

Devotions for the Eighteenth Week after Pentecost, October 13-17, 2025

Monday of Pentecost 18 – Prayer of the Day

Almighty God, You show mercy to Your people in all their troubles. Grant us always to recognize Your goodness, give thanks for Your compassion, and praise your holy name; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

My friend said he remembered hearing the sirens while he was drifting in and out of consciousness. They were coming for him. He had been in a pretty serious car accident and now they would need to extract him from the crumpled remains of his car. He would recover, but it would be a long and hard road. There were surgeries, physical therapy, a persistent limp. But sitting down over a glass of beer over a year later he would tell me that this was the best thing that ever happened to him. He thanked God for that other driver who swerved in front of him and caused him to leave the road as he sought to avoid a collision.

By his own admission he was heading in a life-destroying direction that day when he had that accident. Not that traveling south on the freeway leads to death, but that his work, his family, his relationship with God, all of the things that should bring him health were out of step. He was miserable and it wasn't getting any better. Until he was forced to slow down and consider anew everything about his life. When it was all taken away, even for a little while, he came to see everything differently.

We ask God that he would grant us to recognize His goodness. That can sometimes be hard to do, especially when tough things are happening to us. If you are in the middle of a difficult day when you read this, I don't expect you to be thanking God for your misery. You may never come to that point like my friend did. Sometimes it works that way, but other times it does not. It may be that only from heaven's perspective will we be able to see that. But I am convinced that He who dries every tear will eventually bring us to see and recognized His goodness everywhere.

Tuesday of Pentecost 18 – Ruth 1:1-19a

¹ In the days when the judges ruled there was a famine in the land, and a man of Bethlehem in Judah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he and his wife and his two sons. ² The name of the man was Elimelech and the name of his wife Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem in Judah. They went into the country of Moab and remained there. ³ But Elimelech, the husband of Naomi, died, and she was left with her two sons. ⁴ These took Moabite wives; the name of the one was Orpah and the name of the other Ruth. They lived there about ten years, ⁵ and both Mahlon and Chilion died, so that the woman was left without her two sons and her husband.

⁶ Then she arose with her daughters-in-law to return from the country of Moab, for she had heard in the fields of Moab that the LORD had visited his people and given them food.

⁷ So she set out from the place where she was with her two daughters-in-law, and they went on the way to return to the land of Judah. ⁸ But Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go, return each of you to her mother's house. May the LORD deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me. ⁹ The LORD grant that you may find rest, each of you in the house of her husband!" Then she kissed them, and they lifted up their voices and wept. ¹⁰ And they said to her, "No, we will return with you to your people."

¹¹ But Naomi said, "Turn back, my daughters; why will you go with me? Have I yet sons in my womb that they may become your husbands? ¹² Turn back, my daughters; go your way, for I am too old to have a husband. If I should say I have hope, even if I should have a husband this night and should bear sons, ¹³ would you therefore wait till they were grown? Would you therefore refrain from marrying? No, my daughters, for it is exceedingly bitter to me for your sake that the hand of the LORD has gone out against me." ¹⁴ Then they lifted up their voices and wept again. And Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her.

¹⁵ And she said, "See, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law." ¹⁶ But Ruth said, "Do not urge me to leave you or to return from following you. For where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God. ¹⁷ Where you die I will die, and there will I be buried. May the LORD do so to me and more also if anything but death parts me from you." ¹⁸ And when Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more.

¹⁹ So the two of them went on until they came to Bethlehem.

Three women trudged down that dusty path, one elderly and two much younger. I don't think we get just how vulnerable they must have been in that moment. The older woman turns to the younger and urges them to leave her. Return to your homes, she tells them. They can take care of you better than I can. One of them, Orpah, takes her up on the offer but the other will not leave her mother-in-law. Her words of devotion and commitment have made her famous. The friendship of these two women of different generations has come down to us as one of the greatest friendship stories of all time.

My wife shops on a certain day of the week. It is convenient for her schedule, but it is also the day she can see them. They are a woman and her daughter-in-law who almost always shop the same day. They run into each other in one aisle or another and catch up. The daughter-in-law is effectively blind. She keeps a hand on the cart or the older woman. I have been along to meet them. They are a sweet pair. It is clear they love each other.

The Bible makes a particular point to say that Ruth is the ancestor of both King David and Jesus, the son of David. He has Moabite in his genes. But I think the Spirit of God also wanted us to see this friendship between these two women. It is good to have a friend. Life is better with someone to confide in and to support in their need. Jesus calls us to welcome the stranger and the alien, even a Moabite girl found a home in Bethlehem, in the family of Jesus. He also calls us to

friendships. You probably already have one of those. Call your friend, have a cup of coffee together, and catch up. Friendship is a holy thing.

Wednesday of Pentecost 18 – Psalm 111

- ¹ Praise the LORD!
I will give thanks to the LORD with my whole heart,
in the company of the upright, in the congregation.
- ² Great are the works of the LORD,
studied by all who delight in them.
- ³ Full of splendor and majesty is his work,
and his righteousness endures forever.
- ⁴ He has caused his wondrous works to be remembered;
the LORD is gracious and merciful.
- ⁵ He provides food for those who fear him;
he remembers his covenant forever.
- ⁶ He has shown his people the power of his works,
in giving them the inheritance of the nations.
- ⁷ The works of his hands are faithful and just;
all his precepts are trustworthy;
- ⁸ they are established forever and ever,
to be performed with faithfulness and uprightness.
- ⁹ He sent redemption to his people;
he has commanded his covenant forever.
Holy and awesome is his name!
- ¹⁰ The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom;
all those who practice it have a good understanding.
His praise endures forever!

