

Scripture Readings for August 30th

Psalms 26:1(ESV) ¹Vindicate me, O Lord, for I have walked in my integrity, and I have trusted in the Lord without wavering. ²Prove me, O Lord, and try me; test my heart and my mind.[£] ³For your steadfast love is before my eyes, and I walk in your faithfulness. ⁴I do not sit with men of falsehood, nor do I consort with hypocrites. ⁵I hate the assembly of evildoers, and I will not sit with the wicked. ⁶I wash my hands in innocence and go around your altar, O Lord, ⁷proclaiming thanksgiving aloud, and telling all your wondrous deeds. ⁸O Lord, I love the habitation of your house and the place where your glory dwells. ⁹Do not sweep my soul away with sinners, nor my life with bloodthirsty men, ¹⁰in whose hands are evil devices, and whose right hands are full of bribes. ¹¹But as for me, I shall walk in my integrity; redeem me, and be gracious to me. ¹²My foot stands on level ground; in the great assembly I will bless the Lord.

Jeremiah 15:15-21(ESV) ¹⁵O Lord, you know; remember me and visit me, and take vengeance for me on my persecutors. In your forbearance take me not away; know that for your sake I bear reproach. ¹⁶Your words were found, and I ate them, and your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart, for I am called by your name, O Lord, God of hosts. ¹⁷I did not sit in the company of revelers, nor did I rejoice; I sat alone, because your hand was upon me, for you had filled me with indignation. ¹⁸Why is my pain unceasing, my wound incurable, refusing to be healed? Will you be to me like a deceitful brook, like waters that fail? ¹⁹Therefore thus says the Lord: “If you return, I will restore you, and you shall stand before me. If you utter what is precious, and not what is worthless, you shall be as my mouth. They shall turn to you, but you shall not turn to them. ²⁰And I will make you to this people a fortified wall of bronze; they will fight against you, but they shall not prevail over you, for I am with you to save you and deliver you, declares the Lord. ²¹I will deliver you out of the hand of the wicked, and redeem you from the grasp of the ruthless.”

Matthew 16:21-28(ESV) ²¹£From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. ²²And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, “Far be it from you, Lord![£] This shall never happen to you.” ²³But he turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance[£] to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.” ²⁴Then Jesus told his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ²⁵For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. ²⁶For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his life? Or what shall a man give in return for his life? ²⁷For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done. ²⁸Truly, I say to you,

there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.”

Rev. Gary Lewis Hendrickson

August 29/30, 2020

Lutheran Church

13th Sunday after Pentecost

Heaven on Earth

Romans 12:9-21 (ESV) ⁹Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. ¹⁰Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. ¹¹Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. ¹²Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. ¹³Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality. ¹⁴Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. ¹⁵Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. ¹⁶Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be conceited. ¹⁷Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. ¹⁸If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. ¹⁹Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.” ²⁰To the contrary, “if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.” ²¹Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Rules and Regulations! We all know about them. For the most part, they set the limits or boundaries on what we can or cannot do. I was watching an old pirate movie on television a while ago and a dispute arose as to how the booty these pirates had captured was to be divided. There was no ensuing argument, because the exact procedure for division of all ill-gotten gains was clearly recorded in their pirate articles. If these articles were followed, no pirate could claim that he was being treated unfairly by his fellow conspirators. These pirate articles had a formal name: The Articles of Confederation. Every pirate band had its own articles that determined exactly how the group was to operate. And every pirate was expected to conform to what these articles stated.

But the adoption of Articles of Confederation weren't just limited to pirate gangs. Absolutely not! Many collective bodies used this concept to provide guidance, structure, and limitations for their groups. The original 13 American States had their Articles of Confederation as they banded together to fight the British and declare their independence from English rule. For one thing, these articles spelled out how our Congress was to finance the War of Independence. Mostly, the financing came by borrowing money—from private citizens and foreign lenders. When the war was over, our new nation owed about 34 million dollars to its private citizens and 10 million dollars to various foreign lenders. Back then, it was deemed necessary to maintain a good reputation with foreign countries. Accordingly, the little money to which the Congress had access went to repay the foreign lenders. Meanwhile, our private citizens, who had financed the war with their own resources, had to wait for repayment. The Articles of Confederation had given Congress the authority to borrow money, but they didn't provide a means for Congress to repay the debt incurred.

Even with the best of intentions, it seems that no one setting rules has the future foresight to provide allowances for every contingency. That's often the reason why laws are changed, agreements are amended, and contracts need to be rewritten. We are a people who need our rules and regulations to govern what we can and cannot do. Without rules to follow, we'd have to trust that everyone would do whatever was right. And that approach just doesn't seem practical in our sinful world. Besides, we know ourselves well—and we know that we usually can't be counted on 100% of the time to do precisely the right thing. Oh, we may come awfully close on most every occasion, but there always seems to be a time when we do what is most favorable for us—rather than what is perfectly right. And naturally there is a term to describe these behavioral patterns that are found among all human beings: it's called Original Sin. The stigma of Original Sin stops us from approaching perfection. Faults are found even among the best of us.

