

Sunday, May 2

Hebrews 12:1-14 *Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.* (vv.1-2 NIV)

As one who enjoys running in road races, I have learned that to perform my best requires attention to a rigorous training schedule. Distractions requiring a change in training intensity or duration hamper my performance on race day. So too it is with the race that God wants to run with us. I won't be distracted by worry, anger, fear, or whatever when I "keep my eyes upon Jesus and look full into his wonderful face." Neither will I focus on the "overs" of over-performance, over-spending, over-speaking, over-eating, or over-whatever.

One time my desire to purchase a red suit was on the throne, instead of Jesus. As the sales clerk was finishing with alterations, I heard Jesus say, "What are you doing??!!" (I didn't need that red suit. I had promised my husband not to make such a purchase without prayer and discussion with him.)

The suit didn't come home with me that day. Instead, I chose to honor Jesus and my husband. As the hymn says, "the things on earth will grow faintly dim, in the light of His glory and grace."

Leviticus 8:1-13, 30-36; Psalms 24, 29; Luke 4:16-30

Monday, May 3

Psalm 56 *Record my lament; list my tears on your scroll—are they not in your record?* (v.8)

I love David's reminder that God loves us so much that He even records our tears, aches, and sleepless nights. I have three children, whom I love very much. But, I do not and cannot record their every tear, ache, or sleepless night.

This knowledge of God's love reminds me to pray about everything and anything. Surely, if God cares enough to watch over us recording every tear and ache, then He knows us and wants to be

involved with us in everything. Praying for viruses, misplaced items, nagging decisions, or words for a stressed-out friend are just as important as prayers for cancer, depression, the economy, etc.

Recently, my brother-in-law saw his physician for ear pain. When the pain intensified and he couldn't wear his hearing aid or go to work, he figured the medication needed more time. He had not prayed about ear pain because he didn't want to bother God about *that!* A friend prayed with him. God did provide—a new diagnosis, new medication, and ear pain resolved. Praise God!

Leviticus 16:1-19; Psalms 57, 58; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18

Tuesday, May 4

Psalm 62 *My soul finds rest in God alone; my salvation comes from him. He alone is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I will never be shaken.* (vv.1-2)

Knowing God is my rock, salvation, and fortress is such reassurance and comfort. What a heavenly insurance policy! It is a bit like car insurance. If I want it, I must pay the premium and follow company guidelines to keep the policy active. With God's insurance policy, all I have to do is remember to *choose Him* when emotional stress comes my way.

I recall a frantic phone call from my daughter. She was at work and had experienced a sudden onset of headache, blurred vision, and dizziness. She was lying on her office floor; her speech was coherent; she was alone and afraid. Instantly, I was filled with dread, fear, and confusion, too.

Upon first hearing her voice, I had quickly asked God to be with us. When she finished giving me necessary details, I said, "Let's pray." In her distress, she said, "Mom, there is no time to *pray!*"

How many of us try to figure stuff out first and then, if we need His help, we pray?! My daughter has a vivid memory of God's healing intervention that evening. She is better equipped to pray *first* the next time.

Leviticus 16:20-34; Psalm 61; 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11; Matthew 6:7-15

Wednesday, May 5

1 Thessalonians 5:12-28 *Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.* (vv.16-18)

This Scripture is one of the first ones I memorized. Over time, I have noticed an important preposition in Paul's instructions that totally change the meaning. That is, he says give thanks *in* all circumstances, not *for* all circumstances.

I know God is good all the time. When difficulties come my way, I thank God for His presence and provision. I focus on what He is doing and not what I want Him to do.

My father had a massive stroke; confined to a wheelchair and dependent on others for almost everything, he has a good mind filled with memories, excellent speech, and the ability to use the phone and remote control. He knows he has the fullness of Christ in him through the Holy Spirit. Plus, he lives in a Christian nursing home, has friends who visit, and his Cursillo group gathers there weekly. He tries not to focus on the fact that his wife and family can't visit much and his body still can't get out of that chair.

I thank God for being with my Dad.

Leviticus 19:1-18; Psalm 72; Matthew 6:19-24

Thursday, May 6

Matthew 6:25-34 *"Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own."* (vv.27, 34)

Why worry when it is futile? We can't even add a single hour to our day by doing it! And, Jesus teaches us not to worry about tomorrow either. Yet, we worry....

