



Taste and See...

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A Calendar of Healing _____

Rev. Dr. Donald P. Richmond

It is the disposition and decision of God to heal. It is who God is. It is what God does. Followers of Jesus Christ simply *continue* “all that Jesus began to do and teach” (Acts 1:1). We are all, broadly speaking, stewards of God’s healing mercy (Matt. 4:23 and Acts 1:1) and, as “Ambassadors of Reconciliation,” we must all strive to *continue* Christ’s cathartic charism.

But it is also clear that, while this

is God’s ultimate intention, there are times and seasons that are more appropriate to healing. That is, while the Bible tells us that “now is the acceptable time” (2Cor. 6:2), there are times when the Holy Spirit is especially with us to heal (Luke 5:17). And there are also times when, although God still desires to heal, the Spirit isn’t especially moving in that direction at that time (Matt. 15:38). Put in a more positive light, there are seasons when God and circumstances converge in order to make observable healing more possible. Let me provide one personal example.

When I was a child, I was often sick. As this continued for some years, my mother eventually scraped enough money to-

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CALENDAR, continued

gether for me to be able to see a physician. Seeing me, the physician immediately said that I needed an operation. This was difficult. As a single parent with minimal income, my mother could barely afford a doctor. A hospital visit and operation were out of the question. Hearing this, my mother immediately took me from the physician to the priest of our local parish. Blessing my throat, I was miraculously healed. It was February 3, the Feast of Saint Blaise. Saint Blaise, within the Roman Catholic Tradition, is the healer of throats - and my throat was at the root of my ongoing illnesses. God certainly wanted to heal. God intended to heal. But it was specifically on this day, this particular saint's calendar day, that observable healing actually occurred.

This does not at all mean that we should not pray at all times, and under all conditions. We must always pray and turn to God for God's many graces. But there are times when God is more obvious in and through our prayers. The Anglican Church observes Feasts, Fasts, Seasons and Calendars. Those who are interested in communicating God's healing, most especially those who have the charism of healing, should attend to the various Seasons that the Church observes in order to more fully participate in the activities of God on our behalf.

Several seasonal illustrations might be helpful:

During *Advent and Christmas*, we might pray (among other prayers) for God's incarnate presence to be communicated to the person asking for prayer. God has sent Jesus Christ into the stable of our needs and has spoken His word of peace and goodwill.

Similarly, during *Lent*, we can especially ask God to reveal God's companionship and compassionate presence in each person's pilgrimage of pain and suffering. God is in our every wilderness experience!

As well, during *Easter*, we might ask that Christ's resurrection life be communicated to the person in need, also remembering that Christ's resurrection life is often experienced in the communion of Christ's suffering. Healing prayer in some way partakes of and participates in Christ's resurrected and ascended life.

During *Pentecost*, we might ask that the fire of God consume the person's pain and suffering and empower the supplicant to new life and new living. And, when we do not physically see any change, with Saint Bonaventure we should, "ask not for understanding, [but] ask for the Fire." God is present with power, with compassionate purpose, even when we do not see the changes we would like to see.

During the *Transfiguration* we can capitalize upon God's transfiguring ability, God's transcendent authority to radically heal, even when (as with the Apostles after the Transfiguration) we

must descend back into real life with real people who have real problems - and with whom, unless we are fasting and praying, we are at a real loss.

During *Ordinary Time*, because we serve the Extraordinary God, we must pray for people to see and know and experience God's intervention in their most extraordinary ordinary lives. With the late Dr. Francis A. Schaeffer, we can boldly assert that there are "no little people" and that there are "no little places." God always acts! God, in some way, always answers.

Although God is always The Healer, and ultimately desires to heal, Seasons, Sacraments, Feasts and Fasts sometimes facilitate greater opportunities for God's greater movements. Let us *at all times* seize God's ongoing Seasons of healing grace.

For reflection: What is your favorite Season of the Church Calendar, and what does this Season communicate to you about God's heart of healing? Have you ever taken the time to reflect upon and pray about the Seasons of the Church Year as opportunities for more perfectly accessing God's ongoing healing graces?

The Rev. Dr. Donald P. Richmond, a widely published author and illustrator, is a retired Anglican priest. This article is an excerpt from his longer work, "Restore Thou Those."

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From the Editor

Alison Stortz

Some years, the seasons flow smoothly into one another – but not this year, at least not where I am, just outside of Ottawa. Spring is sort of here; leaves are beginning to sprout on the trees, but it's still chilly and many spring flowers have yet to bloom. At this point, summer isn't even visible as a dot on the horizon.

Unseasonable weather aside, according to the church calendar we're moving from Eastertide, which ends with the celebration of Pentecost, into Ordinary Time which, thanks to Pentecost, is anything but ordinary!