Ed was always a bit of a character. He smiled a lot, had a few wise things to say, which he frequently said, and liked to tease people, including this preacher. But the first thing you often noticed about Ed was his hand. He only had a couple of fingers and the nub of a thumb. He used it well. I remember him raking mulch at the church, at least when he wasn't leaning on the rake spouting some tidbit of wisdom.

Ed was a veteran of WWII. He had been in a bomb disposal unit in the Pacific theater. One day, while defusing a bomb, a detonator had exploded in his hand, seriously injuring him and removing fingers and most of his thumb. He nearly died. In fact, his mother received a telegram informing her that her son had died. That took a little while to straighten out. He continued to serve in the military as a bomb disposal expert. He had a healthy fear of the materials he was handling, and hence he was wise about handling them.

The psalmist says that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. God is not safe. You need to know that. Time and again he has gotten under the skin of regular people like you and me and done some interesting things, dangerous things. Francis was the unremarkable son of a cloth merchant in Italy in the 12th century, but somehow God called him to follow Jesus through

poverty and humble service. His life was forever transformed and much of Europe with him when he answered that call and took up his plain brown robe. You could follow the lives of many others and come to the same conclusion: Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Dorothy Day, or even a young struggling law student named Martin Luther. God is not safe. He has a way of getting hold of you and making the rest of this psalm your words of praise, spoken with your whole heart.

Thursday of Pentecost 18 – II Timothy 2:1-13

¹ You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus, ² and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. ³ Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. ⁴ No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him. ⁵ An athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules. ⁶ It is the hard-working farmer who ought to have the first share of the crops. ⁷ Think over what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything.

⁸ Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David, as preached in my gospel, ⁹ for which I am suffering, bound with chains as a criminal. But the word of God is not bound! ¹⁰ Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory. ¹¹ The saying is trustworthy, for:

If we have died with him, we will also live with him;

¹² if we endure, we will also reign with him;
if we deny him, he also will deny us;

¹³ if we are faithless, he remains faithful—
for he cannot deny himself.

There were tears in her eyes as she talked about her daughter. It was a conversation I have had more than once with elderly members of my parish. Their children had walked away from the faith and attended no church. They proclaimed their liberation from the rule of Christ, but most often this meant an enslavement to something else, if not an addiction, perhaps they lived under the tyranny of money, work, or most often their own selfish desires.

This daughter lived in another state, was married, and had children, but no one went to church. Her mother was afraid for her daughter's eternal life. She should be. Verse 12 of this reading from II Timothy 2 is stark. If we deny Jesus, He will deny us. I think of that Gospel reading we had several weeks ago in which Jesus said that many will come knocking on the heavenly feast at that last day, but the master of the feast will say, "I do not know you." I do not want that for anyone, most especially for the people whom I love.

But I did not need to tell her that. She knew that already. We focused instead on verse 13. If we are faithless, Jesus is faithful. He cannot deny himself. There have been many times when I have forgotten my confirmation vows and His baptismal promises, but He has never forgotten His

promises to me, not for one moment. There had been a day, some years ago, when this woman and her husband had brought her new baby girl to a font, and she had been baptized. Jesus made a promise that day. He has never forgotten it. He has never stopped caring about her and to this day is reaching toward her in love and grace. The nature of that love and grace are such that she can refuse. He will not force, but he will never stop looking for her and calling her home.

That Jesus made that promise to you too. He made it to all who have been washed in a font. The elderly man with dementia who cannot remember your name is in His hands. He may have forgotten Jesus, but Jesus never forgot him. The same is true of the child who has run away, the friend with mental illness, or anyone else for whom you pray, all of them. We care for them and love them, yet we are but instruments of God's care. His love and grace save them, and He has many ways to care.

Friday of Pentecost 18 – Luke 17:11-19

¹¹ On the way to Jerusalem he was passing along between Samaria and Galilee. ¹² And as he entered a village, he was met by ten lepers, who stood at a distance ¹³ and lifted up their voices, saying, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us." ¹⁴ When he saw them he said to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." And as they went they were cleansed. ¹⁵ Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice; ¹⁶ and he fell on his face at Jesus' feet, giving him thanks. Now he was a Samaritan. ¹⁷ Then Jesus answered, "Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine? ¹⁸ Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" ¹⁹ And he said to him, "Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well."

I got a call from an old friend the other day. He is doing well, and I am glad. It was not so a few years ago when we spoke. He was going through a very difficult time in his life. He struggled with an addiction. His marriage had ended. He did not know what to do as the father to his only child. She had been a little girl when we had first met, now a young woman.

We often pray for people's physical ailments in church and that is a good thing, but I wonder sometimes if we should not pray a little more earnestly for the deeper healing of people's souls. I know I prayed this for my friend when his life was in a tailspin. Fix all his problems and he would still have been soul-sick. I am glad God heard those prayers and answered them.

The ten lepers who left Jesus that day were all cleansed. Their leprosy was cured. But one of them noticed something else. He had been healed. Luke, who may have been a physician, notes a different word in Greek for us. It is related to the word we use today for a doctor. It shows up as an "ia" in the middle of a lot of words – think *pediatric* or *geriatric* medicine. This "ia" is the word Luke uses here for what the man realizes happened to him. It connotes health and wholeness. A pediatrician works toward the health of children. He had not simply been made clean of his leprosy, but true health, whole health had been given to him.

He comes back and praises God and thanks Jesus. Jesus sends him on his way with another important word. Your faith has made you well. This word "made well" could have been translated "saved." This is the word for one who has been rescued from Satan's clutches and

restored to the grace and favor of God. Jesus offers us far more than just the healing of our bodies. He does that, to be sure. But that is the smallest part of his healing. He heals our whole lives, He heals our souls.