I know God calls me to understand the difference between planning and worrying. There are things I can do with God's help—setting goals, making action plans, implementing them. The issue may not be resolved, but we are in it together. Worrying means I don't trust God enough to get it done my way, so I will try to help Him.

My college son mentions that he can't understand the teaching style of his calculus professor. My body goes into full alert mode. How

can I fix his problem? Then we prayed. God had the perfect plan for our long term good. My son would choose the action plan and I would honor his choice. Daily prayer kept me from getting involved. Praise God! My son had a successful semester with a new professor and we were both blessed to know God is trustworthy.

Leviticus 19:26-37; Psalms 70, 71; 2 Thessalonians 1:1-12

Friday, May 7

Matthew 7:1-12 *"Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened."* (vv.7-8)

Isn't our God amazing? He is always there waiting and watching over us, ready to open the door and get involved in our lives. The key point is that we have to *ask* first. We have to invite Him to be involved. He always answers prayer—yes, no, or not yet. So we have to persist in pursuing God too.

I remember a period when my sister and I were making difficult financial decisions for the long term care of our father. It seemed obvious he would need to move to a new facility. But, how could we explain a move to his first semi-private room in a location which would prevent his wife from visiting as often? We persisted in prayer for months, waited patiently, and were reminded God was with him. One day, God answered. The assisted living home could no longer care for Dad's increasing physical needs and a bed in the only Christian nursing home (which had a long waiting list) was available.

Leviticus 23:1-22; Psalm 106:1-18; 2 Thessalonians 2:1-17

Saturday, May 8

2 Thessalonians 3:1-18 *But the Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen and protect you from the evil one.* (v.3)

Thank God for His protection. He knows that what separates us from His grace is ourselves, the world/others, and the enemy. It is a relief to know that I am not responsible for all the bad stuff that comes my way, but I need to be aware of the impact of others' influence on my behavior and that the enemy is always suggesting his way, too.

I have found that the enemy uses guilt with me. I sin, recognize it, repent, and thank God for forgiveness. But that nagging voice keeps reminding me I *did it* and makes me feel unworthy. In raising my children, when I caught them doing something wrong, they noted a change in my demeanor. On one occasion, my son's older sisters saw it, too, and said, "Bad boy," and he started to cry. So it is with the enemy. With my son, I told him he wasn't bad and I loved him, but his behavior was bad and needed to change. With the enemy, I reject him and claim Jesus as my Lord and Savior because the enemy has been defeated.

Leviticus 23:23-44; Psalms 75, 76; Matthew 7:13-21

by Jane Shinn

Sunday, May 9

James 1:2-8, 16-18 *My brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of any kind, consider it nothing but joy, because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance.* (vv.2-3 NRSV)

It is not easy for me to count it all joy when I am immersed in challenges that discourage me, or in trials that fatigue and dishearten me! In fact I can become downright depressed. But then I begin to realize that perhaps I have not been "in sync" with the Lord; that I have been going my own way, doing my own thing, and not listening for his still, small voice. I must come back to the place of worship, centering my heart and mind on Him. Soon the stress and anxiety leave me, and I begin to listen and look for His guidance. I am never disappointed!

It has been suggested that we are to allow the Lord to create within us a sanctuary of the soul where He may abide, guiding and directing us throughout each day. Then we are truly letting go and letting God direct our path.

"You show me the path of life. In your presence there is fullness of joy" (Psalm 16:11).

Leviticus 25:1-17; Psalms 93, 96; Luke 12:13-21

Monday, May 10

Matthew 13:1-16 *"With them indeed is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah that says: 'You will indeed listen, but never understand, and you will indeed look, but never perceive. For this people's heart has grown dull,*

and their ears are hard of hearing, and they have shut their eyes; so that they might not look with their eyes, and listen with their ears, and understand with their heart and turn—and I would heal them'" (vv.14-15)

In this passage Jesus makes the point of why he must speak in parables to the people. This helps me understand that my heart and mind must be so attuned to his holy presence, so intent on following him, listening for his still small voice, that I will be able to discern and understand many things that he wishes me to know. In this unity with the Lord, I can be at peace with myself and others, and his healing peace and presence saturates my soul. "Then we will never turn back from you; give us life, and we will call on your name.

"Restore us, O LORD God of hosts; let your face shine, that we may be saved" (Psalm 80:18-19).