The colour of Ordinary Time is green – a fitting colour for summer. Kermit the Frog once sang, "it's not easy, being green... but it's beautiful, and it's what I want to be." In this issue we have opportunities to consider "seasons" as they relate to the calendar, and to our lives – beginnings and endings, ups and downs, but always thoroughly infused with the fire of God's unending and life-giving love for us, ignited by his Holy Spirit.

In this issue, we come to the end of our reflections on Psalm 119, and we have the pleasure of welcoming a new ARM board member to our group – Rev. Tony Hilling.

Whether it feels like summer or not, I pray that the season ahead will be one of refreshment and revival for us all. Come, Holy Spirit, Come!

Happy Summer! I look forward to hearing from you.

Alison ☺

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A Tough Lesson

Rev. Paul Orritt

How many of you remember Gracie Allen, who played the scatterbrained wife of George Burns' straight man? You can still view some of the skits they played out before live audiences on You Tube. In one such skit, Gracie called in a repairman to fix her electric clock. The repairman fiddled with it for a while and then said, "There's nothing wrong with the clock; you didn't have it plugged in." Gracie replied, "I don't want to waste electricity, so I only plug it in when I want to know what time it is."

King Duncan in his *Collected Sermons* says, "that's an apt description of many of us. We save our religion for a rainy day. We go about unplugged and wonder why our lives are so devoid of power. How sad. Christian faith is not something to be plugged in when it is convenient or when it is necessary. The Christian life is lived daily. There is a cost involved."

When I was an adolescent, my dad taught me that I would appreciate something all the more for working for it. I really didn't believe him, and thought it was simply a ploy that got him off the

hook - the adolescent mentality must be passed down from generation to generation.

I remember vividly once wanting a motorcycle. Actually, it was more of a large "mo-ped," a motorized bicycle defined by limits on engine displacement, speed, by a requirement for pedals, etc. Whatever it was, I thought it had "me" written all over it.



I could imagine myself on that bike; the world would be my oyster for sure as I rode the highways and byways. Just one catch - I had no job and no money, but I had lots of desire, or so I thought.

One of the smartest things my dad ever did - though I know now he just did not want to say

"no" outright - was to accompany me to the shop in which said beast was on sale, as if by accompanying me he would demonstrate his willingness to at least consider such a purchase. This he did, and then announced to my absolute delight that he would double every penny I earned towards the purchase of the bike.

Need I confess that my desire for the grand machine did not translate into activity that would produce the coin needed? My "easy rider" visions faded as the months passed, and were eventually discarded.

There are many ways to understand/interpret what Jesus said in John 12:24-26 about the necessity of a grain of wheat falling to the ground and dying, that if it did not it would remain a single seed (and profit no one), but that in its dying a harvest would come forth. The principle Jesus is declaring is quite simple and few of us (especially those into planting of any kind) would argue with it.

Imagine the frustration if the seeds you planted somehow decided that they would not die,

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LESSON, continued

that is, not give themselves up to cease being one seed in order to become a crop. Days and months later you could dig that seed up only to find it resistant to any change whatsoever, still lying there in exactly the same condition as when planted. This you might expect from a rock; not from a seed.

There is a cost to growth of any kind, and quite often it is not pleasant. We embrace the notion that we should be able to continue on with our lives without so much as the slightest deviation from our comfort zone, and still see progress and development. It is stretching and work and difficult situations and problems and disease that generate growth in virtually every area of our lives. No pain, no gain, they say. And I think they are right, not that I appreciate the fact.

Following Jesus is not easy, and Jesus was honest enough to spell this out for anyone who would want to follow Him. He said that those who loved their lives so much so that they did not want Him to mess with their lives would, in the end, lose the very purpose and joy they would have found in Him. If your ultimate goal was to play it safe - to be comfortable, never take a risk or step out in faith, never try anything new or allow yourself to think differently about things -

well, you might have a comfortable existence, but at the same time you might be missing out on life.

Following Jesus is a challenge that can release untold joy, even in the midst of discomfort and trial and hardship. Following Jesus is an adventure that can elevate your heart rate far into the aerobic zone, and open your eyes to marvels you never thought possible. Following Jesus can be absolute delight, but it will not be easy and Jesus forewarned us all of its rigors. Existing may bring us comforts; following Jesus will bring us life, and abundantly so.

Rev. Paul Orritt, a former ARM Chair, is an associate priest at Christ Our King Anglican Church in Calgary, AB.

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Friendly Fire

It is unseasonably warm today, here in Miramichi. The temperature is in the mid-twenties and the UV index is high. That may be normal for late June or July, but for May 5, it is unsettling. Not only that, we have had very little precipitation this past winter and the woods and land are very dry. People in New Brunswick are concerned about the upcoming forest fire season, and are afraid of a repeat of last summer, when wells went dry and out-of-control forest fires burned for weeks on end. Fire has become something we fear. A carelessly discarded cigarette or an unattended campfire can result in immeasurable destruction and even loss of life.

