

Good News Daily

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Sunday, July 11

Romans 10:4-17 *If you declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and if you believe in your heart that God raised Jesus from the dead, you will be saved.* (v.9 NCV)

Yesterday, a parishioner phoned to say his 96-year-old neighbor was dying at home. He wanted “advice” on what to say to the man in his last days. I said, “Can you ask him point blank, ‘Do you have faith in Christ and believe He died for your sins?’”

The entire gospel of salvation through Christ comes down to St. Paul’s statement in this verse: We must believe in Jesus’ sacrificial death for us, from which God raised him to life again, and then declare that he is Lord over our lives. The church member said he would “try to get through to” his friend. I reminded him Jesus promised us: “If two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven” (Matthew 18:19). So, I suggested we agree in prayer over the phone, praying for this man’s salvation—and for God to get through to him, even if no one else can. I hope and pray this elderly gentleman accepts Christ’s merciful love before he meets the Lord on the other side.

1 Samuel 17:50—18:4; Psalms 148, 149, 150; Matthew 23:29-39

Monday, July 12

Acts 11:19-30 *Barnabas was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and full of faith. When he reached Antioch ... he was glad. He encouraged all the believers ... always to obey the Lord with all their hearts, and many people became followers of the Lord.* (vv.23-24)

In the Episcopal Church’s baptismal liturgy, we vow to “proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ.” As we see from this account in Acts, the fact that Barnabas’ faith and his joy in the Lord were evident made him a good example for the church at Antioch. Although only the Holy Spirit can ultimately bring believers to faith, encouragement from church members that are farther along on their faith journeys can make a difference in our spiritual growth.

At the parish I serve as Rector, I’m still hearing awe-filled stories about a parishioner who died years before I arrived. The example of his faith and mystical experiences, scriptural knowledge and prayers, devotion and leadership, all had a profound impact on an entire generation of church members. I regret not having known John, but I still see the fruits of his ministry, and look forward to meeting him in heaven.

1 Samuel 18:5-16, 27b-30; Psalm 25; Mark 1:29-45

Tuesday, July 13

Mark 2:1-12 *Jesus ... said to the paralyzed man, “Young man, your sins are forgiven.” Some of the teachers of the law were ... thinking to themselves, “Why does this man say things like that? He is speaking as if he were God. Only God can forgive sins.”* (vv.5-7)

Our housekeeper was on vacation, so Sandi came instead. A devout Christian, she was excited to learn that I’m a pastor. As she cleaned, I sat at our computer, previewing the service video we recorded to post online while our church was closed during the 2020 pandemic. Sandi looked over my shoulder and as she saw me on the screen preaching, she exclaimed, “Oh, you’re such a good Christian!” I was quick to contradict her: “No I’m not! I’m just a sinner forgiven by God’s grace.”

Only God can forgive our sins. Thankfully, He will, whenever we repent, even if we must do this daily, or moment-by-moment. A relative confessed to me a bad habit, and I assured him God will forgive whenever he “does what he doesn’t want to do” (as St. Paul said of himself). “But isn’t that kind of pat?” he protested. “You sin, knowing you’re doing wrong, then you just ask forgiveness?” Uh, yeah. That’s how I understand God’s mercy. We *all* have bad habits. We’re *all* sinners. God’s very nature is to forgive—He loves doing that for His “kids”!

1 Samuel 19:1-18; Psalms 26, 28; Acts 12:1-17

Wednesday, July 14

Mark 2:13-22 [*The Pharisees*] asked his followers, “Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?” Jesus heard this and said to them, “It is not the healthy people who need a doctor, but the sick. I did not come to invite good people but to invite sinners.” (vv.16b-17)

Remember the old Alka Seltzer jingle’s ending, “Oh what a relief it is!” That’s my reaction to Jesus’ declaration that he came for me ... and you ... and every one of us. For, as St. Paul writes in Romans 3:23, “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”

I know that because evil still has power in this world. At my deepest core, I am spiritually and morally sick, and I’m so thankful that the doctor—Jesus—is in. And, our Great Physician makes house calls! Bless you, Lord, for breaking bread and sharing fellowship with “tax collectors” (widely despised throughout Israel because they collaborated with the Roman occupation) and “sinners.” Today, you’re in the drug dens with the addicts; you walk the streets with the hookers; you even befriend lawyers, politicians, and terrorists. And still, people wonder why you love and invite them all. Thank God that you do!

