

St. Paul: On The Same page

for 07.27.14 Pentecost 7a

Day One: Deut. 7:6-9

⁶ For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession. ⁷ The LORD did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. ⁸ But it was because the LORD loved you and kept the oath he swore to your forefathers that he brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

July is an especially patriotic month. Now more than at other times we hear people talking about the United States in terms that resemble the Promised Land. And certainly this nation is a unique one in all the history of the world.

Talk about a land “flowing with milk and honey!” We sing songs about the amber waves of grain and majesty of purple mountains. Our homeland is a place of freedom and

prosperity beyond anything that Israel could imagine.

And yet, we have no reason to boast. Just like God’s people, Israel, we were not placed here in this country because we were good – but because God is good.

God did not bless our nation because we were more numerous or more powerful than others. We have been blessed because God is powerful.

He has blessed all the nations of the world with amazing resources, but sin has often turned those gifts into a cause for misery instead of mercy. And our own sin and greed, our substitution of other things in the place of God may yet destroy God’s gifts to us.

We have good reason to be glad about God’s gifts here, but even greater reason to be humble and grateful, and to pray that God keeps us faithful to him.

Prayer: *Dear Father in heaven, we thank you for the gifts you have given us as a people. Lord, give us the greatest gift. Make us a people who bring honor to your name. Amen.*

Day Two: Romans 8:28-39

²⁸ *And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.* ²⁹ *For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.*

We hate being in the dark. We don't like not being in the know. When our children were small, they always wanted to know everything that was going to happen. What will be for lunch? What will be for supper? When will it be ready? Where are we going? When will we get there? And why, why, why, why, why?

Pretty soon we got tired of explaining ourselves all the time, especially about small things. We said, "trust me, you'll like what we're having for lunch." But they still wanted to know.

There are many things we adults do not know, and cannot know. We don't know the cure for cancer, or for hundreds of other illnesses. We don't know the answer to pollution or poverty or the secret to peace. We can never know what others are thinking, or whether what we

see is the same as what others see or hear or taste. We don't know how our own brain works. And even as we think about it we don't know where our thoughts come from.

There is so much we don't know. But we DO know this, "that in all things God works for the good of those who love him."

Of course, like parents with a child, God does not tell us what he is doing. He doesn't explain himself. Sometimes he tells us part, but not the whole. He desires us to trust him – because trust is a sign of love. And when we trust him, then what happens?

When we trust in our Father, then we will see his love through his faithful fulfillment of his promises. We see his good gifts, not ahead of time, but as they unwrap day by day for our blessing, just as each day we saw the gifts our parents placed on the table before us.

Prayer: *Dear Father, I know your plans are good, but sometimes I doubt and struggle. Send me your Spirit. Help me to believe and to rest in your love. Amen.*

Day Three: Rom. 8:31-37

(The epistle continued...)

³¹ *What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us?* ³² *He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things...*

³⁷ *No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.*

Dorothy asked the Cowardly Lion if he would be afraid of a rhinoceros. “Imposeroos!” Or a hippopotamus? “I’d thrash him from top to bottomous!” But what is your answer when you are confronted by enemies like cancer, unemployment, loneliness, anger, even death?

The courage of the Cowardly Lion evaporated in the face of danger because it was built on bluster. It was a courageous covering over a heart of fear. The Lion knew that he did not have the strength to face real enemies, but he covered up his fear with bold words.

We often do the same. We pretend that science, or money, or our fitness routine, or our diet, or our special medication will stave off our enemy. But our body ages regardless of what we do. Our

cells decay, and we fall prey to all of the diseases and injuries that are common to our humanity. And we can do nothing in the face of these things because we are weak.

But Paul’s courage does not come from a false bravado. It does not spring from faith in his own intelligence or strength. It comes from faith in one whom he knows is powerful to overcome.

“If God is for me,” he says. Satan may be against me. The world may oppose me. All of my sins may rise up and accuse me, and I could do nothing. Cancer and Alzheimers and arthritis may assail me, and I am helpless. But if God is for me, if God who created the world is for me, if God who made my body is for me, if God who paid the price for my sin and who purchased for me eternal life – if He is for me then who cares who is against me? Because of him, I am more than a conqueror!

Prayer: *Dear Jesus, captain of my soul, you have beaten all my enemies by your mighty power. Now, comfort and encourage me with your never ending love and mercy. Amen.*

Day Four: Matthew 13:44-52

⁴⁴ *“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.*

⁴⁵ *“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. ⁴⁶ When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.*

People stand in line to bring their things to the Antiques Roadshow. Every week the appraisers appear in a different city and the lines go out the door of folks carrying things they found in their attic or basement. A vase here, an old toy there, a gun, a painting, a piece of china – everyone is hoping to discover that something they thought was worthless is actually a priceless discovery.

And sometimes they do! Many are disappointed. But one lady finds that an old pot that her mother received with a plant might sell for \$15,000. A man finds that his painting of ducks might be worth \$10,000. And everyone who sees their joy hopes to find the same treasure in their trash.

Jesus says that we do have such a treasure, right at our

fingertips. And yet we let it slip through our fingers.

What does the kingdom of heaven look like? It looks like the Body of Christ, a motley group of sinful people, a hodge podge of oddballs, some of whom sing off key. It looks like a church with a pastor whose sermons are sometimes good and sometimes not so good. It looks like an old book written by prophets and apostles, like an hour in worship that we could have spent in bed. It looks like bread and wine and a promise of presence.

Like an old attic treasure, the kingdom of heaven is hidden under layers of dust. But it is a treasure worth all that we are and have. In fact, it is worth far more than we can pay. But someone else has paid the price for us, given up everything for us, and placed it here before us.

People stand in lines to find a treasure among their antiques. What will you do to uncover the treasure that lies before you?

Prayer: *Dear Jesus, thank you for this great treasure. Help me to hold onto it forever. Amen.*