

IT'S A GOOD DAY
TWENTIETH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST, PROPER 24
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BECKY ROBBINS-PENNIMAN
CHURCH OF THE GOOD SHEPHERD, DUNEDIN, FL

COLLECT OF THE DAY

Sovereign God, raise your throne in our hearts. Created by you, let us live in your image; created for you, let us act for your glory; redeemed by you, let us give you what is yours, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

ISAIAH 45:1–7

The Lord says to his anointed, to Cyrus, whom I have grasped by the strong hand, to conquer nations before him, disarming kings, and opening doors before him, so no gates will be shut:

I myself will go before you, and I will level mountains. I will shatter bronze doors; I will cut through iron bars. I will give you hidden treasures of secret riches, so you will know that I am the Lord, the God of Israel, who calls you by name. For the sake of my servant Jacob and Israel my chosen, I called you by name. I gave you an honored title, though you didn't know me.

I am the Lord, and there is no other; besides me there is no God. I strengthen you— though you don't know me— so all will know, from the rising of the sun to its setting, that there is nothing apart from me. I am the Lord; there's no other.

I form light and create darkness, make prosperity and create doom; I am the Lord, who does all these things.

PSALM 96:1–9

Sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the whole earth.

Sing to the Lord and bless his Name; proclaim the good news of his salvation from day to day.

Declare his glory among the nations and his wonders among all peoples.

For great is the Lord and greatly to be praised; he is more to be feared than all gods.

As for all the gods of the nations, they are but idols; but it is the Lord who made the heavens.

Oh, the majesty and magnificence of his presence!

Oh, the power and the splendor of his sanctuary!

Ascribe to the Lord, you families of the peoples; ascribe to the Lord honor and power.

Ascribe to the Lord the honor due his Name; bring offerings and come into his courts.

Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness; let the whole earth tremble before him.

*******TURN ON RECORDER*******

1 THESSALONIANS 1:1–10

From Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy. To the Thessalonians' church that is in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace and peace to all of you.

We always thank God for all of you when we mention you constantly in our prayers. This is because we remember your work that comes from faith, your effort that comes from love, and your perseverance that comes from hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of our God and Father. Brothers and sisters, you are loved by God, and we know that he has chosen you. We know this because our good news didn't come to you just in speech but also with power and the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction. You know as well as we do what kind of people we were when we were with you, which was for your sake. You became imitators of us and of the Lord when you accepted the message that came from the Holy Spirit with joy in spite of great suffering. As a result you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. The message about the Lord rang out from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia but in every place. The news about your faithfulness to God has spread so that we don't even need to mention it. People tell us about what sort of welcome we had from you and how you turned to God from idols. As a result, you are serving the living and true God, and you are waiting for his Son from heaven. His Son is Jesus, who is the one he raised from the dead and who is the one who will rescue us from the coming wrath.

MATTHEW 22:15–22

Then the Pharisees met together to find a way to trap Jesus in his words. They sent their disciples, along with the supporters of Herod, to him. “Teacher,” they said, “we know that you are genuine and that you teach God’s way as it really is. We know that you are not swayed by people’s opinions, because you don’t show favoritism. So tell us what you think: Does the Law allow people to pay taxes to Caesar or not?”

Knowing their evil motives, Jesus replied, “Why do you test me, you hypocrites? Show me the coin used to pay the tax.” And they brought him a denarion. “Whose image and inscription is this?” he asked.

“Caesar’s,” they replied.

Then he said, “Give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God.” When they heard this they were astonished, and they departed.

Song of the Day: *When We are Living*

What’s your definition of a “good day?”

A day when nothing bad happens? A day when you win the lottery?

I have one simple criterion for remarking, “Today was a good day.”

That’s when I learn something – anything.

On a day I learn something, part of me is still fresh and excited and growing.

It can be almost anything –

from learning how to use Windows 10 on my new computer,
to finding a different way of seeing the world.

I’ve been learning a lot over the last month or so.