Leviticus 25:35-55; Psalm 80; Colossians 1:9-14

Tuesday, May 11

1 Timothy 2:1-6 *First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgiving be made for everyone, for kings and all who are in high positions, so that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity.* (vv.1-2)

We are all aware that we are in difficult times. The economy has been shaky; news of violence, evil, and unscrupulous behavior inundate us daily. It is easy in these times and circumstances to become discouraged. Yet this passage calls us back to the duty of intercession for our leaders, for all in high places, and for our world. We may not agree with the decisions made, but we are to intercede and believe that our God is a great God, the One who is ultimately in charge of the universe. He is in control, and we are to trust that God will use these times and hardships to humble and bring those who are astray to himself. And so our prayers are "right and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior who desires everyone to be saved and to come to knowledge of the truth" (vv.3-4).

Leviticus 26:1-20; Psalm 78:1-39; Matthew 13:18-23

Wednesday, May 12

Ephesians 1:1-10 *...just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure*

of his will. (vv.4-5)

Have you ever been places where you are uncomfortable, feeling that you did not fit in? These can be awkward moments, causing us to withdraw within ourselves. Our discomfort may even cause us to want to escape the situation at once. At times like this, I remind myself that I am the beloved of the Lord, chosen to be his very own! Difficult situations cannot demolish me, for I am the Lord's possession. By the same token, I am called to radiate his love, to be his calming presence in all situations, difficult or not!

"You are my hiding place and my shield. I hope in your word" (Psalm 119:114).

Leviticus 26:27-42; Psalm 119:97-120; Matthew 22:41-46

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Matthew 28:16-20 *"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations... And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."* (vv.19a, 20b)

We are called to be His messengers, to bring His light into the darkness of those we encounter. We are called to give them the hope that is in our hearts, to help them to come to know Jesus as their Lord. We cannot do this in our own strength. (He never intended for us to do so!) He has promised to be with us always and in all ways! As we connect ourselves to Him in prayer continually throughout the day, His anointing will be on us, to love others as He loves us, and to bring them to know Him as their beloved Savior and Lord.

"Show us your steadfast love, O LORD, and grant us your salvation." (Psalm 85:7)

Daniel 7:9-14; Psalms 8, 47; Hebrews 2:5-18

Friday, May 14

Ephesians 2:1-10 *For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—not the result of works, so that no one may boast. (vv.8-9)*

I used to believe that by being relatively kind to others, going to church each week, and doing good works I would be assured of the Promised Land. But I was in darkness and didn't realize it. By the Lord's mercy and benevolent grace I was able to come to faith and be saved. He powerfully broke through my doubt and ignorance, and suddenly I was able to see the truth and was set free to believe!

Although we were dead, we have been made alive in Christ Jesus! His resurrection life courses through us daily when we are closely connected to him! We cannot boast in our own works, for it is he who has saved and anointed us for the works that he has prepared for us.

1 Samuel 2:1-10; Psalms 85, 86; Matthew 7:22-27

Saturday, May 15

Ephesians 2:11-22 *So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God. (v.19)*

We have all experienced how it feels to be left out and rejected. To notice that you are on the fringe or outside a group can be very painful. Yet in God's community, we are all His beloveds, His chosen ones! Once we were lost and didn't know Him, like aliens struggling in a foreign land. Yet He chose to uncover for us the truth of His amazing love, and rescue us from lives of hopelessness and futility.

We were "brought near by the blood of Christ" (v.13). We are now joined together in love with our brothers and sisters in Christ! When disagreements arise we can go to one another, confess our anger and hurt, and allow God's love to heal the relationship.

In God "you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God" (v.22).

Numbers 11:16-17, 24-29; Psalms 87, 90; Matthew 7:28—8:4

by Carolyn Petersen

Sunday, May 16

Exodus 3:1-12 *"But I'm not the person for a job like that!" Moses exclaimed. (v.11 TLB)*

“Who is this guy Moses to talk back to God like that” you say. After all, didn’t God just reveal Himself to Moses vis-a-vis the burning bush and rather impressive statements like “I am the God of your fathers—the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob”? One would think God would know who he was picking.

But how like Moses in this regard am I—and maybe you too. When called upon to do these writings, for example, my first reaction, at least to myself, was: “But I’m not the person for a job like this.” Now I believe God was speaking to me through the assignments last year and now, and I am grateful for the opportunity to share with you some of my thoughts on how good God really is—all the time!

