

Devotions for the Twenty-Third week after Pentecost, November 17-21, 2025

Monday of Pentecost 23 – Prayer of the Day

O Lord, almighty and ever-living God, You have given exceedingly great and precious promises to those who trust in You. Rule and govern our hearts and minds by Your Holy Spirit that we may live and abide forever in your Son, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

She was a cheerful soul. She had round cheeks and a wonderful smile and bright eyes. Her husband had died shortly after she arrived in town. It was supposed to be their retirement years, the place they had dreamed about living for years, away from the city, out in the country. It did not turn out that way. She spent the first months in a hospital with him, then a funeral, and then that little house they had picked out seemed really empty.

But Jesus had made a promise to her. He would be with her every day, even to the end of the world, even if it felt like her world was ending. He would not leave her. He did not leave her. She came to church that next Sunday and was embraced by women and men whom she had not known that long. They had not become fast friends, not yet anyway. But among them were others who had buried a spouse and others who knew the nature of pain and grief. And they loved her.

It took a little while, but the smile came back and soon she was bustling around that kitchen at church, serving children, serving funeral luncheons, making fellowship dinners happen. Many of us rejoiced with her. Jesus had kept His promise. In those other folks he had hugged her. He had loved her. He still does. He never left her.

Tuesday of Pentecost 23 – Malachi 4:1-6

¹ “For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble. The day that is coming shall set them ablaze, says the LORD of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch. ² But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings. You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall. ³ And you shall tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet, on the day when I act, says the LORD of hosts.

⁴ “Remember the law of my servant Moses, the statutes and rules that I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel.

⁵ “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes. ⁶ And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction.”

My father served a rural parish when I was young. It was an old parish which remembered the days when preachers needed a horse to visit his parishioners. The parsonage came with 20 acres of land, enough for my father to return to his own roots as the son of a farmer and get a few cattle, a horse, and even a ridiculous goat which no fence could contain.

Parishioners who were farmers were only too happy help. A dairyman sold us a couple of newborn calves we could raise, bottle feeding them until they were weaned. One of them became mine, a small black calf with a white face. All winter long my after-school routine was the same. Mix the powder with water in a large plastic bottle and feed this animal in the small barn behind our house. One day, early in spring, my father said it was time to let the calves out. But he insisted we be present, not only to watch but to be there in case something happened. For you see, when a calf has been confined to a barn all winter and it takes those first hesitant steps outside, the hesitation quickly passes. Soon, it is as if an entire winter's worth of play is released. Leaping and twisting, running in ever greater circles, our little calves went tearing around the little pasture situated just outside that barn.

I was shocked to see my docile little friend run right into the gate. She got up, a little stunned, but none the worse for it. I imagined that her neck was broken after that collision, or some other horrible thing had happened. My father laughed. He said sometimes they will run right through a fence. Then we would have had to chase them down. As it was, she hit the gate and learned a lesson. Soon she was much calmer.

Malachi likens our joy on the day of Jesus' coming to that of a calf released from the stall. Will we be a bit of a danger to ourselves? It may be. But our shepherd will be watching. Go ahead, kick your heels up a bit. It will be a whole new world.

Wednesday of Pentecost 23 – Psalm 98

¹ Oh sing to the LORD a new song,
for he has done marvelous things!

His right hand and his holy arm
have worked salvation for him.

² The LORD has made known his salvation;
he has revealed his righteousness in the sight of the nations.

³ He has remembered his steadfast love and faithfulness
to the house of Israel.

All the ends of the earth have seen
the salvation of our God.

⁴ Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth;
break forth into joyous song and sing praises!

⁵ Sing praises to the LORD with the lyre,
with the lyre and the sound of melody!

⁶ With trumpets and the sound of the horn
make a joyful noise before the King, the LORD!

⁷ Let the sea roar, and all that fills it;
the world and those who dwell in it!

⁸ Let the rivers clap their hands;
let the hills sing for joy together

⁹ before the LORD, for he comes
to judge the earth.

He will judge the world with righteousness,
and the peoples with equity.

It was with dread that I picked up that envelope at the student services. The student whose exam was in that envelope was struggling, really struggling. We had worked out an accommodation for him to take the exam at another time, with some extra time, through the testing service at the university, but I seriously doubted how much help that would be. Yet, when I grabbed my pen and set the exam against the grading key, he did well, not an A+ but well. It was evident that he had taken my admonition to study to heart. His mastery of concepts and the information required was good. I finished grading the exam and thanked God for a little victory that day.

This psalm is familiar to all of us. The familiar Christmas hymn, “Joy to the World,” is a metrical paraphrase of this psalm by Isaac Watts. Just from the title and as you consider the words of Watts’ hymn you realize that the world is glad that God’s judgment is rendered. The sea roars, the rivers clap their hands, the hills sing together for joy. All this is because the Lord comes to judge the world with righteousness.

Have you ever wondered at the joy of sea, rivers, and hills? Elsewhere in the psalter the forests and mountains also get into the rejoicing act (Ps 96:12 and 148:9). Back in Deuteronomy 30 Moses had called heaven and earth as witnesses against the people of God if they broke that covenant. They did break that covenant, but God sent His Son to bear that price and atone for the sins of the world. Now, the witnesses that were supposed to bear testimony against us, have the joyful duty of bearing witness to what Christ has done. They robed themselves in darkness that day which Jesus died. But on that day to come, that last day, they shall shout the truth of Christ’s redemption, a far more joyful task. My day of bearing witness to the study and hard work of a struggling student is only the tiniest fraction of that joy. I look forward to the rivers clapping their hands and the hills singing together for joy.