Many of you know I grew up as a military brat – an Air Force brat.

My dad was a fighter pilot during the Vietnam era. He did two tours over there.

We were a typical military family, moving around a lot.

By the time I was 13, I’d lived on three continents. I went to three high schools.

I calculated that by the time I got married, I’d had 22 bedrooms.

A few years back, I read a book on military brats; the title was:

*Military Brats: Legacies of Childhood Inside the Fortress.*¹

This was one time you could judge a book by its cover.

It had some insights I found very helpful.

One of them was that, as brats grew into adulthood, we divided into two camps:

those that were enthralled by the military, becoming warriors themselves,

and those that were forever wearied by war, and wanted nothing more to do with it, ever.

The military family is the original breeding ground of hawks and doves.

I am a dove. I have no stomach for violence –

not in movies, not in books, not on TV, and certainly not in games.

My dad retired from the service when I was in college,

and I put the whole military thing behind me for a long, long time. Until this year.

This year, I did something I’d been thinking of doing for over 5 years.

There is a program, run entirely by volunteers,

that flies veterans to Washington DC for the day to honor their service,

take them to Arlington National Cemetery and to the nation’s war memorials.

The Honor Flight is focusing on veterans from WWII, Korea and Vietnam.

My dad is in that cohort. He’s 89. He isn’t in great health.

So, I asked him if he’d like to go on the Honor Flight.

He said, yeah, sure, OK. And I got the application in.

He was accepted, and he’s going this Tuesday, day after tomorrow.

¹ Mary Edwards Wertsch, *Military Brats: Legacies of Childhood Inside the Fortress*. Harmony, 1991

Every veteran is accompanied by a “Guardian”

to make sure the veteran is safe and cared for all day.

I’m going as with my dad as his Guardian. This is the very definition of role reversal. We had our orientation yesterday. The room was filled with aging men, but I could still see the determination and pride of a warrior in each face.

Remember, even though I arranged for my dad to go on the Honor Flight because I’m a loving daughter and all that, I’m still a dove.

I walked into the orientation room yesterday

still seeing war through my eyes, my experience, my priorities.

But, it was a good day. Why? Because I learned something.

Near the beginning of the orientation, they showed a film clip of President Roosevelt’s prayer on D-Day.

(By the way, Franklin Delano Roosevelt was an Episcopalian.

I started to say he was a *good* Episcopalian, but he was kind of . . . frisky.)

The voice of a president, who, like me, never served in the military, spoke over images of desperate fighting, praying for service men:

*They will be sore tried, by night and by day, without rest-
until the victory is won. The darkness will be rent by noise and flame.*

Men’s souls will be shaken with the violences of war.

For these men are lately drawn from the ways of peace.

They fight not for the lust of conquest. They fight to end conquest. They fight to liberate.

They fight to let justice arise, and tolerance and good will among all Thy people.

They yearn but for the end of battle, for their return to the haven of home.

And a bit later in the prayer, these words:

Help us to conquer the apostles of greed and racial arrogancies.

*Lead us to the saving of our country, and with our sister Nations
into a world unity that will spell a sure peace,*

a peace invulnerable to the schemings of unworthy men.

And a peace that will let all of men live in freedom,

reaping the just rewards of their honest toil. Thy will be done, Almighty God.

The two phrases that caught my breath were these:

First: *They fight not for the lust of conquest. They fight to end conquest.*

Second: *Help us to conquer the apostles of greed and racial arrogancies.*

What did I learn from that prayer spoken when war was at its fiercest?

I learned – just a little bit – why all those men were in that room.

They don’t love violence any more than I do.

They weren’t looking for spoils of war, but for justice and sure peace.

They were doing it, not primarily for themselves, but for others,

so people they didn’t know and would never know would be free.

It was a good day; I learned that I had a tremendous amount in common with those men:

we all want a sure peace, we all want a world

where the apostles of greed and racial arrogancies are stopped cold.

These warriors put their lives on the line for this sure peace in the best way they knew of.