Psalms 66, 67; Hebrews 12:18-29; Luke 10:17-24

Monday, May 17

Joshua 1:1-9 *No one will be able to oppose you as long as you live, for I will be with you just as I was with Moses; I will not abandon you or fail to help you.* (v.5)

Joshua had just been given a commission to lead the people across the Jordan River into the Promised Land. Unlike Moses, Joshua’s reaction was *not* “I’m not the person for a job like that.” Instead, Joshua gave orders to the leaders of Israel to cross the Jordan and conquer (v.11). Why the difference? We’ll not know, but what matters is that God promised to be present with Joshua as with Moses—to never abandon him or fail to help him.

We can rely on the same promise today. Jesus said “I will never leave you or forsake you.” That means he is *with us* all the time in the Holy Spirit, whether we feel like it or not. Too often I succumb to the lie that God is not present because my emotions tell me otherwise. I need to listen to God’s promises, period!

Psalm 89:1-18; Ephesians 3:1-13; Matthew 8:5-17

Tuesday, May 18

Psalm 100 *For the Lord is always good. He is always loving and kind, and his faithfulness goes on and on to each succeeding generation.* (v.5)

My family is currently seeing how good God is from generation to generation. Back in 1972 we felt led by the Lord to purchase some acreage in the North Georgia Mountains, and we built a cottage there in

1975. Last year our daughter, son-in-law, and grandson felt led to give up the big city life in Tampa and move to North Georgia. They would build on part of the remaining acreage, and live in our cottage until the new house was ready.

But there were at least three major hurdles. A new job had to be found, and we all know how difficult that is these days. The Tampa house had to be sold—another difficult task with the housing slump. There had to be adequate technology in the new location for the new information technology job. All three hurdles were so systematically overcome that my daughter was heard recently to say: “It’s all fallen in place so perfectly that I can’t believe it—God is so good!”

The closing on the Tampa house just happened, and the next generations are now happily getting settled and working in Georgia. The Lord continues to bless, for the Lord is good, and His love endures forever!

1 Samuel 16:1-13a; Psalms 97, 99; Ephesians 3:14-21; Matthew 8:18-27

Wednesday, May 19

Matthew 8:28-34 *The herdsmen fled to the nearest city with the story of what had happened, and the entire population came rushing out to see Jesus, and begged him to go away and leave them alone.* (vv.33-34)

This is the familiar story of Jesus casting out demons from two men who lived in the local cemetery. Scripture says they were so *dangerous* that no one could go through that area. Instead of being grateful that the men were cured and the dangers removed, the locals begged Jesus to vacate the premises!

At first blush I am shocked by their rudeness in the face of Jesus’ miracle. Then I remember the times in my own life when God has been encountered in a miraculous way, and it has been just too much for me. It’s as though I can’t take being in the presence of one so holy when I am so not. Scripture speaks of not being able to look upon the face of the Most High. Indeed, that was likely part of Moses’ problem with the burning bush—being simply awestruck, not able to take it all in. And being awestruck is good—as long as it’s combined with gratitude, resulting in action. Too often, however, I prefer staying all tingly over getting to work.

Isaiah 4:2-6; Psalms 101, 109; Ephesians 4:1-16

Thursday, May 20

Ephesians 4:17-32 *If you are angry, don't sin by nursing your grudge. Don't let the sun go down with you still angry—get over it quickly.* (v.26)

How many times have you heard this admonition applied to husbands and wives? It is applicable there, but to me personally it was more pertinent to a broken business partnership. Someone who I totally trusted betrayed me, causing huge life changes. It was not a matter of the sun going down on my anger, but rather unrelenting anguish which lasted for years. I kept seeking answers for why he had done this, but none ever came. Finally, in desperation on my knees at a healing service at my church, I pleaded with God to let me forgive and for Him to take away my anger and hurt. He did, and replaced the rage with peace, which lasts to this day.

Zechariah 4:1-14; Psalm 105:1-22; Matthew 9:1-8

Friday, May 21

Ephesians 5:1-20 *So be careful how you act; these are difficult days. Don't be fools; be wise: make the most of every opportunity you have for doing good.* (vv.15-16)

These are indeed difficult days. As I write this, the United States is in near-Depression, if not actual. Major banks are failing. General Motors and Chrysler have declared bankruptcy. Unemployment is at or nearing 10%. The housing market is in shambles; foreclosures are staggering in number and dire effect on families. Homelessness is on the rise. The government is spending at a rate to bind future generations to unimaginable debt.