But not all fire is destructive. There is another fire, which brings forth life – spiritual life. In the scriptures, the fire of the Holy Spirit symbolizes God’s presence, judgment and empowerment. It also represents the purifying, zealous nature of the Holy Spirit, enabling believers to live as “living sacrifices.” Those of us who have experienced the fire-power of the Holy Spirit will likely agree that it is anything but destructive; rather, it is life-changing and life-giving.

In Acts 2:3-4, tongues of fire

rested on believers to signify the Holy Spirit’s presence and empowerment for the purpose of spreading the Good News of the risen Christ; fulfilling John the Baptist’s prophecy of baptism with the Holy Spirit and fire. Fire represents the Holy Spirit’s role in cleansing lives and refining believers, acting as a “consuming fire” that removes unholiness.



Throughout Scripture, fire is used to show God’s active presence, such as the pillar of fire (Exodus 13:21) or the burning bush (Exodus 3:2). Fire also symbolizes a burning passion, urging believers to not “quench the Spirit,” but rather stay fervent and filled.

In 1993, while attending the Diocese of the Arctic Synod in Iqaluit, I met Bishop Masuko and his wife, who were visiting from Zimbabwe. They described how it was quite a jaunt to travel from Africa to the Canadian north.

Bishop Masuko spoke of how the fire of the Holy Spirit can move just as powerfully in a cold Arctic as in hot Africa. While he was with us he taught us an African Holy Spirit chorus with the words: “Fire, fire, fire. Fire fall on me. Fire, fire, fire. Fire fall on me. On the day of Pentecost, fire fall on me. On the day of Pentecost, fire fall on me.”

ARM sees the fire of the Holy Spirit as the necessary component in the work and mission God has assigned to us. As one who experienced afresh the mighty power of the Holy Spirit more than 20 years ago, at an ARM event in Montreal, I know first-hand the importance of “sharing the fire” with others. We are looking forward to our event in Winnipeg in June, and are excited to be planning an event in Calgary in October. As always, ARM welcomes opportunities to minister in the power of the Holy Spirit to all who would invite us. Is there some way we can share God’s love and fire with you?

Faithfully in Christ,
The Venerable Perry Cooper

My Spiritual Journey Continues

Ven. Michael Stonhouse

In the previous issue, I described my introduction to the Holy Spirit and to what has variously been called “Baptism in the Holy Spirit” or “Baptism by the Holy Spirit.” Little did I know then that there was much, much more to come!

Over time, I discovered that the gift of tongues would bless me in times of private prayer, but they were also to be used in intercessory prayer, in prayer for others — particularly in those times and instances when we did not know how to pray or what to pray for. And much to my amazement, this sometimes involved healing, sometimes deliverance, sometimes reassurance, and sometimes correction or challenge or direction. I have often likened the Baptism in or by the Holy Spirit to being gifted with an interesting tool bag full of various gifts or tools that you only learn about as you reach in and begin to use them and apply them.

The most obvious one, the initial one, was the gift of tongues. From my reading and experience I soon learned that its primary function — apart from expressions within services of public worship or prayer — was as a personal prayer language, a way of growing closer to God and being better able to share ourselves with Him.

This was especially brought home to me one disastrous day at my

social work office. I had mistakenly jotted down a court appearance on the wrong date in my calendar and so had missed it entirely. Not only I had missed it, but so had my client, as I was supposed to pick her up and take her to court. The judge had phoned my boss, and my boss was livid. As you might guess, my emotions and my thoughts were all a jumble.

I retreated to my familiar place of prayer but found that I simply could not pray coherently. I was just too upset. But then I found myself lapsing into tongues and discovered that it was as if my spirit within me was bypassing my mind and my emotions and speaking directly to God. As I prayed, all the confusion and hurt and recriminations melted away and I was once again clean and fresh within. And then I could pray in English, coherently and properly — finally.

But that was only the start, even with the gift of tongues. I discovered that they were also to be used for others, in intercessory prayer, particularly when we did not know how to pray or what to pray for. And, much to my amazement, this sometimes involves healing, deliverance, reassurance, and/or correction, challenge or direction.

My most dramatic experience of the use of tongues in healing came many, many years later, long after

I had experienced God’s power to heal in other settings. I was teaching the junior confirmation class at St. Peter’s, Calgary, and was explaining about the various gifts and ministries of the Holy Spirit. I had mentioned about the gift of tongues and its uses, and the kids immediately wanted to know what it sounded like. I explained that it was not meant for show or for performance but only for prayer — personal prayer or prayer for someone else. “So,” I ventured (never thinking that anyone would take me up on it), “if you have someone you’d like me to pray for and would be willing to sit in a chair as a proxy, then I will use my prayer language.”

