

Devotions for the Fifteenth Week after Pentecost, September 22-26, 2025

Monday of Pentecost 15 – Prayer of the Week

O Lord, keep Your Church in Your perpetual mercy; and because without You we cannot but fall, preserve us from all things hurtful, and lead us to all things profitable to our salvation; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who live and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

One day, after a family outing to pick blackberries in late-summer Missouri heat we emerged from the bramble to take stock of the fruit of our efforts. It was sad. The berries had been good a few days earlier, but now the hot sun, birds, and other pests meant we found very little. We had only a few forlorn berries rolling around in the bottom of our containers. We were hot, scratched, and miserable. As we climbed back into the car, my grandfather, remarked, “Well, at least we had the fun of it.” At this point, the rest of us, who had been working ourselves into something of a grump, looked at one another and burst out laughing. Grandpa always had a wicked and dry sense of humor.

We pray in this prayer that God would lead us to all things profitable to our salvation. I for one would really like to fly to heaven first class. I would like to enjoy life and have nice things. I would avoid the blackberry brambles of life and just enjoy the berry pie. Keep me from the thorns and heat, O Lord! But this last part of the prayer, where we pray that God would lead us to those things which are profitable to our salvation has to give us occasion to pause and reconsider.

That old sinner who was dealt a mortal blow in my baptism is still lurking in me. He would likely use that comfort, ease, and success that I desire to distract me from my Lord and lead me astray. I might be comfortably astray, but I would be astray, vulnerable, and ultimately in a great deal of hurt. So, Jesus leads me into the brambles of life. It is not always fun or seemingly fruitful. But at least we have what He means for it to be, profitable to my salvation. It is a good thing, when life gets a little prickly and painful to remember that your Good Shepherd is leading you to all things profitably to your salvation. It might not be pleasant or even safe, but he knows what he is doing.

Tuesday of Pentecost 15 – Amos 8:4-7

⁴ Hear this, you who trample on the needy
and bring the poor of the land to an end,
⁵ saying, “When will the new moon be over,
that we may sell grain?

And the Sabbath,

that we may offer wheat for sale,
that we may make the ephah small and the shekel great
and deal deceitfully with false balances,

⁶ that we may buy the poor for silver

and the needy for a pair of sandals
and sell the chaff of the wheat?"

⁷ The LORD has sworn by the pride of Jacob:
"Surely I will never forget any of their deeds.

Our conference speaker asked us to take off our shoes and look inside at the label. "What does it say," he demanded. "Where was it made?" Mine said Viet Nam. "Do you know anything about the man or woman who made those shoes?" he asked us. I had to admit that I knew nothing about that person. I did not know what sort of life people who worked in that factory lived or whether this shoe had been made in a factory which was safe or healthy for those who toiled within it. This is part of the problem of globalization. It was not that long ago that one would have known who the cobbler was in town. You might only have one or two pairs of shoes, but you probably knew who made them, you might even have known the cow which provided the leather for those shoes.

Such shoes today would seem prohibitively expensive to us. We have grown used to buying inexpensive things only to throw them away and buy new ones a few months later. But we do not know the men and women who made them. Have we, as Amos accused his hearers long ago, sold those people in a far-away land for a pair of sandals, Nikes, Adidas, or another brand we love? How would we know otherwise?

It is good to be mindful about such things. God calls us to spend our money to the blessing of other people. That can certainly mean helping folk, even in distant lands, earn a living and feed their children because we buy things that they make. It does mean, however, that asking a few questions about how this article came to be made is surely in order.

In Amos' day, the avarice of powerful people resulted in the suffering of many. God saw that and said he would never forget it. The nation of Israel went into a terrible exile and the prophetic witness connects the suffering of the lowly to the suffering which God visited upon His people in the exile.

Wednesday of Pentecost 15 – Psalm 113

¹ Praise the LORD!

Praise, O servants of the LORD,
praise the name of the LORD!

² Blessed be the name of the LORD
from this time forth and forevermore!

³ From the rising of the sun to its setting,
the name of the LORD is to be praised!

⁴ The LORD is high above all nations,
and his glory above the heavens!

⁵ Who is like the LORD our God,

who is seated on high,
⁶ who looks far down
on the heavens and the earth?
⁷ He raises the poor from the dust
and lifts the needy from the ash heap,
⁸ to make them sit with princes,
with the princes of his people.
⁹ He gives the barren woman a home,
making her the joyous mother of children.
Praise the LORD!

Some time ago the New York Mets called up a young man from their farm team in Syracuse. He had only been playing AAA ball for a few days, less than a week, when the call came to pack up and head to New York for his first major league game ever. His name is Brett Baty. In his first at bat, in fact, his first swing as a major league player, he hit a home run. You can watch this in a little video clip here. His parents were in the stands and the camera was already focused on them as they watched their son's first game. It is a lot of fun to see.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7eMGCM8uKgc&t=124s>

This psalm speaks of the great and unexpected reversal which is the mark of God's kingdom. He whose name is praised from the rising to the setting of the sun, east to west, turns the world on its head, raising the poor from the dust and sitting them down with princes. At the end of that little video you see the many players of the Mets, some of them justifiably famous I am sure, embracing this lanky and long-haired kid not long out of high school.