Against this backdrop of gloom, I need to seek God's wisdom so that I make prudent and well-considered decisions. I don't want to be a fool. But while I am absorbed in concerns over financial matters, there is the tendency to lose sight of the needs of others under my very nose. Just yesterday when the counter girl at Wendy's gave me a great big smile while serving my chili, I was reminded that little things can mean a lot to someone in distress. I need to see more opportunities for doing good, especially in times like this.

Jeremiah 31:27-34; Psalm 102; Matthew 9:9-17

Saturday, May 22

Ephesians 6:10-24 *For we are not fighting against people made of flesh and blood, but against persons without bodies—the evil rulers of the unseen world, those mighty satanic beings and great evil princes of darkness who rule this world; and against huge numbers of wicked spirits in the spirit world.* (v.12)

Sometime ago our church held a parish weekend retreat on the church property. The main speaker was very dynamic, and his topic the first night was warnings about the reality of evil spirits.

No one noticed a young man slip into the meeting until he was suddenly behind the altar, holding the crucifix by its long wooden handle. He began screaming obscenities and calling the speaker a liar in frightening language. He smashed the crucifix over the altar, breaking it into two halves, and began to threaten the speaker with the jagged point of the spear he had just created. He was finally subdued and taken away by the police.

There was little doubt in anyone's mind that they had seen the presence of evil spirits manifested in the young man. The speaker continued, and never have I seen such rapt attention in an audience. We knew from what we had just witnessed that the message was real.

Ezekiel 36:22-27; Psalms 107:33-43,108; Matthew 9:18-26

by Larry Carroll

Sunday, May 23

Acts 4:18-21, 23-33 *"For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard."* (v.20 NIV)

When you have witnessed something amazing most people cannot help but tell about it. I remember seeing Hawaii for the first time. My initial breath as I got off the plane was filled with the sweet aroma of the native flowers. The air there actually smells good! The sand is made of beautiful, crushed shells. Around every twist of the road is a surprise of nature. Seeing it myself was better than any description I had been given, but that would not stop me from trying to express it to you.

In this Scripture from Acts, Peter and John are so filled with the Holy Spirit that they cannot help but speak about Jesus and his saving

grace. They were even threatened with punishment if they spoke or taught at all in the name of Jesus. Ha! They knew Jesus; they saw his miracles, one after another! Remember, these same two, Peter and John, were there with Jesus on the mountain as he was transfigured before them. They *saw* his glory shining, his clothes dazzling white, and *heard* the Father's voice, "This is my son whom I love, listen to him!" (Mark 9:7).

When Jesus reveals himself to you, nothing and no one can keep you from sharing the miracle of his love! The circumstances are always amazing, personal, and powerful. Come, Lord Jesus! Reveal yourself to me again today!

Deuteronomy 16:9-12; Psalm 118; John 4:19-26

Monday, May 24

1 Timothy 1:1-17 *Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen. (v.17)*

Are there times throughout a worship service where you find yourself abandoned to God alone and are able to get caught up in the movement of the Holy Spirit? It might be during a prayer or a song, but suddenly there is no one else in the sanctuary—just you and God. St. Paul does this even as he is writing a letter to his friend Timothy. He *can't help* but break out in praise for what God has done for him. Then he says, "Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst" (1 Timothy 1:15).

Paul is not the only one who can claim this position. Incredibly, Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I, *Liz*, am the worst. Jesus' invitation to eternal life is always personal. We were destined to death because of sin; but because of the atoning sacrifice Jesus made on our behalf, we who are washed in his blood and made righteous are promised eternal life. He calls and welcomes each one of us—individually. Many times he beckons, "Come to me." He gives rest to the weary. To those who hunger and thirst, he refreshes. He is the one who has the words of life.

One day all believers will be together at the heavenly banquet table. And I can hardly wait to swap stories with Paul! Let your praise bubble forth as you worship the King! Amen!

