



Daily Devotionals – June 5 to June 11, 2021

By Dr. Charles Qualls and Rev. Steve Gibson -- Franklin Baptist Church

Since we have resumed handing out printed bulletins in Worship as we were doing before the pandemic, we will no longer be sending out the prayer concerns and order of worship via constant contact on Fridays.

There are three ways you can access the weekly bulletin along with church notes: 1) either in person on Sundays during worship, 2) on the church's website under the Sermons/Bulletins/Devotionals tab or 3) on the church's Facebook page each week.

Faithfully,

Dr. Charles Qualls, Pastor

June 5 - Psalm 8 by Rev. Steven R. Gibson *Divine Majesty and Human Dignity*

1 O Lord, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens. 2 Out of the mouths of babes and infants you have founded a bulwark because of your foes, to silence the enemy and the avenger. 3 When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established; 4 what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them? 5 Yet you have made them a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honor. 6 You have given them dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under their feet, 7 all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, 8 the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the seas. 9 O Lord, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

Devotion:

Have you ever went outside and lay down on the grass and gazed upon the night sky? Oh, the wonders that are in the sky! When we look at the night sky, we can feel pretty insignificant, but the story does not end there! Psalm 8 begins and ends with praise to God, "O Lord, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth!" (Psalm 8: 1; 9)

Following the opening acclamation of praise to God, the writer abruptly moves to the condition of people. It was as if this was the first time that people had glanced and gazed into the creation. The result is the profound amazement that such an all-powerful God would even dare be concerned about his creation.

What follows is a juxtaposition between God and God's people.

- + God's glory is above the heavens and yet is concerned with babes and infants.
- + God created the heavens, the moon and the stars and yet God cares for humans and mortals.
- + God created humans a little lower than God, crowned them with glory and honor, and yet has given them dominion over all the earth and all the creatures of the earth.

Walter Brueggeman suggests that verse four is both the center of the Psalm and also serves to hold boundaries and the center together: "What are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them."

Several thoughts stem from this Psalm:

- 1) God is both creator of all and yet, is still concerned with people.
- 2) God's sovereignty cannot be understood separately from the knowledge that God chooses to care for people.
- 3) The identity of humanity cannot be understood without this relationship with God.
- 4) Psalm 8 suggests that people are God's custodians in the world, in effect, people serve as God's representatives in the world.
- 5) God and people are partners in the care of creation.
- 6) God has made the hazardous choice to share God's power.
- 7) Because God created people in the image of God indicates that we will suffer.
- 8) Being God's people allows us to experience both glory and suffering.

There are many additional thoughts to gleam from this Psalm -- I welcome you to share your discoveries with me.

Prayer:

God over all, yet right beside us, we marvel at your power over all creation. Despite your masterful creation, you still love us in spite of our frailties and failures. O Lord, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth. Amen.

June 6 - John 14:15-17

by Dr. Charles Qualls

The Promise of the Holy Spirit

15 "If you love me, you will keep my commandments. 16 And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. 17 This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.

Devotion:

You've lived one or two of the following situations yourself. You've been one or many of the players in these stories. Right?

- The teenage child pleads with his parents, "I know I've played the instrument since 4th grade. But I've gone as far as I can with it and now I want to switch to singing. If you love me, just trust my judgment on something once."
- The husband says to his in-laws, "I know that our decision about her healthcare affects you, too. But if you love me...don't make this decision any harder on me than it already has been. The doctors have done all they can, and I've come to trust them. It's time for Hospice."

- The friend says, "I know my career change is going to catch you off-guard. But I've made this decision with my eyes wide open. If you love me, just support me as I do what I think I've got to do."

Without all the blanks filled in -- without all our questions answered -- we either decided to indeed love and support. Or, we decided they needed us to buck their request and in effect not trust them.

Jesus' "Farewell Discourse" began in John 14 and went into chapter 17. There was still much to do and say. Our Lord would not just end up on the Cross tomorrow. But here, he was at least trying to prepare his closest followers for a time when his readiness to be sacrificed would affect their lives dramatically.

So we should probably take seriously what he said to them here. Logic, if nothing else, should make a compelling case that these lines we visit today in John 14 might be central to what it is to be a Christian. Jesus was laying down priorities. Final things.

"If you love me, you will keep my commandments."

There it is. Simple, at least to read and hear. A little more complicated to follow. Maybe because even though Jesus laid it right out there -- like the parent, family member or friend -- we don't really trust him. We trust our own judgment more.

