

(For Monday, August 7, 2017) What's your focus when you're in God's house?

"I have not lived in a house since I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent for my dwelling." (2Sam.7:6, ESV)

In this passage, God admonishes David for his ambition to build a house for God's dwelling. Apparently, that is not in line with God's will, and David is probably intending to begin this building program more for his own glory rather than for that of The Lord. The lesson is applicable to us as well. I have served in a number of congregations where certain attributes of the brick-and-mortar premises had become especially dear to some members. It might have been a special stained-glass window, or some of the Altar furniture, or indeed a particular worship space which had been the location of multiple generations of religious experience. When we become so attached to the furniture and the ambience of our worship space, we can forget the real purpose of being in God's presence on Sunday morning, which is the earnest, humble, joyous worship of The Lord. I have also experienced numerous instances where, when people become too attached to the "stuff" of the Church, God will invariably remove those objects in order to bring the focus of his children back to Him.

What about you? What's the focus of your worship and the origin of your joy when you're in God's presence?

(For Tuesday, August 8, 2017) Have you put your trust in judgment or mercy?

"Therefore, when the Lord heard [of the betrayal of his People Israel], he was full of wrath...Yet he commanded the skies above and opened the doors of heaven, and he rained down on them manna to eat and gave them the grain of heaven." (Ps.78:21a, 23-24)

Many of the old sayings we're used to hearing are based on worldly judgment. Therefore, "If you lie down with dogs, you'll get up with fleas." "Where there's smoke, there's fire." Apparently, the broken world of human-kind is seen in starkly binary terms: things are either good or bad; we are either victors or vanquished. Thanks be to God the HE doesn't see us that way! This verse from Psalms is actually one of the great tenants of the Christian faith. Although we are broken, God still loves us. Even if we rebel against Him, his mercies are still new for us each morning. Although we are sinners, yet we are saved.

Now, if God is determined to practice that much mercy and grace, if the Creator of heaven and earth is determined to refrain from judging and condemning us with all our faults, then shouldn't we be willing to practice at least a little of the mercy and forbearance with those we meet today?

(For Wednesday, August 9, 2017) What season are you in?

"This [Paul's preaching in the hall of Tyrannus in Ephesus from 11:00 AM to 4:00 PM each day] continued for two years, so that all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks." (Acts19:10, ESV)

This verse presents a view of Paul which is decidedly at odds with the image we have of him as a wandering missionary. Apparently, there was a time in Paul's life when God instructed him to remain fixed in one place, and to adopt a disciplined schedule of regular devotion to public testimony. I have found that there are seasons in the lives of everyone. And each season brings with it a set of characteristics and requirements that are different from those of an earlier season. It is such a mistake to reject these changing seasons that God sends into our lives.

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Refusing to embrace them and the changes that accompany these different seasons can lead to needless remorse and emotional/spiritual impoverishment.

Are you accepting and embracing the changing seasons of your life? Because each new season brings with its arrival a unique set of distinct blessings.

(For Thursday, August 10, 2017) Are you being called to challenge?

“And a voice came out of the cloud, “This is my beloved son; listen to him.” (Mk.9:7, ESV)

It’s a sobering thought to note that this verse from atop the Mount of Transfiguration is an account of God identifying Jesus with almost exactly the same words we heard at Our Lord’s Baptism in the River Jordan (See Mk.1:11). It’s a somber moment since immediately after identifying Jesus as His Son, God drove Christ into the desert to go through his 40 days of temptation (See Mk.1:12-13). And in fact, in just a few short days after his Transfiguration on Mt. Hermon, where God again names Jesus as His Son, Our Lord will soon have to endure the ultimate test of Gethsemane and Golgotha. Though I still don’t completely understand it, after many years of reflection I am convinced that one of the surest ways God demonstrates his love and encouragement for his children is when He places us in situations of painful challenge.

Is God calling you to challenge and sacrifice? If so, whatever the nature of these trials, you may rest assured that He will be with you every step of the way.

(For Friday, August 11, 2017) Can you see God through the pain?

“For everyone will be salted with fire.” (Mk.9:49, ESV)

This verse has puzzled theologians and Bible scholars for centuries. It occurs nowhere else except in Mark’s account of what Jesus says. Its meaning is hotly debated. Some believe that Jesus is saying we believers are actually a kind of sacrifice to God, and the “salt” of the Holy Spirit is what purifies us and makes us an acceptable offering. Others believe that this being “salted with fire” represents the challenges of being faithful to the Christian Gospel, thus producing our state of sanctification. Yet others note that the verse is applicable to everyone (not just the redeemed), so they link this verse to the final Day of Judgment.* Whatever the interpretation of this verse, I think we have to conclude that Jesus is telling us this: Some form of sacrifice and a measure of earthly pain must accompany us on our earthly pilgrimage with The Lord.

Has there been a moment of pain for you recently when you can glimpse the hand of God working in your life through the hardship you’ve endured?

*See footnote Mk.9:49, *English Standard Version Study Bible* (Crossway Bibles) p. 1913

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