Proverbs 10:1-12; Psalm 25; Matthew 12:22-32

Tuesday, May 25

Proverbs 15:16-33 *A cheerful look brings joy to the heart, and good news gives health to the bones. (v.30)*

We are integrated beings in that we are a combination of body, mind, soul, and spirit. I know that when I have a cold or a headache, my spirit feels down. When I am spiritually dry, I am more susceptible to physical ailments. When my mind and soul are overwhelmed by stress, I don't sleep well which drags the rest of me down. One area touches the other. There is a positive side though! A cheerful look or words of love can bring life and healing.

"The tongue has the power of life and death" (Proverbs 18:21). I know the power one word of encouragement spoken at the right moment can produce. It is the same type of dynamic energy as a lightning bolt. This makes me want to be generous, not miserly about giving out positive words and looks. You may never know how much the recipient needed the encouragement. After all, "good news gives health to the bones."

Here are some words of love: "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (Romans 10:13). More good news! This brings life to my spirit which brings healing to my mind and body. Jesus affects every part of my being! He is Lord! Thanks be to God!

Psalm 26, 28; 1 Timothy 1:18—2:8; Matthew 12:33-42

Wednesday, May 26

Matthew 12:43-50 *For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother. (v.50)*

I have four siblings with whom I am very close. We have endured together through some very difficult periods, including the death of our father when I was six years old. As we march through time together we have always felt a strong solidarity, almost as if we were a team; helping and cheering, pushing each other on. It seems the difficult times in our lives in some way act as glue which help hold us together.

When I look at the larger picture being portrayed in Jesus' teaching here, you and I, *the doers of the Fathers' will*, have this same family connection spiritually. When we acknowledge one another as spiritual siblings, it brings our lives into a deeper dimension. Jesus wants us to be connected to him *and* to one another. "I have given them the

glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me” (John 17:22-23). As disciples and, yes, *siblings* of Jesus, with his blood flowing through our veins, we really are heirs to the throne. This is true kinship! Once again, we look ahead to the heavenly banquet where we will all join together in the unending hymn: Holy, Holy, Holy!

Proverbs 17:1-20; Psalm 38; 1 Timothy 3:1-16

Thursday, May 27

Matthew 13:24-30 *“Let both grow together until the harvest.”* (v.30a)

Jesus cautions us in this parable about the wheat and weeds not to pull the weeds “because while you are pulling the weeds, you may root up the wheat with them” (v.29). The image is that these two look so much alike; identical in fact, that you cannot tell the difference. The wheat is so precious; it is not worth the possibility of spoiling it. However, there will be a time when they will be safely separated. Our omniscient, holy God is the only truly capable judge, for He sees and knows all. To make a judgment when we don’t know the complete story is tricky at best, tragic at worst. A person may make a huge mistake and then be so changed by the grace of God and the circumstances which follow, that we actually witness their redemption. Others may look perfect on the outside, but their hearts are far from God. “Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart” (1 Samuel 16:7).

It’s actually pretty easy to fool people. I should know; my twin sister and I would joke around by switching places, tricking our teachers and classmates. People still get us mixed up! My twin-hood helps me appreciate the fact that looks can be deceiving.

Lord, forgive me for judging others when I don’t see the whole picture!

Proverbs 21:30—22:6; Psalm 37:1-18; 1 Timothy 4:1-16

Friday, May 28

Psalm 31 *Into your hands I commit my spirit, redeem me, O Lord, the God of truth.* (v.5)

Jesus said the first part of this sentence with his last breath. This Scripture is uttered by people everywhere, whether they are in peril or

upon death. Our spirit is the part of us that lives on into eternity. Interestingly, anesthesia may put our body and mind to sleep, but our spirit is awake and working. Our spirit never dies. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow wrote, “There is no death; what seems so is transition.”

One of Jesus’ greatest promises is found in John 14:19: “Because I live you also will live.” I recently had the privilege of being with my mother throughout her terminal illness. I saw her body becoming weak, but I witnessed her spirit—*the person she really is*—soaring. Inside she was still fresh, strong, quick, running, springing! I perceived deeply in my heart how the Holy Spirit was infusing her with life—even though it was the invisible life of the spirit. I am certain as she breathed her last breath here, the Lord, *who lives*, brought her from the hands of death and carried her to life. She lives! And it is all due to the unfathomable love of God for us. By His one great sacrifice, God has joined the person in us—our spirit, the invisible part of us which God sees and knows and loves—to Himself.

Thank you, O Lord, God of truth. My spirit belongs to you!