1 Samuel 20:1-23; Psalm 38; Acts 12:18-25

Thursday, July 15

Psalm 37:1-18 *Don’t be upset because of evil people. ... because like the grass, they will soon dry up ... they will soon die away. Trust the Lord and do good. Live in the land and feed on truth. Enjoy serving the Lord ...* (vv.1, 2b, 3a)

It’s hard not to “be upset because of evil people” when we read about social and political situations that lead to poverty, hunger, disease, and environmental disasters. Or, when our hearts break over oppression, violence, war, racial injustice, child abuse, cruelty to animals, and so many other ways people mistreat one another and Creation. Thankfully, Scripture promises that eventually the wicked will be punished. And the Bible assures us God has a heart for “underdogs.”

There isn’t much we can do to fix the world’s problems—that’s God’s job. Meanwhile, today’s psalm shows us how we should be living: Trust the Lord and serve Him, do good and “feed on the truth.” Interesting expression. Does part of our upset over the news come from believing everything we read or see? Perhaps we need to dig deeper, research more thoroughly, to find truth in our society. On the other hand, God’s truth is clear and unchanging, and is revealed both in His written word, the Bible, and His living Word, Jesus Christ. So, let us “feed on Him in our hearts by faith, with thanksgiving”!

1 Samuel 20:24-42; Acts 13:1-12; Mark 2:23—3:6

Friday, July 16

Psalm 31 *I give you my life. Save me, LORD, God of truth.* (v.5)

As I sat in New York City’s Riverside Church on All Saints’ Sunday, 1987, the choir and congregation sang, “Take my life, and let it be consecrated, Lord, to thee.” When I’d left home that morning, I could never have anticipated encountering God there, in a way that would change my life forever. During Communion, the Holy Spirit revealed to me that I had been bought with a price (1 Corinthians 6:20); God loved me unconditionally; my sins were forgiven; and the Lord was calling me to new life in Him.

If I had known, I would have gladly prayed this verse of Psalm 31. But I didn’t have to. God took my life even when I hadn’t offered it to Him. He saved my soul even though I didn’t ask Him to. That’s because God always makes the first move, and we are saved solely by His grace. I was raised a churchgoing “Christian,” read the Bible, sang the hymns, did the outreach work—but had never known the living Christ until that Sunday morning. I haven’t been the same since and can’t thank and praise Jesus enough!

1 Samuel 21:1-15; Acts 13:13-25; Mark 3:7-19a

Saturday, July 17

Mark 3:19b-35 *“My true brother and sister and mother are those who do what God wants.”* (v.35)

One wonders how Jesus’ mother, Mary, reacted to her son stating that his “real” family are only those who do God’s will. We know from both the accounts of Scripture and tradition that Mary was

unerringly faithful to our Lord, and followed him closely throughout his ministry. But in Matthew 13:55 all of Jesus' brothers are named—James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas—and John writes (7:5), “not even his brothers believed in him.” So, perhaps Jesus' “dig” was directed to his siblings.

For us who are believing Christians trying to do what God wants, it's painful that other family members don't want anything to do with Jesus. For more than 30 years, I've prayed for a favorite cousin to come to a saving knowledge of Jesus, to have a life-transforming encounter with the living Christ. And yet, he continues in unbelief, and makes lifestyle choices that are contrary to God's word and will. Maybe we need help praying for the unbelievers in our family: “Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death.” Amen.

1 Samuel 22:1-23; Psalms 30, 32; Acts 13:26-43

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