Thursday of Pentecost 23 – II Thessalonians 3:1-13

¹ Finally, brothers, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honored, as happened among you, ² and that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men. For not all have faith. ³ But the Lord is faithful. He will establish you and guard you against the evil one. ⁴ And we have confidence in the Lord about you, that you are doing

and will do the things that we command. ⁵ May the Lord direct your hearts to the love of God and to the steadfastness of Christ.

⁶ Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us. ⁷ For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us, because we were not idle when we were with you, ⁸ nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with toil and labor we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you. ⁹ It was not because we do not have that right, but to give you in ourselves an example to imitate. ¹⁰ For even when we were with you, we would give you this command: If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat. ¹¹ For we hear that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work, but busybodies. ¹² Now such persons we command and encourage in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living.

¹³ As for you, brothers, do not grow weary in doing good.

In some versions of the rule of St. Benedict is a wonderful passage about what the abbot is to do with visitors to the community. He is to show them honor and respect. He is to provide for them. But after three days, if a visitor will not contribute to the life of the community by chipping in to wash dishes or help in some way, things change. After several admonitions, the Abbot is to command a pair of hefty brothers to escort the miscreant out of the gates of the monastery and deposit him on the road.

The Benedictines are famous for their hospitality. If you show up at a monastery and they can possibly take you in, they will. It won't be plush, but you will be fed and housed. But even their hospitality has limits. I am reminded of that as I see the many who live on the streets of our cities these days. Many, perhaps most of them, are not capable of working any more. Their addictions, mental illnesses, and other maladies make them virtually unemployable, but do we simply shrug our shoulders and say that is the way it is? I don't think that is what Paul had in mind here.

I do not want to offer up simplistic solutions to complicated problems. There is a lot going on with our homeless epidemic in this country. At the same time, I do believe that part of the issue is that we have allowed the nobility and dignity of work to be eroded. So many cannot see that working is good, they can only see it as an unjust expectation which society has laid upon them.

Paul gently but firmly counseled his first and twenty-first-century readers to work, to do so quietly and earn their own living. We can speak well of work. We can thank God today for the occupations and various vocations which have enabled us to contribute to society and to earn our daily bread. Praise God today for this blessing, speak well of work, and thank the grocery checker, teacher, electrician, etc., whom you meet today for their work.

Friday of Pentecost 23 – Luke 21:5-36

⁵ And while some were speaking of the temple, how it was adorned with noble stones and offerings, he said, ⁶ “As for these things that you see, the days will come when there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.” ⁷ And they asked him, “Teacher, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when these things are about to take place?” ⁸ And he said, “See that you are not led astray. For many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am he!’ and, ‘The time is at hand!’ Do not go after them. ⁹ And when you hear of wars and tumults, do not be terrified, for these things must first take place, but the end will not be at once.”

¹⁰ Then he said to them, “Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom.

¹¹ There will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and pestilences. And there will be terrors and great signs from heaven. ¹² But before all this they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors for my name's sake. ¹³ This will be your opportunity to bear witness. ¹⁴ Settle it therefore in your minds not to meditate beforehand how to answer, ¹⁵ for I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict. ¹⁶ You will be delivered up even by parents and brothers and relatives and friends, and some of you they will put to death.

¹⁷ You will be hated by all for my name's sake. ¹⁸ But not a hair of your head will perish.

¹⁹ By your endurance you will gain your lives.

²⁰ “But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation has come near. ²¹ Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, and let those who are inside the city depart, and let not those who are out in the country enter it, ²² for these are days of vengeance, to fulfill all that is written. ²³ Alas for women who are pregnant and for those who are nursing infants in those days! For there will be great distress upon the earth and wrath against this people. ²⁴ They will fall by the edge of the sword and be led captive among all nations, and Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.

²⁵ “And there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth distress of nations in perplexity because of the roaring of the sea and the waves, ²⁶ people fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world. For the powers of the heavens will be shaken. ²⁷ And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. ²⁸ Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”

²⁹ And he told them a parable: “Look at the fig tree, and all the trees. ³⁰ As soon as they come out in leaf, you see for yourselves and know that the summer is already near. ³¹ So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near.

³² Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all has taken place.

³³ Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

³⁴ “But watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a trap. ³⁵ For

it will come upon all who dwell on the face of the whole earth. ³⁶ But stay awake at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are going to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.”

Earlier this week, in the prayer we considered on Monday, we adored God for making exceedingly great and precious promises to us. I have been known to ask in Bible studies when this issue comes up just what are those promises. I find that normally I get a few blank stares, a few will respond with a promise or two, but most folks have a hard time enumerating these exceedingly great and precious promises which God makes to us. Let's fix that today.

This is a text which many people read in fear. But they shouldn't, not really. Jesus is giving us a realistic vision of what is to come, indeed much of this describes the world we live in today. Listen to what he says to us:

- There is an end to the tumult, wars, and suffering – vs. 9
- I will give you a mouth/witness which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict – vs 15 (Remember, most of the early Christians were uneducated.)
- Not a hair of your head will be harmed – by your endurance you will gain life - vss. 18-19
- When things are the worst, you will see Jesus coming – vs. 27
- God's Word, the Word which declares you holy and heaven-bound, will not pass away – vs. 35.

Jesus speaks of many things which could and do frighten us, but He is speaking great and precious promises in which we can trust and rejoice. He encourages us to do just that. When we see all these terrible things, He urges you to lift your heads, straighten yourself up, your redemption is near – vs. 28.