Quick as wink, there was a chair in front of me with a young person seated in it. They had taken me up on my challenge. They wanted prayer for a young person seriously injured in a ski race at Lake Louise. I dutifully prayed in tongues and, as I prayed, I saw a picture of the human body, particularly of the skeletal system. Certain parts seemed to be especially colored, which I took to indicate where the injuries were. After the prayer was over, I explained this to the kids, never expecting anything further to come of it.

Imagine my surprise at the next Junior Choir meeting when several of them came up and asked

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me how in the world I had known. Known what, I wondered. The skier had caught an edge in his race and had cartwheeled down the slope. During the previous meeting, while I prayed, he had been in a coma with undetermined injuries. But I had pinpointed exactly where those injuries were. Of course, it was not me at all, but the Holy Spirit working in and through me.

The story does not end there. A year or more later, a friend of mine was waiting to go into a prayer meeting and fell into conversation with another woman, who commented that she really had reason to praise God this time as God had miraculously healed her son of a skiing injury — totally healed him — when he had not even been expected to live. My friend learned that this was the very lad I had prayed for. Well, well.

My experience of tongues as a means of deliverance came back in seminary. One night, sharp at two o'clock in the morning, I was woken up from deep sleep (fully

awake, which is *very* surprising for me) and told to pray for the son of a fellow student. Of course, I did not know how to pray or what to pray for, but as I entered into prayer it was as if I was entering into the most clammy and clinging and terrible darkness. It was a darkness that could be felt, and it was horrible. I could only think to pray in tongues. Even then it was like punching inside a woven sack. It was ever so difficult and agonizing. But I persisted, and after an hour the darkness departed, and I was free to return to bed.

The next morning, I asked my friend what had happened at that particular time. He visibly paled and asked why I wanted to know. I explained that God woke me up and told me to pray for his son. He then explained that his son had been having nightmares repeatedly — every night at the same time. That night, however, the parents woke up a few minutes early and, peering across the hallway into the boy's room, had seen a dark presence hovering over the boy's bed. A few minutes later the boy awoke and started screaming

as he had the other nights. At this, the ghostly presence left that room, crossed the hall, and entered the parents' room. My friend was speechless, but his wife immediately spoke to the 'presence' and said, "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth and in the power of His shed blood, I command you to leave and never return." And that was that. Of course, her words were important, so what part did my prayers have? I don't know. But, nonetheless, I believe it was important for me to pray that night.

My experience of tongues for reassurance came as part of a healing conference at the Sorrento Centre in BC. I had been appointed to one of the prayer teams. As I prayed over one lady (in English, and silently in tongues), I got a powerful message for her. It was so specific that I was really taken aback. Either it was from God, or I would look like a total idiot. Anyway, I stepped out in faith and shared the message with her. I explained to her that God loved her very much and was with her every step of the way. That even though she had just given up her job as a nurse, God had another one for her, and even though she had just given up her lease, God had another, even better place for her. She was astounded and asked me whether I had met her before or knew her from somewhere else, because all of the things I had referred to were exactly right. It was a wonderful re-

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assurance to her of the reality of God's love for her.

As for tongues for direction, I prayed for a parishioner during our weekly mid-week prayer meeting (in English and tongues) and once again received a strong mental picture, this time of a cement conduit pipe. The woman asked me if God had told me anything, and I described this conduit pipe through which God wanted to pour His life and love into her life – only it was partially blocked. She asked if God had said what the problem was, and I said, “resentment against two particular individuals.” She asked me their names and I told her. Her response: “I thought that’s who it would be.” Wow.

When it comes to spiritual healing, I have never believed that I have a *ministry* of healing. Nevertheless, when I am called upon, and reach into my tool bag, there is that gift, just ready and waiting to be used. My first experience of being used in healing came as a total surprise. Coming in the wake of so many reports of faked spiritual healings, I had come to disbelieve in the whole works. Yet here I was at church on a Saturday evening observing a well-known evangelist and faith healer. Word had gotten out, and the church was jam-packed with people seeking healing of some sort. When it came time for prayer, the evangelist invited people to come forward, and soon he could not handle the crowds. He asked the

pastors to assist, then the other congregational leaders, then others, and still others. Finally, there were only three people left that were not either praying or being prayed for: myself, and two of my buddies. We were greatly surprised when the evangelist then called for the three of us to come up and pray for someone. We were sure that there must be three *other* people, but we were it!

