaching a teenager to drive is a joy!

This outbreak will end through vaccine, herd immunity or somehow. Soon after we will probably return mostly to normal. The legacy of the pandemic will be of sickness and struggle, but I am hopeful it will not be entirely that. So many simple joys either new or newly realized, will be part of that legacy going forward. "For his anger lasts only a moment, but his favor lasts a lifetime; weeping may stay for the night, but rejoicing comes in the morning." (Psalm 30:5)

Wednesday, November 11

Leslie Winesett

When you tell a story to a Sunday School class full of 4- and 5-year-olds, it's hard to know what they are hearing and retaining. The story is often accompanied by a soundtrack of interruptions: Velcro shoe straps fastening and unfastening on repeat, blurted out requests to use the bathroom, announcements about itchy mosquito bites and upcoming birthday parties. Sometimes you wonder if the children are listening at all.



One of my favorite Godly Play lessons is the story of Jesus' birth, told during Lent in the context of his life, death, and resurrection. The storyteller holds a plaque with a picture showing the faces of Mary and Joseph. The baby Jesus is also pictured, but only the back of his head; he is looking up into the faces of his parents. The storyteller uses an index finger to trace a line down Mary's nose and then across her eyes, drawing a cross on her face. The motion is repeated on Joseph's face and accompanied by these words: When the baby looked up into the face of the Mother Mary, he already saw the cross. When he looked up into the face of the Father Joseph, the cross was there, too.

A few years ago, when I told my class this story, a 5-year-old girl cut in with a revelation. "Hey!" she exclaimed, pointing at the child next to her. "You have the cross on your face, too!" She looked at every child in the class, finding the cross on each of their faces. Finally, she turned to the back of the room and pointed to the silver-haired co-teacher sitting in a chair. "Even the old people have the cross!"

Every once in a while, in a room full of noisy, wiggling kids, you get a moment like this one. You have confirmation that they are not only paying attention, they are forming their own understanding of their relationship with God and with each other. In these moments, it's my turn to listen and learn.

Here's what I learned from my class that day. All of us have the cross, all the time, every day. It is part of who we are. On our faces we carry a reminder of Christ's journey toward the cross, the pain and suffering of his death, and the pure, transformational joy of his resurrection. The promise of God's grace and mercy and love and hope is all around us in the faces of everyone we meet. We just have to remember to look for it there.

Compassionate God, when the baby Jesus looked up into the faces of the Mother Mary and the Father Joseph, he already saw the cross. Help us to see the cross in all of the faces we see – every size, shape, color, and age – and to share with each one a measure of the grace, mercy, love, and hope you have given us through your son Jesus Christ. Amen.

Thursday, November 12

Adrienne Winston

Be still, and know that I am God! ~Psalm 46:10

2020 has been a year unlike any that many of us have yet experienced. SARS-CoV-2 cruelly introduced many of us to it through widespread suffering and the loss of lives, livelihood, and security along with the smaller, but no less profound loss of the fellowship, embraces, and simple joys that were once so easily taken for granted. During these unprecedented times, feelings of abandonment, confusion, and despair have become the companions of many, and feelings of guilt engulf those of us who have not experienced the losses of employment or loved ones that others have. This sense of guilt and anxiety about the future has stalked me since the beginning of the pandemic; even the simple act of taking pen to paper (or rather, taking fingers to keyboard) for writing this devotional was nearly impossible. I missed deadline after deadline creating and destroying countless drafts because everything that I wrote seemed either trite or platitudinal. What could I possibly say in the midst of so much grief and sorrow? How could I speak a word of hope into the abyss of 2020?



And yet, these feelings are not unique to us and would not have been unknown to our foremothers and fathers in faith who established Christ the King Church 75 years ago during years of economic depression, war, and racial strife: years much like those that we are facing now. In the midst of enormous suffering, the founders of our congregation heard God's call and stepped into the unknown. To gather as the body of Christ is to take part in a radical act of faith: the realization that God alone is God, and that all of creation is a gift of God's love.

Social distancing, research, education, and lifting up our loved ones and leaders alike in prayer are all our sacred duty in this time to each other, all of creation, and God. But it is no less vital for us to acknowledge our own position as God's beloved creation. We must act with courage and conviction, but we must also allow ourselves to surrender to the God who has created all that is and gives us life. Powers, principalities, and yes, pandemics rise and fall, but God and God's promises endure. So be still, and know that God is God: yesterday, today, tomorrow, and always. **Amen.**

Friday, November 13

Rachel Zoch



How Long, O Lord?

I've heard the psalms compared to the blues – a decidedly funky form of lament. I frequently find myself, especially in 2020, lamenting the state of the world or asking for help with my own hardships or those of loved ones and others by asking, “How long, O Lord?” – a lament that first appears in Psalm 6, verse 3:

*My soul is in deep anguish.
How long, Lord, how long?
Turn, Lord, and deliver me;
save me because of your unfailing love.*

The psalms are a great source of comfort to me, partly because they feel so honest. A dear and thoughtful friend of mine once observed that David does a great deal of whining about his enemies in the psalms. How much of our own prayer is complaining to God?

And God always listens. The latter verses of Psalm 6 are echoed throughout the book:

The Lord has heard my cry for mercy; the Lord accepts my prayer.

The brighter psalms, like Psalm 96, express deep joy and help me remember that because I belong to God, who watches over me, the rest is just details. Psalm 27 is a particular favorite, from its declaration of faith in verse 1:

*The Lord is my light and my salvation — whom shall I fear?
The Lord is the stronghold of my life — of whom shall I be afraid?*

... to the last verse, which helps me remember that God is always with me and the source of my strength:

Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord.