Proverbs 23:19-21, 29—24:2; 1 Timothy 5:17-25; Matthew 13:31-35

Saturday, May 29

1 Timothy 6:6-21 *For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it.* (v.7)

Isn’t this a sobering thought? We come into this world and leave it in a state of pure grace. There is nothing we can bring with us and nothing we can carry out. We made no advanced provisions (like a fruit basket upon arrival!) and of all the possessions filling our homes and pockets, not one thing will leave with us. The promise is that God is with us. He is the one who nourishes, sustains, and brings us life. “My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place,” says the psalmist (Psalm 139:15).

There is no time or place God is not with us. Jesus, who was there to welcome us into this world, will be there to welcome us into eternity. What a comfort to know we are spiritually chaperoned by the Almighty! He loved us into this world, he loves us through this life, and he loves us into eternity. Now that’s safety! That’s security! That is truly amazing grace. Father, thank you for the miracle of your love!

Proverbs 25:15-28; Psalms 30, 32; Matthew 13:36-43

by Liz Tucker

Sunday, May 30

John 1:29-34 *Then John gave this testimony: "I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. I would not have known him, except that the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is he who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.'" (vv.32-33 NIV)*

One of the first hymns I learned while growing up was "Holy, Holy, Holy! Lord God Almighty," describing God's Power, and also describing God's being, "God in three persons, 'Blessed Trinity.'" In the early stages of my Christianity the concept of "God in three persons" was truly a mystery to me, similar to the way Winston Churchill described Russia: "a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma." But I prayed that the Holy Spirit would guide me through God's mystery to a deeper understanding of The Trinity.

I learned that God was a loving Father, gracefully drawing me into a closer relationship with Him; that God's Son, Jesus Christ, loved me enough to sacrifice himself as an atonement for my sins; and that God the Spirit, loves me, dwells in my heart, and draws me to God's love as I surrender to Him, trust Him, and serve Him. God's Three love each other in perfect harmony in God, and He invites all of us to join Him, in Him, for all eternity! I accept that invitation and worship God, the Three in One described in Isaiah 9:6: "Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace"!

Job 38:1-11, 42:1-5; Psalms 146, 147; Revelation 19:4-16

Monday, May 31

Matthew 13:44-52 *"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field." (v.44a)*

When we were kids in Sunday school our teachers used Jesus' parables as beacons to draw us into a deeper relationship with him and our neighbors. They also helped us to realize that knowing God through Jesus Christ takes a lifetime of study, prayer, and growth as we develop that relationship. In the thirty three years since Jesus entered my life, I still find new gems of wisdom in his parables.

Jesus' most familiar parables are the longer ones: *The Parable of the Sower, The Parable of the Wicked Tenants, The Lost Son*, etc. But

when Jesus begins with "The kingdom of God is like..." I anticipate a real jewel coming. The shorter, more succinct parables often have a greater impact than do the longer and more narrative ones. *The Treasure in the Field, The Pearl of Great Price, The Mustard Seed, and The Lost Sheep* are great examples of this.

Jesus, the Son of God, not only uses parables to teach us truths from everyday life, the Divine Jesus uses parables to teach us *eternal* truths as we grow into a deeper relationship with him, his Father, and the Holy Spirit.

Ecclesiastes 2:1-15; Psalms 41, 52; Galatians 1:1-17

Tuesday, June 1

Matthew 13:53-58 *But Jesus said to them, "Only in his hometown and in his own house is a prophet without honor." (v.57b)*

There is a saying: "Familiarity breeds contempt." I imagine that in the parochial and agrarian society of Nazareth and its surroundings, Jesus, the local carpenter, was familiar and well respected by the town-folk.

But then Jesus stepped out of the box! He proclaimed himself as the Son of God! His teachings not only challenged the "old ways" customary to Jewish tradition, but also were supported by his performance of healings and miracles. Those who were more familiar with the "old" Jesus had difficulty with the new; skepticism, anger, offense, and contempt followed, particularly in his hometown.

I suspect that most of us, to whom Jesus has come, have experienced rejection from those who knew us in our "old ways" (when we were not exactly saints). But God, through His Holy Spirit, draws us into His family despite the contempt of those who reject us. God wants us to become His Saints. Thus we sing, "The Saints of God are just folk like me, and I mean to be one too."