Our hearts sank when we saw who it was. It was a lady we knew, a lady in a wheelchair who had been paralyzed from the waist down for many, many years, and here she was asking for healing. Remember: I didn't believe in spiritual healing, and neither did my companions. So, being rather skeptical, we asked her to show us how she needed healing. She lifted up her skirt and showed us the most repulsive sight. Her legs were shortened and twisted, all the muscles gnarled and atrophied. It was quite clear that she was not faking her ailment. Satisfied, but not at all convinced that anything would come of our prayers, we obeyed the evangelist and started praying. Being of a totally doubtful mind, I kept my eyes open as we prayed, and was absolutely astounded to see her legs lengthen and straighten before my very eyes, and the muscles and ligaments resume their proper shape and form. It was amazing, and I don't think that I would have believed it had I not seen it with my very own eyes. After we had finished praying, one of my buddies

said to her (without an ounce of conviction, for he had not seen what I had seen), “You're healed now. You can get up and walk.” And she did! She had not walked for perhaps twenty years, so her gait was pretty wobbly and uncertain, but she walked, all the way back to her seat.

And that was only the start. I have been used by God to heal in a parish setting, in the Order of St. Luke, at Diocesan events, and at Theology Alive in Banff. The incredible thing is that it is not me, nor my faith, but God – a God who is, above all else, good and loving and faithful – who matters. The gifts of the Holy Spirit, gifts that God Himself has given us, are there for our use in assisting God in His work.

Archdeacon Michael Stonhouse is the retired pastor of St. John's Minister & Associated Parishes in Lloydminster, SK.

Introducing... Rev. Tony Hilling

I was born in Glasgow and grew up in Uddingston, Scotland. I remember visiting the David Livingstone museum at Blantyre; a walk of about 4 miles. It was case of Roman Catholic kid meeting Protestant missionary. Somehow, his life affected me. But I think I was more impacted by being an altar boy.

A priest walked into our classroom and said: "Put up your hands anyone who wants to be a priest!" I very tentatively raised mine, with my life-long friend Johnny. He went on to be a priest. I detoured in Northern Ireland studying law. I emigrated to Canada in 1976 (50 years ago on April 26), and worked with a couple of law firms in Alberta until the NEP crisis ended that in 1982. At that time, I sensed the Lord call me again (2nd time) to go to seminary and study for the priesthood. My parish priest and the Calgary bishop sent me to St. Paul's Seminary/University in Ottawa; I was ordained priest in 1987. I served in Medicine Hat, downtown Calgary, and Drumheller. I left the RC priesthood in 1994. My wife Brenda and I were married on July 14, 1995.



After a few years practising law, I sensed the Lord call me again (3rd time) - this time to pastor a community-style

charismatic church in Cochrane, followed by 10 years in Red Deer leading a charismatic post-Lutheran community. By 2015, we had moved back to Cochrane where I worked as a "wandering" chaplain for Prison Fellowship Canada, then as a government chaplain at Bowden Institution.

While networking for Prison Fellowship, I met Archbishop Greg Kerr-Wilson. He reminded me that Anglicans respect the Roman orders. I was feeling drawn back to a more traditional expression of faith and liturgy; I was missing the sacredness of the Eucharist. It was a slow development, but by 2019, I felt the Lord call me to be part of the Anglican Church (4th time!!) and I was welcomed into the Communion at All Saints Church, Cochrane on December 8, 2019, formerly St. Mary's RC church - the very place where I celebrated my first Mass back in 1987. I am now Incumbent at St. Paul's, Calgary.

I move in the gift of tongues and at least twice I have seen healings through it. I have been asking the Lord particularly for the Anointing to deal with and heal cancer. I regularly bring words from scripture over people, also family and even myself. I look forward to helping people explore and exercise their spiritual gifts as a member of the ARM board.

God has been very faithful and extremely patient with me. I am blessed!

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Finding Happiness in Obedience, Part 12

Dianne Trinder

And now we come to the end of Psalm 119, which is both the longest psalm and longest chapter in the Bible. This psalm reminds us of the joy to be found in developing a relationship with God through his word. Like the eight lines of each stanza, there are eight Hebrew words, all synonyms, used to refer to the Word of God: Commands, Decrees, Instructions, Word, Regulations, Promises, Commandments and Laws. This time, we will look at the twenty-first and twenty-second letters of the Hebrew alphabet: *shin* and *tav*.

In ancient Hebrew, the pictograph of Shin is a pair of front teeth. Shin has five meanings: tooth (sharp, strength), steadfastness, change, return and year. Shin stands for Shaddai, a Name of God. It represents divine fire and transformation, often associated with divine energy, spiritual and structural stability. It represents the immovable power of God.

Tav, the final letter of the Hebrew Alphabet, means sign, mark or seal. It is associated with the concept of truth, *emet* - Aleph (beginning), Mem (middle), Tav (end). Tav is viewed as the “seal” of creation. It symbolizes completion, truth and perfection.

The Passion Translation calls verses 161-168, “Devoted to God’s Word,” and verses 169-176, “I want to follow You.” We

will look at these verses using the wording from the NLT.

Verses 161-162: “Powerful people harass me without cause but my heart trembles at your word. I rejoice in your word like one who discovers a great treasure.”

