



Daily Devotionals – May 8 to May 14, 2021

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

We have concluded our weekly exercise of writing a daily reflection for a year. I hope you'll consider this good news, though. We plan to loop around and continue sending these to you weekly until they are published in book form. We'll keep you posted as we know more about that.

A word about how this will work. Now they will come simply by date with no mention of the day of the week. Remember, these devotions were written for a specific year in time. This means occasionally you may find mention of it being "Easter" even though at a given time the calendar that year may see Easter, Christmas, etc. fall on a different day. If that is the case, then be flexible and just enjoy that special day as it falls within the Devotional. We hope you'll enjoy these as they continue to speak to the year ahead.

Faithfully,

Dr. Charles Qualls, Pastor

May 8 - Exodus 3:1-12 **by Dr. Charles Qualls** ***Moses at the Burning Bush***

3 Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. 2 There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. 3 Then Moses said, "I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up." 4 When the Lord saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." 5 Then he said, "Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." 6 He said further, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

7 Then the Lord said, "I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, 8 and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. 9 The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. 10 So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt." 11 But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" 12 He said, "I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain."

Devotion:

There is a place called "Willow Peak" in the Sinai Peninsula. Near it nowadays sits St. Catherine's Monastery. Christian tradition calls this high spot "Mount Horeb." The "Mountain of God," translated from Hebrew. In scripture, you will also see Mount Horeb referred to as "Mount Sinai." Most scholars tend to believe they are one and the same.

What a fascinating story we have in Exodus 3. Since we were children, most of us have been taught the story of Moses and the burning bush. There is so much to be fascinated with here:

- A bush that will not burn itself out.
- The need to remove shoes in God's presence.
- A voice that speaks audibly to Moses.
- Instruction and a sense of sacred calling that would change Moses' life forever.

This is Holy ground, this spot where Moses stood. Well, it was after this at any rate. At the time, it seems to have simply been a place pretty much in the middle of nowhere. A simple bush, like so many other scrubs that would have dotted the middle Eastern landscape. That is, until this one caught fire and the voice of God spoke to Moses from it.

One obvious dimension we should take with us from the story is that any time we are in the presence of God -- we are standing on holy ground. God transforms where we are by God's very presence. That is still true today.

Moses would bring the children of Israel back to Mount Horeb, or Sinai, in their protracted wilderness journey. Here, he famously put the Lord to the test and derived water from the rock. He received the tablets upon the mountain, as well, while the people grew fickle and went to another church nearby...ummm....fashioned a golden calf, I mean. As late as 1 Kings 19, the prophet Elijah also went to Horeb. At some point in time, the ancient Hebrews clearly knew how to get there. Now, no one is sure of its exact location. "Willow Peak" notwithstanding, of course.

Let's celebrate. Because the God of our fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob -- that same Yahweh God still wishes to speak to you and me. Whenever God is present, we are standing on holy ground. However old and however young you may be, God can still speak into your days. God can still place a hand upon your shoulder and charge you with doing an important work. You are needed. You are vital to what God is still doing.

Here's the deal. We'll need to do a few things. Moses didn't walk away from the scene without investigating. Only then did he hear God. Moses revered God and worshipped there. Moses then left, and actually did what God had asked him to. We'll have to be faithful if Moses' story is to become ours.

Prayer:

God of all time, and of all places, please speak to us. We may have to come to worship to hear your voice. We may have to read your sacred words to hear you. We may have to quiet life down and listen. But please speak to us and include us in what you are doing. We are listening, Lord. Amen.

May 9 - John 8:48-59 by Dr. Charles Qualls *Before Abraham Was...I Am*

48 The Jews answered him, "Are we not right in saying that you are a Samaritan and have a demon?" 49 Jesus answered, "I do not have a demon; but I honor my Father, and you dishonor me. 50 Yet I do not seek my own glory; there is one who seeks it and he is the judge. 51 Very truly, I tell you, whoever keeps my word will never see death." 52 The Jews said to him, "Now we know that you have a demon. Abraham died, and so did the prophets; yet you say, 'Whoever keeps my word will never taste death.' 53 Are you greater than our father Abraham, who died? The prophets also died. Who do you claim to be?" 54 Jesus answered, "If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing. It is my Father who glorifies me, he of whom you say, 'He is our God,' 55 though you do not know him. But I know him; if I would say that I do not know him, I would be a liar like you. But I do

know him and I keep his word. 56 Your ancestor Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day; he saw it and was glad.” 57 Then the Jews said to him, “You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?” 58 Jesus said to them, “Very truly, I tell you, before Abraham was, I am.” 59 So they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple.