Patience isn't really my thing, so “wait for the Lord” is a message I need to hear! And when our church adopted the “cranberry” ELW hymnal a few years ago, I found that message repeated again in the lovely Advent hymn *Awake, Awake and Greet the New Morn* by Marty Haugen, especially the fourth verse:

*Rejoice, rejoice, take heart in the night, though cold the winter and cheerless,
the rising sun shall crown you with light, be strong and loving and fearless;
Love be our song and love our prayer, and love, our endless story,
may God fill every day we share, and bring us at last into glory. ELW 242*

This is my prayer: **May we be strong and loving and fearless, and may God fill every day we share so that we may share God's love and cast out fear. Amen.**

Saturday, November 14 Daniel Zorn



Hearing God's Voice

My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any one pluck them out of my hand. ~John 10:27-28

A favorite hymn from the Taizé community, used in our contemplative worship services, is Evangelical Lutheran Worship (#751), "O Lord, Hear My Prayer," taken from Psalm 102. The hymn's lyrics: "O Lord, hear my prayer, O, Lord hear my prayer: when I call, answer me."

Have you ever wondered, "What is God's will?" I have many times. What do we mean when we say we want to know the will of God?

I seek God's guidance many times. I ask Him to give me an answer; show me the way.

I do not expect God's answer to be ushered in by dramatic music being cued, nor the razzle-dazzle of lights and glitter, nor jazz-hands. I would just like an answer. And many times, I hear nothing. Yet, the hearing problem is not with God not speaking, but with me not listening!

So, perhaps, the question to ask is, "How can I know the voice of God?" Yet, it is difficult to hear God's voice.

In 1 Corinthians 14:10, we are told there are many voices in the world clamoring for our attention:

The Voices of the World The Voice of Satan The Voice of Self The Voice of God

God's faithful – Believers – are often compared to sheep. It is the characteristic of sheep to not know where they are going. They must be led. Jesus says, He is the shepherd or leader of the sheep. He says, His sheep know his voice and follow Him instead of the "strange" voices of the world, Satan, or self. However, how do sheep recognize His voice? I have been thinking, what is required to really hear the voice of God?

I think of:

Salvation – Every one that is of the truth hears my voice. ~John 18:37

Receptivity – Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any one hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in, and will sup with them, and they with me. ~Revelation 3:20

Faith – But without faith it is impossible to please him: for they that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him. ~Hebrews 11:6

Attentiveness – And when the Lord saw that he turned aside to see, God called unto him out of the midst of the bush, and said, Moses, Moses. And he said, Here am I. ~Exodus 3:4

Discernment – Father glorify thy name. Then came there a voice from heaven, saying, I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again. The people, therefore, that stood by, and heard it, said that it thundered: others said, an angel has spoken to him. ~ John 12:28-29

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Openness – If you hear His voice today, do not be stubborn. ~Hebrews 3:7

What does hearing God's voice provide other than an answer? It provides me with or reminds me of my **communion** – my deep relationship – with God. It provides me with the **comprehension** – to understand, to perceive the sense of what is being said, and reminds me that through Him I am able to comprehend so much more; it provides me and reminds me of **compliance** – to follow Him, to be a doer of His word; it provides me with a **spiritual flywheel** – it increases my capacity to hear and to believe God; and it provides me with **encouragement and hope** – the eternal God reminds me that there is more to true life than these passing physical circumstances and body.

In the Old Testament, God spoke at many times in a variety of ways. Today, He speaks to us in His Son, Jesus (The Word), as we hear Him in the words of the Bible as interpreted by the Holy Spirit.

I like the story told on Franklin D. Roosevelt. Apparently, President Roosevelt got tired of smiling the expected presidential smile and saying the usual expected things at all the White House receptions. So, one evening he decided to find out whether anybody was really listening to what he was saying. As each person came up to him with extended hand, he flashed a big smile and said, "I murdered my grandmother this morning." People would automatically respond with comments like, "How lovely!" or "Just continue your great work!" Nobody listened to what he was saying, except for one foreign diplomat. When the president said, "I murdered my grandmother this morning," the diplomat responded softly, "I'm sure she had it coming."

Are you listening?

Voice of God, sometimes you shout, sometimes you whisper – keep speaking to me and help me to open my ears, my mind, and my heart to Your word and to Your will. Amen.

Sunday, November 15

Kate Paxton



Almighty God-Father-Creator forgive us when we fail to embrace the Mystery-the Wonder-the Belovedness of All Your Children and All Your Creation. Help us to open our eyes and our hearts. In the name of your Son, our Lord. Amen.

Witnessing The Mystery



Watercolor by Kate Paxton. Dedicated to the Celebration of Christ the King Church's 75th Anniversary

*Morning has broken like the first morning
Blackbird has spoken like the first bird
Praise for the singing
Praise for the morning
Praise for them springing fresh from the Word*

*Sweet the rain's new fall, sunlit from heaven
Like the first dew fall on the first grass
Praise for the sweetness of the wet garden
Sprung in completeness where God's feet pass*

*Mine is the sunlight
Mine is the morning
Born of the One Light Eden saw play
Praise with elation, praise every morning...
God's recreation of the new day*

*Morning has broken like the first morning
Blackbird has spoken like the first bird
Praise for the singing
Praise for the morning
Praise for them springing fresh from the Word
Morning is Broken, ELW 556*

Every creature is a glittering, glistening mirror of Divinity. ~Hildegard of Bingen