When I looked up the cross-references for verse 161, the confrontation between David and Saul in 1 Samuel 24:11 shouted out at me: “Look, my father, at what I have in my hand. It is a piece of the hem of your robe! I cut it off, but I didn’t kill you. This proves that I am not trying to harm you and that I have not sinned against you, even though you have been hunting for me to kill me.” This is the stance we all need to take, as believers in Jesus, towards those who oppose us. No matter what anyone, even powerful people, try to do to us we need to emulate David’s response to Saul. This is not an easy thing to do, especially when we have been wronged profoundly. However, we need to put our trust in the Lord and focus on him instead of on those who have wronged us. There should be trembling and a fear of the Lord when we don’t act according to his commands.

Recently, during my daily reading, the Lord highlighted the story of Jabez in 1 Chronicles 4:9-10: “There was a man named Jabez who was more honourable than any of his brothers. His mother named him Jabez because his

birth was so painful. He was the one who prayed to the God of Israel, ‘Oh, that you would bless me and expand my territory! Please be with me in all I do, and keep me from all trouble and harm!’ And God granted his request.” Lord, what is my territory? What are you calling me to do? If I ask God to bless me, then the least I can do is ask the Lord to bless those I might consider an “enemy,” or someone I may not agree with. Every time we read and meditate on God’s word we can discover great treasures. When we trust in God, we need not be offended or fearful of any “enemy.”

Verses 163-164: “I hate and abhor all falsehood, but I love your instructions. I will praise you seven times a day because all your regulations are just.”

If we truly hate what is evil and seek the truth, continuous praise (seven times a day) would most likely be the result of the daily time we spend in God’s word. We need to keep short accounts with you, Lord, repenting and confessing at the first sign that something isn’t right. Recently I went to a movie, an “R” one with a friend. It wasn’t my first choice but I didn’t want to offend my unbelieving friend. It was a sad, tragic story, and every other scene was sexual in nature, but I didn’t acknowledge my feelings and, again, I did-

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n't want to offend my friend. Needless to say, I had a horrible night's sleep. The next morning, my daily reading was Leviticus 14 and when I read the verses about the treatment of contaminated houses (v33-53), the Lord convicted me. I was one of those contaminated houses; I had allowed myself to become defiled. Immediately I confessed, repented and asked God for forgiveness. This revelation from the Lord released such peace that I was able to give the Lord praise and thanksgiving the entire day. Thank you, Lord, for the power of your word that brings abundant life!

Verses 165-166: "Those who love your instructions have great peace and do not stumble. I long for your rescue, Lord, so I have obeyed your commands."

There is a distinction to be made between the peace experienced by those who love God's word and obey it, and the kind of peace the world attempts to offer. God's lasting peace brings out the joy of the Lord as a by-product of our choices. Ironically, the world encourages us to strive for peace. God's peace comes from waiting, watching, and learning his will for us through reading and meditating on his word. Isaiah 26:3 says it even better: "You will keep in perfect peace all who trust in you,

all those whose thoughts are fixed on you!" This doesn't mean we don't have problems to deal with in the world. Even though we may really be struggling, like the Psalmist says in 119:81, "I am worn out waiting for your rescue, but I have put my hope in your word." Lord, I pray that I may not ever give up praying and be-



lieving that you have my best interests at heart, and that I will always submit to your will.

Verses 167-168: "I have obeyed your laws, for I love them very much. Yes, I obey your commandments and laws because you know everything I do."

Growing up, many of us took Communion or Confirmation classes to prepare us for living the Christian life. I did some of that as an adult, because I married an Anglican. However, it took many

years for me to allow the Lord in - it was a slow process. God knew me and where I stood, and was patient with me, waiting for me to surrender my life to him. A shift occurred when I started to pray and desire more of the Lord. Only then could the Lord begin to truly have an impact on my life. As I gave more and more of myself, he gave me more and more of himself through his word. Apps like BibleHub have provided helpful insight. But, more importantly, when I asked the Holy Spirit for understanding and waited on the Lord, he delivered!

Verses 169-170: "O Lord, listen to my cry; give me the discerning mind you promised. Listen to my prayer; rescue me as you promised."

I believe discernment is the greatest need today for each of us and for all mankind; we should all pray for discernment daily. Psalm 199:27 reminds us, "Help me understand the meaning of your commandments, and I will meditate on your wonderful deeds." Our ability to discern comes from having a relationship with the Lord. Throughout Psalm 119 the Psalmist repeatedly cries out to the Lord; his seeking, his desire for more of God, led him to more and better discernment. In spite of what we think we need from you, Lord,

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and however much we want our desires to be fulfilled, what we really need is a more fulfilling relationship with you. This is where it's all at: friendship with You, Lord.