Devotion:

Social media is such a necessary evil. On the one hand, we have abilities to connect or reconnect with people that life probably would not have brought our way. My 30th high school reunion saw a 25% increase in attendance over the previous one. The only change we could attribute that to was the advent of social media. It simply made finding and inviting classmates so much easier.

On the other hand, social media can be the scene of misinformation and needless arguments. I see both happen on a daily basis. When someone pulls a nutty and decides to be nasty on social media, it can escalate so quickly. I still watch people say horrible things that distance them even from their own family and close friends.

This scripture text in John 8 reads like so many of the social media spats we see these days. The logic and arguments used by those who interrogated Jesus ring familiar to us these days.

Them: “You have a demon.”

Jesus: “No I don’t. But I do know that whoever follows me will never see death.”

Them: “Now, we KNOW you have a demon. Besides, who do you think you are -- Abraham or a prophet? They died. So, you must be saying you’re greater than they are? Who do you think you are!?”

Jesus: “Look...I AM. And now I am out of here.”

Jesus played two cards on the religious inquisitors that they had no answers for. In the process, he modeled for us some things we would do well to remember. First, he never lost sight of who he was. Jesus knew things they did not. Jesus was “before” Abraham, and brings resolution to parts of the human dilemma that the Abrahamic Covenant could not answer. Even more stark, Jesus blatantly told them that he was the Divine. He said, “**I am.**” That is the same name God used when sending Moses to talk with Pharaoh. Jesus knew full well who he was, and never strayed from that no matter what they asked him.

Second, Jesus was willing to walk away from the fight. His time had not yet come. The religious leaders became incensed enough at Jesus that they picked up rocks and would have stoned him. Except that he simply left them standing there holding the stones. As one person has said, “We don’t have to show up for every fight we are invited to.” Jesus showed us that in this episode. It is valuable advice for living.

Prayer:

Lord of our days, remind us who we are and whose we are. If we remember that we are your children, then we might also remember how even to navigate in times of conflict. Speak wisdom into our lives, that we might exert less wear-and-tear on the world... and on ourselves. Amen.

May 10 - John 19:23-30

by Dr. Charles Qualls

Mary, Jesus’ Mother at the Cross

23 When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his garments and divided them into four parts, one part for each soldier; also his tunic. But the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom, 24 so they said to one another, “Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see whose it shall be.” This was to fulfill the Scripture which says, “They divided my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots.” So the

soldiers did these things, 25 but standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. 26 When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son!" 27 Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!" And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.

The Death of Jesus

28 After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), "I thirst." 29 A jar full of sour wine stood there, so they put a sponge full of the sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it to his mouth. 30 When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, "It is finished," and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

Devotion:

This is Mother's Day in America. We honor mothers and mother-figures today that we have known. Our lives are affected by them, and in some way or another they have even given us life.

What a riveting thing our scripture text gives us to picture! Jesus is now hanging from a Cross, but his own mother is there watching. This is a nightmarish set of circumstances. Any mother who has known the death of her child connects with this story in a way the rest of us cannot.

Artists across the centuries have taken turns attempting to capture the sheer energy and emotion. Eugene Delacroix depicts Mary as a still vigorous woman, noticeably strong and attentive. She is alone at Jesus' feet, staring up at him. She will be available to him until he dies. Meanwhile Vouet Simon shows a fragile, broken Mary. She is attended to by the other women, propped up even by one of them lest she shrink into the ground. She has given all she has.