What if keeping Jesus' commandments was paramount to us? And what are those commandments? ***"Thou shalt love the Lord, thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. And the second is like unto it, thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself."***

But we respond:

- *Nah...Jesus doesn't know as well as I do.*
- *That won't work in the real world. Today.*
- *He trusts people more than I do.*
- *That's so naive.*
- *If I do that, I'll lose.*

And we don't even see the Holy Spirit coming as we read Jesus' words. Yet keeping these commandments may have been the biggest reason we were given that helper -- God in that third person. Still, even with the Spirit, I have to ask...do we trust God in Christ?

Prayer:

Lord of our living, what if we did trust you? What if you did know better than we, and not just for our own living but were worthy to guide others as well? What might that be like? Amen.

June 7 - Matthew 28:16-20

by Dr. Charles Qualls

God the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit

16 Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. 17 When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. 18 And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, lo I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Devotion:

One of my home church pastors' favorite jokes comes from this very passage. You see, he refused to fly on an airplane. To the day he died, he limited some of the bigger convention, conference and mission opportunities

he had because he simply would not fly. If he had somewhere to go that seemed far away to many of us, he still preferred to take a long car trip to get there.

One day I overheard one of our other ministers ask him why he wouldn't fly. "Well," he responded. "Jesus said...Lo I am with you always, to the end of the age. He didn't say anything about up high." We all laughed at what a good sport he was, and at how witty his answer was.

Jesus commissioned the disciples on this day in Matthew 28. This was their assignment for an age when he would no longer be with them. Their commission was a large one. The pages of Acts chronicle for us many of the extreme efforts and sacrifices they put in to being faithful to carry this out.

Our assignment from Jesus, in the form of the 2 commandments we mentioned just yesterday, is not all that unlike theirs. Notice that Jesus says he has been given "All authority on heaven and on earth." This is how he wants to use it. He wants to send us out to represent the very best of him.

That will take the very best of ourselves to do. As we hope the quarantine phase of the global pandemic might be winding down, how have you used the time? Have you tried to rest up? Heal up? Get to know yourself better? Learn something new? Find creative ways to reach beyond your needs and help others?

Jesus calls us to live lives that preach the sermon of our faith. We're about to be able to get back out and be around other people. We have the Holy Spirit to shape and guide us. Why not give it a try? Try thinking of yourself -- not as the one to shape everybody else up -- but instead as one to love God with all you have. And to love others at least as much as you do yourself. Because that's what Jesus told us to do.

Prayer:

Lord, only you are able to remake me as a faithful vessel of your love. Today, please make me one day better at that than I was yesterday. Amen.

June 8 - Psalm 29

by Dr. Charles Qualls

The Voice of God in a Great Storm

1 Ascribe to the Lord, O heavenly beings, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength. 2 Ascribe to the Lord the glory of his name; worship the Lord in holy splendor. 3 The voice of the Lord is over the waters; the God of glory thunders, the Lord, over mighty waters.

4 The voice of the Lord is powerful; the voice of the Lord is full of majesty. 5 The voice of the Lord breaks the cedars; the Lord breaks the cedars of Lebanon. 6 He makes Lebanon skip like a calf, and Sirion like a young wild ox. 7 The voice of the Lord flashes forth flames of fire. 8 The voice of the Lord shakes the wilderness; the Lord shakes the wilderness of Kadesh. 9 The voice of the Lord causes the oaks to whirl, and strips the forest bare; and in his temple all say, "Glory!" 10 The Lord sits enthroned over the flood; the Lord sits enthroned as king forever. 11 May the Lord give strength to his people! May the Lord bless his people with peace!

Devotion:

There is a lot of power going on here. As we read these verses, the language dances with an energy that is compelling. But it is so disguised as nice-sounding poetry that we'll have to pick through it all a little to discover the power. Buckle up; it'll be worth the ride.

This psalm explores its writer's observations of God's strength and grandeur. By the way, the psalm itself is attributed to a guy with not a small amount of his own personal power: David. But this writer feels as though he needs to attest to God's "otherness" by offering this worship song or reading. God's strength and glory are the unabashed subject matters. "Glory" being one indicator.

This word is used some 148 times in the Old Testament alone. That essence of God's whole self, worthy to lift up and exalt as above and different from others, including of course mere mortals. One writer feels as though the meaning of glory may have evolved in the Old Testament, moving from praise for God to eventually being a quality or substance of God's presence. "The glory of the Lord," for example, was seen as residing inside the Ark of the Covenant. Interesting to ponder.