I'm reminded of the parable of the Lost Son (Luke 15:11-32) - particularly the difference between the younger son and his older brother. Which one do you want to be? Every time we sin we become like the prodigal son, seeking our own way. It's only when we repent that we are restored to the Lord. The older brother didn't rejoice when his wayward younger brother returned; he was angry. The Bible-Hub app offers this comment on the story: "While the parable concludes with the Father's invitation to the elder son to join the celebration, it leaves the response open-ended, inviting readers to consider their own response to God's grace and the call to extend that grace to others." In practicing grace and love, we learn discernment. I pray for your help, Lord, in showing that kind of grace and love to others.

Verses 171-172: "Let praise flow from my lips, for you have taught me your decrees. Let my tongue sing about your word for all your commands are right."

If I spent more time in praise, I wouldn't have so many opportunities to speak or think evil thoughts about others. Luke 10:27 reminds us to "love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your

soul, all your strength, and all your mind." But this takes discipline, specifically the discipline that God provides. Psalm 94:12 confirms with many others, "Joyful are those you discipline, Lord, those you teach with your instructions." Lord, I pray that every day worship and praise will flow from my lips, bringing me your joy.

Verses 173-174: "Give me a helping hand, for I have chosen to follow your commandments. O Lord, I have longed for your rescue, and your instructions are my delight."

The Psalmist admits that he cannot do anything of any value without the help of the Lord. In this world full of distractions, this needs to be our stance also. In Luke 10:38-42 we read about Jesus' visit with Mary and Martha. Martha was angry with her sister for not helping prepare the meal for Jesus and his disciples. Jesus says, "My dear Martha, you are worried and upset over all these details! There is only one thing worth being concerned about. Mary has discovered it, and it will not be taken away from her." Through his word, the Lord wants each of us to be reminded of this on a daily basis. Our relationship with Jesus is the most important one we will ever have.

Lord, I pray for your help to spend time at your feet learning from you. I pray for a hunger and thirst for more of you that will only continue to grow until we are

with you forever. This is the only way we can "delight in your decrees and not forget your word" (Psalm 119:16).

Verses 175-176: "Let me live so I can praise you, and may your regulations help me. I have wandered away like a lost sheep; come and find me, for I have not forgotten your commands."

The Psalmist closes this psalm with a final plea for life, and an admission that even to the end we will continue to wander like lost sheep and need Jesus to intercede for us, pursue us, and bring us back to himself. In the death culture we find ourselves in today, the Psalmist is speaking to each of us about the value of life and the power of God's life-giving word to bring us back from the dead. I pray this for each of us, from Isaiah 55:3: "Come to me with ears wide open. Listen and you will find life. I will make an everlasting covenant with you. I will give you all the unfailing love I promised to David." God invites each of us into relationship with him, through our Lord Jesus, in the power of his Holy Spirit. Will we answer his call on a daily basis, by reading and meditating on the word of God? I call this revival! Bring it on, Lord Jesus!

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Life in the Spirit: Whitsuntide Readings, Part 5

Rev. Canon Gene Packwood

Last time we looked at readings from 1 Kings, 1 Corinthians and Wisdom. As we slip into the more relaxed (for some of us) summer mode and the long Season after Pentecost, called Ordinary Time or Trinity, depending on your preferred Prayer Book, we come to the readings for the Thursday in the week after Whitsunday: 2Sam. 23:1-5 and Eph. 6:10-20 in the morning, followed by Ex. 35:30-36:1 and Gal. 5:13-end in the evening.

2 Samuel 23:1-5

We begin with the last words of King David, which include: “The Spirit of the Lord spoke through me, his word was on my tongue.”

The phrase, “famous last words” comes to mind. We tend to use the phrase in a derogatory, rolling-of-the-eyes kind of way. But these last words, King David’s last words, should be famous because they are about and were inspired by the Holy Spirit of God. As such, they were delightful, he writes in the previous verse, and from one who, by the Holy Spirit, is “like the morning light when the sun rises on a cloudless morning, the glisten of rain on sprouting grass” (v4).

Lovely imagery, which, according to St. Paul, is something to which we should all aspire. About 1,050 years later he wrote, “Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may

prophesy” (1Cor. 14:1). In other words, as we engage with this brief Prayer Book lectionary Life in the Spirit seminar, this is something for which to pray earnestly with the following verse in mind: “...the one who prophesies speaks to people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation” (1Cor. 14:3).

Building people up, encouraging them, and consoling or comforting them with prophetic words could be very much like David’s “morning light when the sun rises on a cloudless morning” and “the glisten of rain on sprouting grass!”

Ephesians 6:10-20

The fact is, the Christian life is a thoroughly supernatural affair: “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this darkness, against evil, spiritual forces in the heavens” (1Cor. 2:8). You and I are finite, flesh and blood beings, yet we were also created and designed to operate beyond our physicality.