I took what I learned to the Scripture readings for today.

The lesson from Isaiah speaks of Cyrus, the king of Persia.

Cyrus was not a Jewish king, but a foreigner.

2,500 years ago, the Jews were conquered by the Babylonians

Cyrus then defeated the Babylonian king in war and liberated the Jews.

Isaiah said that God used Cyrus, a pagan emperor, to do God’s will.

God can work in and through ANYONE to heal, restore and reconcile,
 anyone, that is, who is open to the movement of the Spirit in their life.
 God is not limited to using only good Jews, or Christians,
 to do the work of the Kingdom of God.

In other words, God can show up in unlikely people,
 places, circumstances and methods.

In fact, wherever there is an increase in justice, liberation, tolerance, and good will,
 and a reduction in greed and bigotry, we can say God's Spirit is at work.

We will not always agree about HOW to get this done.

Some will do it by donning a uniform and marching,
 others will do it by donning a uniform and taking a knee.

What if, instead of judging each other, shaking our fists,
 and demanding that all use the same ways to seek justice,
 freedom, tolerance, good will, abundance and equality,

we actually listen and find what we agree about? I'll bet we'd find out there's a lot.

God acts in surprising ways in all sorts and conditions of people.

I learned that yesterday. It was a good day.

In Paul's letter to the Thessalonians, he exults about how they took the good news
 and lived it out with joy, in spite of great suffering.

This good news of Christ, Paul assures them, will rescue them from the coming wrath.

Wait, "Coming wrath"? Are we back to the divine vengeance thing?

Please remember what Frederick Dale Bruner says about wrath:

The wrath of God is the love of God in friction with the injustice and hatefulness of people.

The wrath of God is the grace of God in collision

*with the selfishness and mercilessness of humanity.*²

When people are bigoted, unjust, greedy, and vengeful,
 they are working against the love and grace of the Reign of God,
 and there will be friction – heat, abrasion, damage.

As Roosevelt prayed to God on D-Day, as we pray every Sunday,
 as we should pray every day, "Thy will be done." God's will be done.

God's will is for peace, not wrath – and peace will come.

That's God's eternal promise, that is God's will for earth as for heaven.

Haters preach intolerance and division, even daring to use God's name.

With their actions comes wrath: friction and collision, suffering for the whole world,
 which is not God's will. God's will is the message of love,
 and our best life comes when we serve this living and true God.

Those warriors put their lives on the line so all can have this best life,
 their commitment to tolerance and good will as strong as mine. Maybe stronger.

I learned that yesterday. It was a good day.

Then, Gospel lesson teaches us to keep focused on what God is doing
 even as arrogant tyrants conquer and oppress to grab power and riches
 trying to stamp their images all over anything that doesn't move.

But it won't work. Because, in the end, who is made in God's image?

Who belongs to God? Everyone. Warriors and hippies, hawks and doves,
 standers and kneelers, pagans and Christians and Jews, even Caesar and haters.

Remember, God can even use those we don't like at all to do God's work;

Cyrus was a pagan emperor – and the Latin word for emperor is . . . Caesar.

² Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary. Volume 1: The Christbook, Matthew 1-12*. Eerdmans, 2007. p. 92

So I learned to see that God was at work in the warriors in that room yesterday;
they put their lives on the line in an effort to give the world
the gifts of justice, sure peace, and freedom.

Some of whom didn't come home, and some, like my dad, did.

The appropriate response to being given these gifts

is a life conscious every moment of every day that we belong to God,
serving the living and true God, even if we don't all do it the same way.

Please stand, now, and find the Collect of the Day in your bulletin,
and let's pray it together:

Sovereign God, raise your throne in our hearts.

*Created by you, let us live in your image; created for you, let us act for your glory;
redeemed by you, let us give you what is yours,
through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.*

As we learn to pray with all our heart, mind, strength and soul,

"Thy will be done," we are learning to give Almighty God what belongs to God.

When we learn that, it's a good day.