If pastors across our country are paying attention this Sunday, then they know they walk a crooked line. I wish our church members understood that line a little better, so let me elaborate. Our assignment, on the one hand, is to pay honor to mothers. America has an almost romantic attachment to this particular holiday. In the old days of printed cards being sent through the U.S. mail, this day was the single best-selling one for those sweet cards. Florists also do a robust business, as children attempt to pay honor. On the other hand, though, pastors also know that not everyone had a healthy relationship with their mother. Some simply do not attend church on Mother's or maybe Father's Day Sundays because the pain is too great. Not all mothers have been stellar. We have to know that.

Here is Mary. She has chosen to be present with Jesus all the way to the end. Mary has faithfully carried out the assignment she had been given long ago as an unmarried girl. She has raised God's own Son. Now, humanity is killing her baby because it did not like what he represented. Humanity gave him a hearing, and it did not like what he did or said. Randall Lolley, whom I mentioned just last Sunday, once entitled a sermon, "Mary: Last at the Cross/First at the Tomb."

Depending on the gospel writer, we find Mary faithfully staying with Jesus all the way to the end. She is there as he is crucified. Jesus charges John with her care. Then, depending on the gospel writer Mary may have been at the Tomb on Easter. Afterwards, as Jesus appears to the disciples in a locked room, Mary sits silently over in a corner among his gathered. She never quit on her son.

Healthy mothers, and mother-figures in our lives, may have given us a similar presence. They have believed in us when few others may have. They have modeled, taught and nurtured some of our better qualities. They have disciplined and permitted, cautioned and freed us to become. This week, we give thanks for the life-giving presence of mother-figures. They are gifts from God.

Prayer:

Lord, you have given us nurturing women. May we take to heart the staunchest of their challenges, and the gentlest of their embraces. The good women in our lives have left indelible marks upon our living. We are grateful. Amen.

May 11 - Acts 7:17-40

by Dr. Charles Qualls

It Was This Moses Whom They Rejected

17 “But as the time drew near for the fulfillment of the promise that God had made to Abraham, our people in Egypt increased and multiplied 18 until another king who had not known Joseph ruled over Egypt. 19 He dealt craftily with our race and forced our ancestors to abandon their infants so that they would die. 20 At this time Moses was born, and he was beautiful before God. For three months he was brought up in his father’s house; 21 and when he was abandoned, Pharaoh’s daughter adopted him and brought him up as her own son. 22 So Moses was instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in his words and deeds.

23 “When he was forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his relatives, the Israelites. 24 When he saw one of them being wronged, he defended the oppressed man and avenged him by striking down the Egyptian. 25 He supposed that his kinsfolk would understand that God through him was rescuing them, but they did not understand. 26 The next day he came to some of them as they were quarreling and tried to reconcile them, saying, ‘Men, you are brothers; why do you wrong each other?’ 27 But the man who was wronging his neighbor pushed Moses aside, saying, ‘Who made you a ruler and a judge over us? 28 Do you want to kill me as you killed the Egyptian yesterday?’ 29 When he heard this, Moses fled and became a resident alien in the land of Midian. There he became the father of two sons.

30 “Now when forty years had passed, an angel appeared to him in the wilderness of Mount Sinai, in the flame of a burning bush. 31 When Moses saw it, he was amazed at the sight; and as he approached to look, there came the voice of the Lord: 32 ‘I am the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.’ Moses began to tremble and did not dare to look. 33 Then the Lord said to him, ‘Take off the sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy ground. 34 I have surely seen the mistreatment of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their groaning, and I have come down to rescue them. Come now, I will send you to Egypt.’

35 “It was this Moses whom they rejected when they said, ‘Who made you a ruler and a judge?’ and whom God now sent as both ruler and liberator through the angel who appeared to him in the bush. 36 He led them out, having performed wonders and signs in Egypt, at the Red Sea, and in the wilderness for forty years. 37 This is the Moses who said to the Israelites, ‘God will raise up a prophet for you from your own people as he raised me up.’ 38 He is the one who was in the congregation in the wilderness with the angel who spoke to him at Mount Sinai, and with our ancestors; and he received living oracles to give to us. 39 Our ancestors were unwilling to obey him; instead, they pushed him aside, and in their hearts they turned back to Egypt, 40 saying to Aaron, ‘Make gods for us who will lead the way for us; as for this Moses who led us out from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has happened to him.’

