

Devotions for the Week of June 18, Tuesday - Friday

June 20

2 Thessalonians 2:13-3:5

Paul writes to the church at Thessalonica in a personal manner and we can discern from his writing that this young church was dealing with difficulties. There must have been some misunderstandings of practice, for he tells them "...stand firm and hold fast to the traditions that you were taught by us...." Perhaps we hear so much doubt and negativity in our daily life from seemingly endless sources, that we too might falter, might consider simply giving up on faith. The faith journey is not easy today and it was not easy then. There will always be doubters and, to use a social media term, 'haters.' But, we are assured in this faith and by God's grace, that our Savior and Lord is never away from us and has us in his love. We call upon the Lord in our time of need and pray for the hearts of those who doubt, those who challenge, and those who refuse, faith.

June 21

Nehemiah 9:1-8

"...and you found his heart faithful before you...."

Ezra speaks to the Lord of Abraham, whom the Lord chose to be the father of Israel, God's chosen people. The people have just confessed sins, during the high holy days, and are declared righteous. When we confess, do we feel righteous? In the weekly liturgy, we begin with confession and forgiveness and it is in God's forgiveness that God sees us as righteous, and we are so. The high holy days, including Rosh Hashanah, the New Year, relate to the festivals that would celebrate a new beginning with the Lord as another year begins. The cleansing of the heart and soul, by confession, is met with forgiveness, that is the pronouncement of righteousness. This pattern of the faithful continues today in worship and so know this day that, in God's forgiveness following your confession, you are also made righteous.

June 22

Jeremiah 18:12-17

The prophet listens to the word of God and hears God's lament of destruction for Israel if they will not repent of evil. Prior to this passage, God speaks of Godself as a potter. The prophet hears God speak of a potter's first attempt resulting in a failed jar that is then molded back into the form of a new, perfect jar. God's lament is over the hope of forming Israel, sinful and broken, into perfection. God's wrath in the lament over Israel is fearful. In this day, are you fearful of the Lord, or are you fearful of humankind? Fear of the Lord is trust, is faith, is obedience, is love and honor of the Lord. The Lord God shows faith in God's people, for there is hope and lament - that is, God's desire for God's people and God's sadness in God's own consideration of destruction for those who will not repent. We are in a new era - the time of Resurrection - and so we have complete assurance in Christ that God has saved us, forgives our sins, and loves us. Fear of the Lord in Christ is loving trust. The potter will make us anew for the prayerful asking.

June 23

Jeremiah 18:18-23

The priests and leaders do not heed Jeremiah, but instead plot to charge the prophet with blasphemy, with heresy, and essentially to ruin his integrity. Jeremiah then reminds the Lord how he spoke on behalf of this people, but now wishes for God's wrath, a wrath as fearsome as God's lamenting wrath in the previous verses, and then some. As the passage leads into chapter 19, God still does not send immediate wrath, but rather gives further instruction to Jeremiah: telling him to tell the people again of the calamities their sins will visit upon them, but to now do so with the visual addition of a clay jar to be smashed. Jeremiah is in danger of

being charged, in danger of losing his status and livelihood, and the Lord commands him to go at it again, being even more forthright in his demonstration of God's word of wrath. We are challenged as Jeremiah, for as believers we share the Good News of God's grace, found in Jesus Christ, only to be ridiculed in certain settings as zealots. As God sends us forth in our daily routine and as we pray, share our God stories, and offer a call to heed the Lord, we should know that the Lord does send us on what seem to be difficult missions in the world. Reaching out to someone with a call of repentance, a call to stop sinfulness, is a task best committed in faith. Jeremiah responds to God and does exactly what God tells him to do in Chapter 19. Times seem impossible for him, but Jeremiah follows the Lord for his fear and trust of the Lord. The message is delivered, even as raw as it is. This is also our challenge as pastors, as believers, as the Body of Christ: to deliver God's word even when it may be heard with difficulty.

June 24

Ezekiel 29:3-7

A different prophet for this daily reading and we are met with God's word through the prophet that now speak against Pharaoh. God has no lament over Pharaoh as the lesson is read, for there is no leading consideration about these people as God considered Israel in Jeremiah 18. No, here, God is indeed angry with a people who would cause harm, deceit, and even death to God's chosen Israel. The treatment of Israel, the people enslaved, has angered God. God's anger does not reassure us in the same way that God's grace in Christ reassures. Still, there is reassurance even in God's anger for God's people for God speaks of justice for the people who believe in God.

As a believer, ending your work week, possibly planning a short weekend away, know that the Lord our God listens to us, watches over us, and cares for us. In this time after the Resurrection, we trust that God is watching over all the people of the world and even considers God's children who do not fully trust, or who would choose sin over love. We should not assume that God will listen to our prayers to dash our enemies, but rather trust that God will change hearts and direct lives if we but ask in prayer for healing all sinfulness. In Ezekiel we hear the vengeful God ready to wipe out Egypt for their atrocities against the Chosen People; but in this life in the Holy Spirit today, we trust God will love and care for all people so that God's equitable justice may reign. This day, pray for your enemy and ask God for loving forgiveness for all the world.