

Good News Daily

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Sunday, February 28

1 Corinthians 3:11-23 *...fire itself will test the quality of each man's work.* (v.13b NAS)

Judging by Peter and Paul, the early church experienced on onslaught of charlatans, thieves, greedy, self-absorbed members who were drunks, cheaters, extortionists, and those who even sued each other. Sometimes I can't tell the difference between the church of Corinth and a bar. In today's reading Paul urged Corinthians to be more thoughtful about how they build upon their faith, challenging them with this illustration. As it was for the early church, so it remains a poignant reminder for me as well. I suppose I sit more like a barstool myself sometimes.

Do my decisions, conclusions, assumptions, and summaries of events and people stand the test of Paul's refining fire? Are they born of charity or judgment? Do I make of them opportunities of forgiveness, growth, and edification or do I sow ambition, conceit, and self-gratification? I may not be an extortionist or an idol worshipper, but I am also challenged to wonder whether my thoughts and deeds are born of gold, precious stones, or straw?

Jeremiah 1:1-10; Psalms 24, 29; Mark 3:31—4:9

Monday, March 1

John 4:27-42 *"I sent you to reap that for which you have not labored."* (v.38a)

I had a supervisor whom I loved dearly but was very naughty to me once—perhaps unwittingly. I had spent nearly an entire month researching proper water treatment for a 36,000 gallon re-circulating water feature to a private estate. The owners insisted on an all-organic approach, one in which fish could thrive. It was no small task given the complexity of pond water chemistry, filters, sun and shade exposure, deciphering products, chemical side effects, fish waste microbiology, algae control, and fertilizer leaching. The owners demand for organics further raised the stakes of impossibility. But I took it as a challenge and forged. The final results were wonderful.

The day the top brass met, my supervisor asked me to turn over my study and join him in the "presentation," in which he took full credit. I'll never forget everyone patting him on the back while I sat there feeling stupid and infuriated. I left thoroughly demoralized. Later, I heard a still voice whisper... "Okay, so now don't *you* ever do that to *your* staff."

Jeremiah 1:11-19; Psalms 56, 57, 58; Romans 1:1-15

Tuesday, March 2

Jeremiah 2:1-13 *I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth....* (v.2 KJV)

My conversion at 16 was unexpected and earth-shaking. It led me to a spiritual reservoir so full of milk and honey I could not get enough. I reveled in prayer, music, fellowship, and even evangelism. Anything was possible through grace and prayer. I recall joy immeasurable. Then I grew up.

By college, fundamentalist were making sordid headlines, my school was discriminating against Moslem students, and the church of my youth had disbanded. The temptations of bitterness, cynicism, and self-righteous indignation overwhelmed me and—spiritually—I became a cranky recluse for nearly twenty years.

While I had forfeited memberships, I never lost my faith and every so often I would hear today's message in some form or another: *I remember you, the kindness of your youth....* A friend once said in the midst of her busy crazy day when she just stops and prays—it realigns her. When the church or the world or life fails me, quiet selfless prayer helps me refocus. It centers me. And by doing so, returns me to the grace of my youth.

Psalms 61, 62; Romans 1:16-25; John 4:43-54

Wednesday, March 3

John 5:1-18 ...*the Jews wanted to kill him, because he was [healing] on the Sabbath.* (v.16 Lamsa Bible)

I always wondered what Jesus meant when he said he did not come to destroy the law but to fulfill it. Today's reading addresses this. While the tradition is not to work on the Sabbath, the primary command is to *keep it holy*. Here the healing is both deed and holiness; God is honored—by an *act* of love. Jesus often scolded religious people who honored the letter of the law at the expense of the spirit. So serious was this he warned it could lead to unforgiveable sin.

What does it say to me when I fail to see the-forest-for-the-trees? Or, when I get so transfixed on my rules, my arguments, my righteous indignation that, in the process, I fail the *spirit* of my goal?

Many of today's struggles play out differently from antiquity, challenging tradition: doctor-assisted euthanasia, contraception, same-sex marriages. Can we end life, lovingly? Can untraditional unions be capable of consecration? Can we heal on the Sabbath? What is the *spirit* of the law? Christ asked this question again and again. So, should I.

Jeremiah 3:6-18; Psalm 72; Romans 1:28—2:11

Thursday, March 4

Romans 2:12-24 ...*you teach others but fail to teach yourself.* (v.21a)

As a lay person having written these devotionals for a couple of years, I have developed a new appreciation for the pastor's task of poignant weekly sermons. However, one vice that not only springs eternal but, I fear, may be incurable, is prejudice. My college psychology professor once defined prejudice as to prejudge with insufficient evidence. Although I have been quoting him for nearly fifty years, I just can't seem to get it right myself.

After years of hiring based on written applications, I finally concluded them to be painfully insufficient evidence. My short fuse which dependably jumps to conclusions can, as dependably, produce *little* evidence. And, my penchant for impatience leaves me, more often than not, *no* evidence at all.

And yet I love to go on quoting my dear professor. His definition rolls off the tongue so well—if only it would absorb. Maybe it will sink in someday. Until then, reminding myself not to prejudge with insufficient evidence will have to remain a life-long discipline.

Jeremiah 4:9-10, 19-28; Psalms 70, 71; John 5:19-29

Friday, March 5

Psalms 69 ...*thanksgiving...shall please the Lord better than an ox....* (vv.30-31)

My friend, I will call her "M," was infectious. Her laughter, her greetings, her presence always lit up the room. Fittingly, she served as an ordained minister officiating weddings. Few people in life have impressed me as truly angelic. M was one. It was all the more surprising to later learn she was desperately unloved.

In a eulogy, her husband H revealed that M was not always so cheerful. She had been verbally beaten down all her life by critical parents and that through her ministry she willed herself to cheerful service to others, perhaps in compensation for her scarred soul. I sat listening in shock to learn of this dichotomy. At one point, H recalled begging her mother to, just once, tell M she loved her. After repeated hounding, her mother finally acquiesced by telling M so—in a birthday card. And although it was not verbal, even its mere written gesture was said to have left M screaming and weeping uncontrollably. Today's reading reminds that sometimes appreciation is far more important than service or sacrifice.

Jeremiah 5:1-9; Romans 2:25—3:18; John 5:30-47

Saturday, March 6

Jeremiah 5:20-31 ...*the cause of the needy they did not judge.* (v.28)

The Jewish Talmud is a voluminous collection based on oral traditions of the early sages and is central to rabbinic studies. One section documents graphic narratives of abuse, mutilation, and murder of the less fortunate found in the city of Sodom. The poor were not just hated, they were legislated against.

One story tells of a young girl of Sodom caught helping beggars and later tied to a hillside where she was drenched in honey and left to die by stinging bees. Another story describes vendors invalidating coins for the poor so they could not buy, and when they died of starvation the coins were scavenged and re-circulated to other poor. Town elders even called for a ban against travelers, all in order to protect their land of abundance for themselves (Sanhedrin 109a).

But today's reading does not address psychopathic societies, rather the church. The lament is God finding this injustice among His own people. Most every country—and church—faces some degree of immigration and, ultimately, the same question. Do we guard what is ours or welcome and share?

Psalms 75, 76; Romans 3:19-31; John 7:1-13

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