God's strength, on the other hand, may be the chief reason among several reasons for this glory. You have to recall that "water" in all its violent and threatening forms always were a formidable opponent in Old Testament literature. So, (follow me here) a God who has power over this power was a staggering word picture. Look at v3-4. Read them aloud, and recall that the God who "spoke" Creation into being is now a mighty "voice" that has power over the waters themselves. God's voice "thunders" -- itself a weather-related phenomenon that has power over storms. That is both ironic and convincing.

Next, God's voice also has the power of a mighty wind. The Cedars of Lebanon, these strong and majestic trees whose wood was one of the most valued commodities in all of the ancient near-East, could be twisted and broken by the voice of God (v5). The winds of God could make tree-tops dance from Lebanon to Sirion (v6). I think of my days on our family farm, when a young calf would get to "feeling its oats" and begin to practically dance in circles, kicking its legs into the air! That seems to be the idea in verse 6 as to how the mighty trees could dance in the presence of God.

Next, we have God as a fire, then perhaps as an earthquake and finally back to something that sounds like a tornado (in verse 9).

You may not measure your world, in today's sophisticated and high-tech civilization, in terms of these same forces. They may have spoken more vividly to an ancient audience. But we get the idea that this same, powerful God is the one on whom we can call when our lives are uneasy and we need the reassurance that there is strength available.

Prayer:

Lord, we may measure strength and power in other ways these days. But when we need to call upon you, may we have a similar belief in your ability to be what no one, nor anything else, can be for us. Amen.

June 9 - 1 Corinthians 12:4-13

by Dr. Charles Qualls

There will be diversity among Christians

4 Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; 5 and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; 6 and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. 7 To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. 8 To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, 9 to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, 10 to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. 11 All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.

One Body with Many Members

12 For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. 13 For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body -- Jews or Greeks, slaves or free -- and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

Devotion:

We're just not all alike.

That much would seem obvious and unnecessary to say. Except that in the days we're living, at its core we are now experiencing unrest because of our differences. Differences that have been at times mishandled have robbed us of being all we could be as a nation and as a world.

Humans have a long history of not handling "difference" as well as we could. Wars have been started in part because of differences. Sometimes harmful words are far flung in response to difference, and we've all known the sting of silence among family and friends because a fractious difference surfaced. Injustice is begun, and perpetuated, in part due to perceptions of difference.

The Church has in its long history a pattern of also reacting poorly, at times, to perceived differences. You'll notice that I use a capital 'C' as I say the word Church. That always indicates the larger history of God's gathered, of which our local congregation is one brief part.

The apostle Paul named this for the Corinthian church now in this letter. In this letter, imagine if you will that he is holding up a mirror to this congregation. He makes some key observations that they need to see as he sees. We are gifted in different ways and we are drawn to different expressions of faith. Different convictions. But, we are all given the Spirit "for the common good."

In any church (notice I now use a little 'c'), our local challenge is to come together in our diversity and yet minister as one body. There are times for you -- or me -- that we relate to God individually as "just God and me." But any time we are "the church," we are to pull together in the Spirit. For God has much for us to do. We'll only be our best as we manage to contribute from our diverse gifts toward the task of the moment that we share.

Prayer:

Lord, we ask you not to make us all alike. That would rob us of our variety and strength. But in our diversity, help us to be one body. Ever remind us of the richness a gifted church holds in your service. Amen.

June 10 - John 14:25-26

by Rev. Steven R. Gibson

The Promise of the Holy Spirit

25 "I have said these things to you while I am still with you. 26 But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you.

Devotion:

Have you ever engaged a babysitter for an evening? Have you ever entrusted your child(ren) with a friend or relative? Feelings of relief because a sitter was secured become mixed with almost a panicked thought -- did I tell them everything that they needed to know?

If your answer is yes, then you have a hint of what Jesus was saying and probably feeling in his final discourse (John 14-17). Jesus knew that his time on earth was limited and wanted to share detailed instructions with his disciples before he departed.

John 14 is a chapter of comfort and as such is often used in Christian funerals. The loved one who is remembered and those who attend the service are comforted with the same words.

Jesus acknowledges that he will soon leave them, but don't worry because I will send the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, to teach you and remind you of my teachings. Jesus even indicates that this Advocate will be sent by God the Father in my name.

We have in this short passage the inner workings of the Trinity -- Father, Son and Holy Spirit all working in unity for the benefit of people.

We would do well to remember that God in three persons seeks to empower and instruct us, even when we feel like we have lost our way. Even in the dreariest of moments, God is with us. When we stumble and fall, God is with us. In our darkest time, we are not alone, because God is with us.

I realize that many feel helpless and hopeless during our pandemic. We miss the fellowship of others - our families, friends and loved ones. What can God teach us through our current situation?

