

Third Sunday after Pentecost

June 26, 2022

Faith, Okemos

I Kings 19:15-16, 19-21, Psalm 16, Galatians 5:1, 13-25, Luke 9:51-62

Matters of the Heart

Please pray with me aloud or in your heart our Prayer of the Day:

Sovereign God, ruler of all hearts, you call us to obey you, and you favor us with true freedom. Keep us faithful to the ways of your Son, that, leaving behind all that hinders us, we may steadfastly follow your paths, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

I will bless the Lord who gives me counsel; my heart teaches me night after night. I have set the Lord always before me; because God is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken. My heart, therefore, is glad, and my spirit rejoices; my body also shall rest in hope... You will show me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy, and in your right hand are pleasures forevermore. Psalm 16:7-9. 11

I think I inherited it. Typically, I'll wake up one or two times during the night, often from dreams, sometimes disturbing, sometimes pleasant, always bizarre. My dad was like that, waking up at 3:00 in the morning, lying on the couch, reading. Often when I go to bed, I'll recite an ancient evening prayer: *I give thanks to you, heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ your dear Son, that you have graciously protected me today. I ask you to forgive me all my sins, where I have done wrong, and graciously protect me tonight. Into your hands I commend myself: my body, my soul, and all that is mine. Let your holy angel be with me, so that the wicked foe may have no power over me. Amen.*

Sharing the disturbing aspects of those dreams with a friend this past week, he suggested beginning with words asking God to totally fill me during the night. And revisiting Martin Luther's Small Catechism I found these instructions: *In the evening, when you go to bed, you are to make the sign of the holy cross and say "God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit watch over me. Amen." Then, kneeling or standing, say the Apostles' Creed and the Lord's Prayer.*

Following these prayers for protection, Luther writes, "Then you are to go to sleep quickly and cheerfully." ☺ ELW, page 1167

So this week I was drawn especially to the words of the Psalm: *my heart teaches me night after night*, and the opening words of today's prayer: *Sovereign God, ruler of all hearts...*

I've been thinking about the "wicked foe" in relation especially to those disturbing dreams. I think about the question I will ask Granger's parents and sponsors: "Do you renounce the devil and all the forces that defy God?" To which I hope they will answer, "I renounce them."

Believing that God truly is sovereign, the [ultimate] ruler of all hearts, I believe that God allows Satan to wreak some havoc in my troubling dreams, those where I have lost my way and nothing in the landscape is familiar. But this sovereign God also awakens me with the assurance that I am in fact not lost, that Jesus holds me securely in his hands.

I wonder if my nighttime experience is not all that uncommon. I wonder if you have experiences akin to mine. Who of us is not troubled, whether by day or by night, by so much in our world that is corrupt. It is not difficult to see abundant examples of the self-centeredness, of the self-indulgence of which Paul speaks in our Second Reading from Galatians 5: of enmity, strife, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, and envy. I found profound the two House Select Hearings this past examining the dark events leading up to and following the January 6 insurrection. I listened to the intense polar opposite reactions to the overturning of Roe v. Wade on Friday.

Paul's words to the little church in Galatia are so timeless, so needed to be spoken today: *The whole law is summed up in a single commandment, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." If, however, you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another...I am warning you, as I warned you before: those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.*

But hear the gospel: Because Jesus "set his face to go to Jerusalem" where he knew would suffer and die for all the world, for every child and man and woman in this country and throughout the entire world, because he was crucified and buried and rose again, everyone is precious, everyone matters, everyone is loved. Everyone, including those we find so easy to hate.

Because Jesus died and rose again for Granger and Garret and Grayson, and for his mom and dad, Katie and Cody, and for everyone of us; because through Holy Baptism all of us are publically and eternally held and protected by Jesus in all our experiences of dying and of being raised up again, our hearts, in the words of the psalmist, are made glad, our spirits rejoice, and our bodies rest in hope.

No matter how corrupt and deeply divided our world has become, no matter how disturbing our dreams, no matter how stressed and worried we may be about what the future looks like for little ones like Granger and his siblings, the gospel, the good news, is that the Father, his Son, and the Holy Spirit are and always will be with us, with these little ones.

The job assignments for Cody and Katie and for all of us is to pray often for these little ones, and again in the words of Paul to be “led by the Spirit” in raising them, in due time teaching them the 10 commandments, the Apostles’ Creed, and the Lord’s Prayer.

Following Jesus means that in the face of hatred and words and acts of violence, we commit every day to pray for the fruit of the Holy Spirit to be lived out in our hearts and in all that we do. Following Jesus means never tiring of these nine words: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

None of us can honestly claim to embody all these words all the time. But Jesus’ death and resurrection means that God, for Jesus’ sake, forgives us, over and over. And the Holy Spirit, usually one little step at a time, enables us increasingly to bear this nine-fold fruit.

May God today and forever bless the heart of Granger. And in this world, these days so fractured, may all of us live by the Spirit and by the Spirit be guided to nine-fold acts of love for our neighbors.

When I go to bed tonight, I intend to recite the Apostles’ Creed and the Lord’s Prayer, and words like the ancient prayer I shared with you this morning. And at least tonight, these opening and closing words from Psalm 16: *Protect me, O God, for I take refuge in you... You will show me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy, and in your right hand are pleasures forevermore.*

Then, God willing, I will heed Martin Luther’s instruction: “Then you are to go to sleep quickly and cheerfully.”

Amen.

JDS