Any person who anticipates going on to an afterlife has some ideas about what that life is going to like. This new life is usually described as having a much better environment than present conditions. Whatever we see as wrong in our present reality will be corrected in this future realm so that we'll be able fully to enjoy our forever life. The question that arises from all this is: If we humans can dream and envision what a perfect reality could be, why don't we act like that right now so that we—along with everyone else—can all have that wonderful experience right now? And there's the rub—the problem—that stops me and others from acting like we're already in heaven. We know how we apparently should act, but we understand that many others don't even have a clue when it comes to proper behavior. So if I begin to act like there is no longer any need for rules and regulations, others will most likely take advantage of me. Present day reality prompts me to think that I must act cautious and protective or the worldly vultures will feast on my bones. And so instead of changing my behavior, I conform to the sinful reality in which I live.

As we read what Paul has written, it might easily describe what life in heaven is going to be like. But Paul is not putting any future reference on the behavior he is advocating; rather, he's suggesting in no uncertain terms that we act like that right now. If we were to summarize what Paul is saying, we might condense it down to, "Live like you're already in heaven, but don't forget that you're not!" In other words, we are to treat others like we anticipate that we'll be treating them in heaven, but that doesn't mean that we have to let others take advantage of us. Oh, we may choose to let folks take advantage of us as we attempt to share the Gospel Message of salvation in Jesus Christ alone with them. But the Holy Spirit guides us as to how far we permit others to go before we put the brakes on. It's not God's intention that we should suffer hardships so that others may "coast" through life (2 Corinthians 8:13).

Once again, another problem with this new behavior comes to the surface. It's so easy to say that our model behavior should only be limited by the Holy Spirit, but exactly how do we know when the warning signs indicate we've gone far enough? It quickly becomes unsettling when we begin to understand that these words from Paul suggest that we are being called to live our daily lives by faith—faith that the Lord will set whatever limits are necessary at exactly the appropriate time. Paul is urging believers to act and live like the people Jesus has made us to be.

What is this genuine love that Paul is advocating? Love is one of the most overused and misused words in our language. We "love" this and that; we love to do some activity; we love certain delicacies; we love selected people. Human tendency is to put conditions or restrictions on our love. We love something or someone if self-satisfying conditions continue to be met—or nothing else has come along that successfully tempts us to place our love elsewhere. Genuine love is a love without

conditions. When we practice this kind of love, we don't place any restrictions or conditions upon it. It's been portrayed to be like a parent's love for his or her child. The child may disappoint us at times, but our love for that child remains steadfast.

One of the most common abuses of the word "love" occurs when people take their marriage vows. They promise to love one another—until death parts them. But everyone who hears couples taking these vows knows from personal experience that this just isn't true most of the time. Couples fall out of love on a regular basis. Some divorce; some just separate; and some continue to live together in what seems to lapse into a loveless union. Loving someone has nothing to do with sentimentality or the amount of pleasure we derive from that relationship, because every one of us can be almost impossible to love at times. Loving has more to do with commitment—I will love that person no matter what! Loving a lovable person is easy for all of us but loving someone who is acting completely unlovable is another story. Genuine love doesn't make conditions; it simply loves regardless of past or current conditions.

There was a time when Heaven on Earth did exist—in a sense. It was the years when Jesus came to live with humanity as one of us. Throughout His life, Jesus practiced all these attributes that Paul is encouraging us to perform. He loved the people around Him—without putting conditions on that love. He didn't select the easiest people to love to be His disciples. He called simple, common men to follow Him. Some, like Matthew the tax collector, were societal outcasts. But Jesus shared the Father's truth and love with them. Even Judas, who stole money from the common money purse of the disciples, was loved by Jesus. When the crucifixion crowd spit on Him, hurled hurting insults at Him, mocked Him, and laughed as the nails penetrated His flesh—Jesus' love for humanity was not swayed in the least. "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34) was His response to their cruelty.

The truth is that we—on our own—cannot do any of the things that Paul is urging us to do. Yet because we have been redeemed from sin, death, and the devil through Jesus' death on the cross and His resurrection from the dead, we have been made new creations in Christ Jesus (2 Corinthians 5:17). Ultimately, all the effects of Original Sin will be purged from us as we leave this life behind and begin anew in heaven with our Lord. At that time, all these positive qualities that Paul mentions in our text will become natural behavior for us. Sin and all its associates will be nothing more than distant memories in our past—if even that. The time between now and the day we enter heaven is not to be spent just waiting for our travel plans to heaven to arrive. Just as Jesus had a mission to accomplish while He was here among us, so do we. We have a mission that Jesus has given to us. And that mission is to share the Good News of His life, death, and resurrection on everyone's behalf to be made known to every living soul. Everyone needs to know that all this was done for him for her! We do that by proclaiming the salvation message for people to hear and living our lives according to the principals of "Heaven on Earth" spelled out in our text today.