THE LIVING WORD OF PENTECOST

A DEVOTIONAL GUIDE AUGUST 14 - AUGUST 20

SEASON AFTER PENTECOST

Proper 15

We have two recurring images for our lectionary texts this week: judgment and a vineyard. Our first passage from Isaiah 2:5-11 mixes images of God's judgment with a future vision of peace and prosperity. This passage includes the well-known image of swords being beaten into plowshares—an encouraging promise in a world so full of violence.

Our Isaiah passages this week focus on God's people facing judgment because of their sin and corruption. The rich and mighty will be brought low, arrogant people will be humbled, and the people will experience disaster. Isaiah 5 presents a striking image of a barren vineyard, which represents God's people. The chapter shows God lovingly tending them and preparing them, yet they only produce a lack of justice and righteousness. Because of this, God destroys the vineyard He had so carefully tended, foreigners will invade the land, and the vineyard will be destroyed.

What do we do with passages that pronounce God's judgment? They aren't much fun to read and, to our modern ears, they strike us as harsh. Sometimes we can read Old Testament passages and wonder if this is the same loving God we encounter in the New Testament. And yet, we know that God is the same in both the past and the future. Our Isaiah passages remind us that God has a deep concern for injustice, for the rich taking advantage of the poor, and for His people disregarding His laws.

Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter.

In the midst of all of these images of destruction we jump ahead to Isaiah 27, which presents a picture of the day when everything will be made right.

God will destroy the evil and the injustice that continually plague our world. These are the images that can comfort us when we think of so many things that have gone wrong.

We also have another vineyard image this week in Psalm 80. Though the lectionary tends to pick and choose a couple of verses from the chapter, this psalm continues the image of God tending a vineyard that represents His people. Though the psalm presents an image of a vineyard that has been destroyed, ravaged by outsiders, and picked over, it also includes a cry to God for restoration. God is not far from us, even when we are experiencing dire consequences as a result of our own choices and decisions.

Hebrews 10 also references God's future judgment and agrees with our passages this week that also include promises that God will keep us close, even when we experience suffering, and that our faith will be rewarded.

This week, we read the story of Jesus clearing the temple, another story of judgment on those who were taking advantage of others and disrespecting God. There are two passages referencing prophets: one about the false prophets that are in the world and who do not acknowledge Jesus (1 John 4:1-6) and another about God's people persecuting true prophets (Acts 7:44-53).

Despite such bleak passages, Psalm 74 is a reminder that God listens when we cry out for help. We, too, can have the confidence of the psalmist and say: "But God is my King from long ago; He brings salvation on the earth."

FOR PRAYER & REFLECTION

Jesus says, "I came to bring fire to the earth—and how I wish it were already kindled" (Luke 12:49). These are not gentle words! But they are full of love.

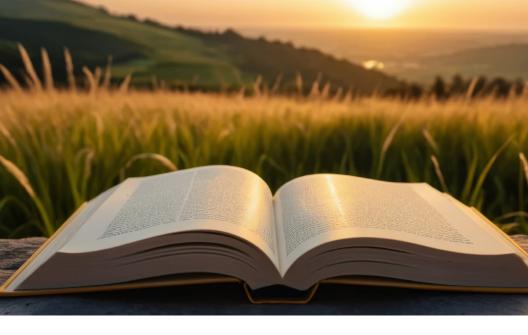
The fire He speaks of is not for destruction—it's the fire of God's cleansing presence, the fire that refines, that makes all things new. It burns away false peace and comfortable illusions. It clears space for justice, for mercy, for the kingdom to come.

Psalm 80 is a cry from scorched ground: "Restore us, O God ... let your face shine, that we may be saved." The psalmist remembers a time when God's people flourished like a vine, but now the vineyard lies in ruins. Still, hope rises. Not because of our strength, but because of God's face—His shining, saving presence.

Psalm 82 takes us into the heart of God's justice. He stands among the mighty and asks: "How long will you defend the unjust?" It's a hard word, but a hopeful one. God does not abandon the poor or ignore the cries of the oppressed. He brings judgment that sets things right. He expects the same from us.

Put together, these texts form a holy discomfort. Jesus brings fire. The psalmist begs for mercy. God calls out injustice. And somehow, all of it is love. Love that burns in order to heal. Love that unsettles us in order to plant us deeper.

So we pray: Lord, let your fire come. Burn away what will not last. Let your face shine on us—especially where we're tired, tangled, or afraid. Judge with mercy. Restore your vine. Teach us to live in light of your justice and the warmth of your love. Amen.



SCRIPTURE

READINGS FOR THE WEEK

Thursday

Psalm 80:1-2, 8-19; Isaiah 2:5-11; Hebrews 10:26-31

Friday

Psalm 80:1-2, 8-19; Isaiah 3:1-17; Hebrews 10:32-39

Saturday

Psalm 80:1-2, 8-19; Isaiah 3:18-4:6; Matthew 24:15-27

Sunday

Psalm 80:1-2, 8-19; Isaiah 5:1-7; Jeremiah 23:23-29 Psalm 82; Hebrews 11:29-12:2; Luke 12:49-56

Monday

Psalm 74; Isaiah 5:8-23; 1 John 4:1-6

Tuesday

Psalm 74: Isaiah 5:24-30: Acts 7:44-53

Wednesday

Psalm 74; Isaiah 27:1-13; Luke 19:45-48

Why do the daily readings begin on Thursday?

The daily readings for each week begin on Thursday and end on the following Wednesday. The Thursday through Saturday readings prepare the reader for the Sunday ahead. The Monday through Wednesday readings reflect on what was presented on Sunday.

The Morning Liturgy

Opening Scripture

The hour comes, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for the Father seeks such to worship Him.

Opening Prayer (based on Psalm 51)

Open my lips, O Lord, and my mouth shall proclaim Your praise. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from Your presence, and take not Your Holy Spirit from me. Give me the joy of Your saving help again and sustain me with Your bountiful Spirit. Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit: as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. *Amen*.

Scripture Reading (read Psalm and Gospel text here)

Period of Silence

Confessing Our Faith (Apostles' Creed)

The Lord's Prayer

The Collect (Proper 15)

Almighty God, You have given Your only Son to be for us a sacrifice for sin, and also an example of godly life: Give us grace to receive thankfully the fruits of this redeeming work, and to follow daily in the blessed steps of His most holy life; through Jesus Christ Your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

A Midday Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, You said to Your apostles, "Peace I give to you; my own peace I leave with you:" Regard not our sins, but the faith of Your Church, and give to us the peace and unity of that heavenly City, where with the Father and the Holy Spirit You live and reign, now and forever.

Amen.

An Early Evening Prayer

Lord Jesus, stay with us, for evening is at hand and the day is past; be our companion in the way, kindle our hearts, and awaken hope, that we may know You as You are revealed in Scripture and the breaking of bread. Grant this for the sake of Your love. *Amen*.

A Bedtime Confession and Prayer

Almighty and most merciful Father, we have erred and strayed from thy ways like lost sheep, we have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts, we have offended against thy holy laws, we have left undone those things which we ought to have done, and we have done those things which we ought not to have done. But thou, O Lord, have mercy upon us, spare thou those who confess their faults, restore thou those who are penitent, according to thy promises declared unto mankind in Christ Jesus our Lord; and grant, O most merciful Father, for His sake, that we may hereafter live a godly, righteous, and sober life, to the glory of thy holy Name.

Amen.

Visit this place, O Lord, and drive far from it all snares of the enemy; let Your holy angels dwell with us to preserve us in peace; and let Your blessing be upon us always; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