The Christian life is also a battle. Jesus said as much here: “Don’t assume that I came to bring peace on the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword” (Matt. 10:34). Uncomfortable, but true. This Ephesians passage is our divine strategic battle plan. It describes our spiritual enemies and how to protect our-

selves from them. For the purposes of our Lives in the Spirit lectionary exercise I want to focus on verses 17 and 18: “Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit – which is the word of God. Pray at all times in the Spirit with every prayer and request, and stay alert with all perseverance and intercession for all the saints.”

We are to protect our minds with the helmet of salvation as we read, pray into and put the word of God – the sword of the Spirit – into action. To pray in the Spirit is to ask for God’s guidance as we pray with the sails of our hearts, minds, souls and bodies set and properly trimmed to move with the Holy Spirit winds of God.

Praying the Daily Offices is an excellent and fruitful way to being praying “at all times.” Pray in tongues, if you have received that gift. Praying with others, so we can share how we’re feeling led and to encourage and be accountable to one another, is also helpful.

Exodus 35:30-36:1

This passage begins: “Moses then said to the Israelites, ‘Look, the Lord has appointed by name Bezalel son of Uri, son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah. He has filled him with God’s Spirit, with wisdom, understanding, and ability in every kind of craft to design artistic works in gold, silver, and

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WHITSUNTIDE, continued

bronze, to cut gemstones for mounting, and to carve wood for work in every kind of artistic craft. He has also given both him and Oholiab son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan, the ability to teach others. He has filled them with skill to do all the work of a gem cutter; a designer; an embroiderer in blue, purple, and scarlet yarn and fine linen; and a weaver. They can do every kind of craft and design artistic designs” (Ex. 35:30-35). Who knew? To be a Spirit-filled Christian involves much more than happy-clappy, falling about, clattering-away-in-tongues behaviour.

A few years ago, this passage from Exodus prompted an Epiphany in me when I thought: could the women (mostly) of the altar guilds in Anglican and other parishes around the world be just as Spirit-filled as all the so-called charismatics, only with Gifts similar to Bezalel and Oholiab? Bezalel is the first person in the Bible recorded as being filled with the Holy Spirit, and the first Gift of the Holy Spirit described in the Bible was to do with “wisdom, understanding, and ability in every kind of craft to design artistic works” (v31-32). And all for worship.

Earlier in Exodus Moses is instructed to, “Make holy garments for your brother Aaron, for glory and beauty. You are to instruct all the skilled artisans, whom I have filled with a spirit of wisdom, to make Aaron’s garments for consecrating him to serve me as

priest” (Ex. 28:2-3). Skilled artisans, filled with a spirit of wisdom – rendered as small ‘s’ spirit admittedly – empowered to make holy garments for glory and beauty.

Then, in chapter 35 a few verses before the lectionary passage we read, “Every skilled woman spun yarn with her hands and brought it: blue, purple, and scarlet yarn, and fine linen. And all the women whose hearts were moved spun the goat hair by virtue of their skill” (Ex. 35:25-26). By virtue of those women being filled with that spirit of wisdom in design, embroidery, fine linen, weaving, every kind of craft and artistic design, an holy and beautiful stage is set for glory and beauty in which to worship the Living God.

It sounds to me like what happened to the people who heard St. Peter speak in Acts, chapter 10, verse 46, when the Holy Spirit came down on them and they spoke in tongues and were anointed and empowered to declare the greatness of – extol, praise, exalt – the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ – all for glory and beauty.

It continues to this day, in churches all around the world. Week by week church sanctuaries are beautified for worship with flowers, banners and hangings. I remember being deeply moved when I first encountered the women of the St. Barnabas Altar Guild in Medicine Hat on a Saturday morning, kneeling at the altar rail to pray before they set about their duties: women filled with

the Holy Spirit for glory and beauty.

Galatians 5:13-end

Finally, to round off this part of our Whitsuntide Life in the Spirit seminar, we have some wonderfully practical and definitive instructions on exactly how to walk by, and keep in step with, the Holy Spirit. Spoiler alert! There is some effort involved – opposition to overcome, even – and things to be avoided: “For the flesh desires what is against the Spirit, and the Spirit desires what is against the flesh; these are opposed to each other, so that you don’t do what you want” (Gal. 5:17).

Not getting to do what we want when we are trying to live Life in the Spirit might be a bit of challenge now and then. But the results – the fruit – make the effort worth it: “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control” (Gal. 5:22-23).

Who would not want to live in an environment with all those benefits and blessings released and active in our lives and our relationships? It would be to experience the very Goodness of God in our Life in the Spirit.

Gene Packwood blogs at GENERALities www.kiwirev.blogspot.ca and can be found on Facebook and Twitter (@kiwirev).

Look for more of this series in an upcoming issue of *Taste and See...*

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