- 1) We need to remember that no matter the circumstance, God is with us to love and support us.
- 2) We need to learn (or relearn) to rely on God for our needs.
- 3) We need to draw closer to God in prayer, meditation and Scripture study.
- 4) We need to increase our prayer life and learn to listen to what God is saying to us.
- 5) We need to intentionally admire nature and the fullness of God's creation.
- 6) We need to remember the way that our lives were before the pandemic and be able to adapt.
- 7) We need to be able to dream about what life might look like beyond the pandemic.

In the final analysis, we need to **trust God!** Just as we had to trust our babysitter to take care of our child(ren), we now need to trust God for the needs that we have.

Remember the words of Jesus - But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. (John 14:26)

Prayer:

Faithful God, our sure provider and constant Advocate, help us to believe your promise that you will never forsake or leave us. Please continue to lead us today, and in the days to come. Amen.

June 11 - Hebrews 3:1-6

by Rev. Steven R. Gibson

Moses a Servant, Christ a Son

3 Therefore, brothers and sisters, holy partners in a heavenly calling, consider that Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession, 2 was faithful to the one who appointed him, just as Moses also "was faithful in all God's house." 3 Yet Jesus is worthy of more glory than Moses, just as the builder of a house has more honor than the house itself. 4 (For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God.) 5 Now Moses was faithful in all God's house as a servant, to testify to the things that would be spoken later. 6 Christ, however, was faithful over God's house as a son, and we are his house if we hold firm the confidence and the pride that belong to hope.

Devotion:

This portion of scripture contrasts Moses and Jesus. It helps us understand the importance of Moses and how Moses assists us in our understanding of the uniqueness of Jesus. Moses was faithful in all of the responsibilities given to him from God. (Exodus 40:16 "Moses did everything just as the Lord commanded him.") Yet the writer, after praising Moses, suggests that Jesus is deserving of more glory because he is the builder of the house. Even as important as Moses was, Moses could only point to the coming of Jesus. So the comparison between Moses and Christ is most striking. Jesus Christ was faithful to his heavenly Father and is also faithful to his followers today.

The section begins with a call to holy partners, imploring brothers and sisters to hold fast to their confession. The readers have already been called brothers and sisters (2:11-12; 17), have been called sanctified (2:11) and partners in Christ (2:14), but now are called partners. Holy partners are encouraged to remember the example of Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession. (This is the only time in the New Testament that Jesus was referred to as apostle.) Jesus was faithful to God who appointed him and was faithful over God's house.

In the book of Hebrews, Jesus is referred to as the high priest of those who believe. What qualifies Jesus as high priest? Jesus was uniquely qualified to be high priest because he was both human and divine. Because he knew both God and humanity, he could speak to humanity for God and intercede to God for humanity. We know that as High Priest, Jesus sacrificed himself for sin, and by doing such, accomplished salvation for all who would receive it.

Fred Craddock has written that God used many messengers throughout time, but Jesus alone is apostle and high priest of "our confession". While the exact meaning of "our confession" remains nebulous, this confession might point to a liturgical occasion, such as the celebration of baptism or the Eucharist.

The singular attribute of Jesus as apostle and high priest is because of his faithfulness to God. We are reminded that every house has a builder, but God alone is the builder of the universe. The statement in verse 6, "we are his house" is intended to hold our attention, and not to lose our focus on our inclusion in his house.

In this passage, the superiority of Christ has been established and we arrive at Christ the faithful Son. Because Christ is God's Son, we are able to become a part of his house if we hold firm to the confidence and the pride that belong to that hope.

What does this passage say to us in the pandemic of 2020?

- 1) Even in adverse situations, God provides a way out (salvation).
- 2) We draw strength from following the example of Jesus, who remained faithful to his calling (our faithful high Priest).
- 3) Our faith comes from God and God expects us to be faithful (like both Moses and Jesus).
- 4) When in doubt, meditate and pray (Jesus often went off alone to pray).
- 5) In light of the situation with George Floyd, what are we to do? (This is the most challenging question on the list. Just as we believe that God created us in his image, and we believe that all life is sacred, then the natural conclusion is that George Floyd was also a child of God. If George Floyd is a child of God, and if I am a child of God, then we are related by adoption into God's family. And if we are related, then our relationship changes – family loves and lives together. Family desires only the best for each other and family works together. May God use us to become instruments of God's peace for all humanity.)

Prayer:

Holy God, you have spoken to us throughout history. Your instructions remain clear, but we often fail to keep them. Please shepherd us in your way. Amen.