I am not saying that God favors the Mets, Cardinals, or even the Yankees. I firmly believe that God loves to see people enjoy themselves and baseball is a great sport for that. But God's team are the folks he sees on the bottom of the heap, names like Gideon, a shepherd boy named David facing down Goliath, an out of work advisor to the king named Jeremiah, and a young woman named Mary of Nazareth. He saw the sorrow of Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Hannah. He is the God who sees such things and raises up the poor from the dust. Praise Him!

Thursday of Pentecost 15 – I Timothy 2:1-15

¹ First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, ² for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. ³ This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, ⁴ who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. ⁵ For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, ⁶ who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time. ⁷ For this I was appointed a preacher and an apostle (I am telling the truth, I am not lying), a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth.

⁸ I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling; ⁹ likewise also that women should adorn themselves in respectable apparel,

with modesty and self-control, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly attire,¹⁰ but with what is proper for women who profess godliness—with good works.¹¹ Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness.¹² I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet.¹³ For Adam was formed first, then Eve;¹⁴ and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor.¹⁵ Yet she will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control.

“I think Paul hates women,” she said. She knew it was a provocative thing to say in a Bible study, but I also think she meant it. This woman had read this passage and others within Paul’s letters and come to that conclusion. She believed that Paul was a misogynist. That began a long conversation. I am not sure that I ever completely disabused her of that opinion, but I learned a great deal. I came to discover that her real beef was not actually with Paul so much, but with those who had used Paul’s words to belittle and denigrate her considerable skills and potential contributions to the kingdom of Christ. She really did not want to be a pastor, but she wanted to serve, and she had a lot she could have contributed. Yet time and again, men had told her that her leadership skills, her insights, her ideas were somehow less important because she was a woman and not a man. Let’s just be clear here. That is not what Paul is saying and they should not have done that. I can see why she said what she said, even if I disagree with her.

Her words that day sat there, a little like a bomb, on the table around which we had gathered. My friend, and I count her as a friend, was right in that things needed a little stirring. Some of this is culturally conditioned. Paul writes to Timothy in Ephesus where the sexually saturated cult of Artemis was led by a priestess served by 1000 eunuchs. Paul might have had good reason to chart another course for the roles of women in the church in Ephesus. But this is not our situation. We need to listen carefully. Paul says nothing about the talent, skill, or leadership abilities of women here. He speaks to a role, rooted in Genesis in which men and women are to work together for each other’s benefit.

I surely do not have all the answers and a brief devotional is hardly the space where such things can be done. We need to watch our words carefully and listen to the hurt and frustration of those who perceive a bias against them. We also need to remember and assert: God has gifted his people with various gifts. We serve Him well when we use them to His glory.

Friday of Pentecost 15 – Luke 16:1-15

¹ He also said to the disciples, “There was a rich man who had a manager, and charges were brought to him that this man was wasting his possessions.”² And he called him and said to him, ‘What is this that I hear about you? Turn in the account of your management, for you can no longer be manager.’³ And the manager said to himself, ‘What shall I do, since my master is taking the management away from me? I am not strong enough to dig, and I am ashamed to beg.’⁴ I have decided what to do, so that when I am removed from management, people may receive me into their houses.’⁵ So, summoning his master's debtors one by one, he said to the first, ‘How much do you owe my master?’⁶ He said, ‘A hundred measures of oil.’ He said to him, ‘Take your bill, and sit down quickly and write

fifty.’⁷ Then he said to another, ‘And how much do you owe?’ He said, ‘A hundred measures of wheat.’ He said to him, ‘Take your bill, and write eighty.’⁸ The master commended the dishonest manager for his shrewdness. For the sons of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light.⁹ And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth, so that when it fails they may receive you into the eternal dwellings.

¹⁰ “One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much, and one who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much.¹¹ If then you have not been faithful in the unrighteous wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches?¹² And if you have not been faithful in that which is another's, who will give you that which is your own?¹³ No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.”

¹⁴ The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all these things, and they ridiculed him.¹⁵ And he said to them, “You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God.

Betty came up to me rather sheepishly one Sunday. I could tell from the way she was acting that there was something up. She pulled my arm and drew me aside. “Pastor, I want to make a large gift to the church.” We were a typical parish, operating on the edge of solvency, so this was welcome news. “But Pastor, I won the money at the casino. Can I give that to the church?” I assured her that we would sanctify her ill-gotten gains by paying teacher salaries in our school. It turns out she had, on a whim, put a dollar in the slot machine near the door and won the BMW sportscar which was parked right inside the door. She did not want such a thing, could not even get in and out of the car, so she sold it and took the cash.

We did talk about gambling for a while, but what struck me about the conversation was the extent to which she worried about the morality of her gift. Jesus tells us to make friends today with our unrighteous wealth. Just what is that? Is it Betty's slot machine winnings? Is it all money? Or is it something else? I think Jesus is not giving advice about money at all in this passage. He is not talking about money, not really. He is the treasure and the forgiveness He won when He gave us His life is the treasure. The “unrighteous wealth” which we have is a treasure which we did not earn and do not deserve. That is what makes it unrighteous. But it is the most righteous thing of all – for it makes us righteous. The unrighteous wealth, the undeserved wealth, we have is forgiveness itself.

We use this unrighteous wealth to make friends who will welcome us to heaven when we forgive and love people. The manager in the story was forgiving debts. Did you catch that? He was forgiving debts. Jesus says that master commended that shrewd manager. God has given you a great treasure, forgiveness, and He would really like you to go waste it on some sinners today.