

Stretching Toward Sunday

Thoughts, readings and reflections
based on this week's lectionary readings

July 27, 2014

Proper 12A/Ordinary 17A/Pentecost +7

The readings this week:

- Genesis 29:15-28 ◦ Psalm 128
- Romans 8:26-39 ◦ Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52



[Click here to read this week's Scriptures](#)

Sighs Too Deep

While on sabbatical, I've had more time than usual for reflection.

This week, I've been thinking about spirit, and about rain.

We Presbyterians are not always comfortable in the realm of the spirit. We prefer words. We often live more in our heads than in our hearts. That is certainly true of me.

But Presbyterians, like everyone else, sometimes experience a spiritual thirst. People search in all sorts of places for things to quench that thirst, to fill up the empty spaces in our souls. "My soul thirsts for God," the Psalmist says.

Similarly, as summer wears on, the earth and its plants thirst for rain in all this heat. I once heard a farmer say that even if he uses a hose to give his garden an inch of water, it doesn't seem to do as much good as 1/10 of an inch of rain. I'm not sure why that's true, but it certainly seems to be so. Just as nothing substitutes for rain, nothing truly quenches our spiritual thirst but the Spirit. As hours are filled with everything from school to work to shopping to just watching TV, we seem to crowd out spiritual void by filling up with other things. That's easier than sitting still and listening for the quiet voice of God.

There is a God shaped vacuum in the heart of every man which cannot be filled by any created thing, but only by God,

wrote Blaise Pascal, French mathematician, 17th century.

There comes a time when everyone finds a dry

spot. When the ground of your faith just will not yield any fruit at all, when it seems there is no water to be found, and so we go looking for anything that will fill that thirst.

Part of Sabbath rest (not sabbatical, per se, but just plain rest) means making space and time for Spirit. The Spirit is what we experience as conscience, or as presence, or as nudging, or as the voice of God.

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. From Romans 8

When words aren't enough or when there are no words, when our own spirits are parched, that is just the time when God's Spirit comes to us.

The Spirit prays for us with sighs too deep for words when we are unable to voice our own emptiness. God cares about what we thirst for—for things to be right with the world, for things to go well for those we love, for things to go well with us. Even when we're unable to form our own words around those needs, the Spirit intervenes for us to be filled with the life-giving waters of God's love and presence. May the Spirit work in you to quench your thirst, to fill you with all the things you need, to bring rain to the parched ground of your soul.



Reflecting on the Word

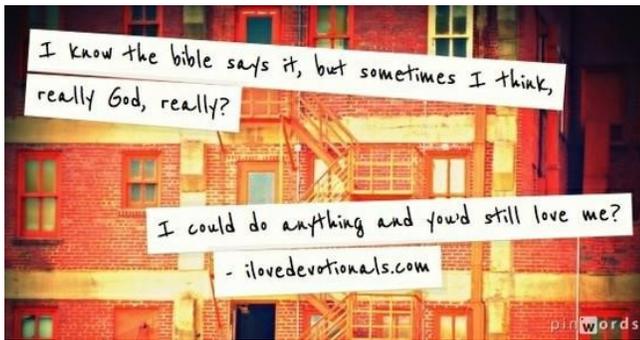


1st Reading: [Genesis 29:15-28](#)

What words would you use to describe the mercy of God? Thank him for each way he has shown mercy to you. Jacob meets his match and means of discipline in Laban. In what way does the latter's trickery repay Jacob for the exploitation of his father's blindness, and how is this situation resolved? A past sin or disobedience to God can leave us with a burden of guilt or failure. How can Jacob's experience renew our confidence in God's grace? Spiritual maturity often comes through suffering. In what difficult situation do you now believe God is working to strengthen your faith and character? [Quiet Time Bible Study, InterVarsity Press](#)

Psalm Reading: [Psalm 128](#)

What is the foundation of God's blessings? List in your own words the blessings of God. Note the different aspects of life that are covered. In what ways can a lack of personal godliness lead a country to ruin? [This Day With God](#)



Praying Toward Sunday

O God, I have tasted Thy goodness, and it has both satisfied me and made me thirsty for more. I am painfully conscious of my need for further grace. I am ashamed of my lack of desire. O God, the Triune God, I want to want Thee; I long to be filled with longing; I thirst to be made more thirsty still. Show me Thy glory, I pray Thee, so that I may know Thee indeed. Begin in mercy a new work of love within me. Say to my soul, 'Rise up my love, my fair one, and come away.' Then give me grace to rise and follow Thee up from this misty lowland where I have wandered so long. ~ A.W. Tozer

3rd Reading: [Romans 8:26-39](#)

Why is it often difficult to feel like a glorious conqueror? What words and vivid images in these verses underscore the difficulties of the present time? How can the Spirit's help encourage us? In verse 28 Paul speaks of "the good" and "his purpose." What is God's good purpose for us? How might trouble, hardship, persecution, famine, nakedness, danger or the threat of death cause us to question God's love for us? In spite of these things, why does Paul proclaim that we are "more than conquerors"? How can eager expectation of glory help us cope with our present problems and sufferings? Look again at the powerful words of these verses. How does this give you courage to persevere? [Quiet Time Bible Study, InterVarsity Press](#)

4th Reading: [Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52](#)

What is the subject of these five parables? What is the basic theme shared by the first two parables: verses 31-33? What do you think that theme would have meant to the first readers of this Gospel in the first century? What does it mean to you today? What is the basic theme shared by the two parables in verses 44-46? What do you think that theme would have meant to the first readers of this Gospel in the first century? What does it mean to you today? How does the parable in verses 47-48 differ from the others? How does this parable reflect the Parable of the Weeds, last week's Gospel (Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43)? If you were to state in one sentence what these parables mean to you, what would you say? [Lutheran Bible Ministries](#)

[nothing]

Based on Romans 8:37-39

[nothing]

not the death
i fear,
or the one
i long for;

[nothing can]

not the life
i sleepwalk through,
or the one
i fantasize about;

[nothing can separate]

not the hubris
that carries me
to the top of Mt. Arrogance,
or the skeptics
who push me
into the Sea of Doubt;

[nothing can separate me]

not the foolish choices
that tripped me up
yesterday,
or the terrors
i imagine
lurking in tomorrow;

nothing can keep us

apart,
God-as-close-as-my-
breath:
nothing
sheol
nada
gehenna
not a thing
not even

me . . .

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