Ecclesiastes 2:16-26; Psalm 45; Galatians 1:18—2:10

Wednesday, June 2

Ecclesiastes 3:1-15 *Whatever is has already been, and what will be has been before, and God will call the past to account. (v.15)*

That “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (Hebrews 13:8) is one of the foundations of my faith. This passage looks to eternal life rather than the temporal existence I presently inhabit. In contrast, today’s reading from Ecclesiastes begins: “There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven....” Simply put, I am limited (or even enslaved) by time.

I praise God that, “He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men” (v.11). My eternal life will be more beautiful than I can imagine, and as I grow in my relationship with God, in Jesus Christ, I also grow in eager anticipation in God’s promise of the glorious adventure in eternity with Him.

Psalm 119:49-72; Galatians 2:11-21; Matthew 14:1-12

Thursday, June 3

Ecclesiastes 3:16—4:3 *“All have the same breath; man has no advantage over the animal. Everything is meaningless. All go to the same place; all come from dust, and to dust all return.”* (vv.19b-20)

The authorship of Ecclesiastes has been attributed to Solomon, King of Israel. He seems to have *believed in* God, but not to have always *believed* God. In this performance oriented existence of mine, I, too, can forget God’s presence in my life. Solomon assumes God is there, but that God has abandoned man in the living of daily life of an imperfect world. He has overlooked God’s promise to us of a loving relationship with Himself. Solomon’s own father, David, had such a relationship with God.

One of the most familiar of Jesus’ parables is that of the sower, in which Jesus describes various impediments keeping us from responding to God’s grace. The seed is the Word of God, being sown into the hearts of men. Some of the seed fell among thorns, which describes the condition of the man who was beset by, “the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth” (Matthew 13:22), making his life “unfruitful.” Solomon was like that man!

My cynicism (which can be much like Solomon’s) can be avoided as I surrender to God. He is my master and produces within me a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty, or thirty times what was sown!

Psalm 50; Galatians 3:1-14; Matthew 14:13-21

Friday, June 4

Psalm 40 *Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but my ears you have pierced; burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not require. Then I said, “Here I am, I have come—it is written about me in the scroll. I desire to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart.”* (vv.6-8)

C.S. Lewis’ book, *Surprised by Joy*, an autobiography and spiritual journey, depicts the younger Lewis and his conversion to Christianity. The title itself speaks volumes about Lewis. In truth, the Christian experiences many joyous surprises in his life. One of my “surprises” came from the reading of Psalm 40. Many of the themes of Scripture are present in this uplifting cry of the psalmist to God, his Savior.

First, he waits patiently for God who hears his cry. Like Isaiah, he affirms that, “those who wait upon the Lord will renew their strength. They will rise up on wings like eagles...” (Isaiah 40:31). Secondly, the psalmist responds in thanksgiving and worship of God for His rescue and restoration. Thirdly, the psalmist acknowledges being overtaken by sin and asks for God’s forgiveness, mercy, and salvation. Finally, the psalmist surrenders to God’s will for him as he proclaims, “Here I am! I have come—it is written about me in the scroll.”

Isaiah’s calling from God to his prophetic ministry was also compelling. God asks, “Who shall I send, and who will go for us?” Isaiah’s response: “Here am I. Send me!” (Isaiah 6:8). May we, as God’s children, wait for, pray for, and respond to God’s call in our lives.

Ecclesiastes 5:1-7; Psalm 54; Galatians 3:15-22; Matthew 14:22-36

Saturday, June 5

Galatians 3:21—4:11 *Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, “Abba, Father.” So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir.* (vv.6-7)

As a new Christian, I was troubled by fears of the devil. My new life, which I had committed to Jesus Christ, was anything but filled with joy and peace. An assistant pastor suggested that counseling and prayers of deliverance would help, and that he would make an appointment with me as soon as he and his family returned from

vacation. I had a question! “Wait a minute,” I said, “What do I do while you’re on vacation?” The pastor saw my point. He was able to recruit two others for me from the same ministry to which he belonged. Many prayers were said and many problems addressed. I came away with a much lighter heart and a more joyful beginning to my Christian life.

John tells me that “perfect love casts out fear” (1 John 4:18) and it is that *perfect love* of God through which He sent His Son to save me and through which His Holy Spirit dwells within me. “It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery” (Galatians 5:1). O Lord, let me “stand firm” in your love!

Ecclesiastes 5:8-20; Psalm 55; Matthew 15:1-20

by Tap Holt

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