Devotion:

We remember Stephen in the book of Acts as one of the first deacons appointed by the apostles. When this group was selected, they had vital work to do in the early church not unlike what we ask of our own deacons at Franklin Baptist.

Now, we encounter Stephen on the brink of that other thing we recall about him: he was the first recorded Christian martyr. He was stoned to death because of violations he committed in the name of his faith practice. Here, now, he is being allowed to testify to a council. He is getting a hearing. Stephen used that occasion to make a case that is grounded in Moses’ deliverance of their people from Egyptian servitude.

His case will continue over into another segment of the text, actually assigned as an option for tomorrow’s lectionary readings. For now, though, he is telling the Moses part of his people’s story.

Here is the pattern. God raised up a human leader. That leader, imperfect though he or she may be, was called upon by God to serve a people. The people liked that leader as long as he or she was singing their

song. When that servant leader stepped on their toes, or did not speak as quickly/loudly/decisively into their particular anxiety as they liked -- that's it. They rebelled or lashed out. This is Moses' story. This is the prophets' stories. This is Jesus' story that led to his death upon a cross.

Okay. I'm going to do the thing that nearly all of you saw coming. I shouldn't. It seems almost cliché. Too obvious and too easy to argue against, maybe. Here goes nothing anyway: every church's modern-day pastor is a little like Moses. There, I said it. I cringed when I typed it. It's hard to type with one eye open.

Imperfect and unready as we may be, we pastors get this sacred calling of God to join alongside a people. To try to lead them and to serve with them. Maybe not in the same way a CEO gets to lead, although in some churches that is the setup and expectation. More importantly, this leadership has to do with spiritual shepherding and big-picture "enculturation." IF we are doing our jobs, and IF the church is healthy, then God has something special with which to work. We are not "...just one of the guys."

Back to the biblical humans. In the story Stephen tells, they did what humans do. They loved that Moses got them out of slavery in Egypt, and then almost immediately began to second-guess the whole strategy. They began to doubt him. They thought they would be recaptured, but through him God provided. They thought he would let them starve, but through him God provided. They thought he would let them thirst to death, but through him God provided. When he received God's call to go up to Mt. Sinai, they answered the perceived leadership void by fashioning a golden calf to worship.

Fickle creatures, aren't we. When times were good, Moses was their guy! When they struggled a little, they quickly doubted Moses. When they didn't like the implications of the story Stephen told them -- when its truths were inconvenient -- well guess what they did to him! Stay tuned until tomorrow....

Prayer:

Lord of our fickle, easily distracted hearts....be patient with us. Build in us a strength and a resolve to commit. To support. To see beyond our individual wants, wishes and distractions. To see what you are doing in the bigger picture, rather than just seeing what we wish. Create in me a clean heart... Amen.

May 12 - Acts 7:44-56

by Dr. Charles Qualls

They Became Enraged and Ground Their Teeth

44 Our ancestors had the tent of testimony in the wilderness, as God directed when he spoke to Moses, ordering him to make it according to the pattern he had seen. 45 Our ancestors in turn brought it in with Joshua when they dispossessed the nations that God drove out before our ancestors. And it was there until the time of David, 46 who found favor with God and asked that he might find a dwelling place for the house of Jacob. 47 But it was Solomon who built a house for him.

48 Yet the Most High does not dwell in houses made with human hands; as the prophet says, 49 *'Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house will you build for me, says the Lord, or what is the place of my rest? 50 Did not my hand make all these things?'* 51 *"You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you are forever opposing the Holy Spirit, just as your ancestors used to do. 52 Which of the prophets did your ancestors not persecute? They killed those who foretold the coming of the Righteous One, and now you have become his betrayers and murderers. 53 You are the ones that received the law as ordained by angels, and yet you have not kept it."*

The Stoning of Stephen

54 When they heard these things, they became enraged and ground their teeth at Stephen. 55 But filled with the Holy Spirit, he gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. 56 "Look," he said, "I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!"

Devotion:

"Geez, Charles...we thought these were supposed to be uplifting and bright. You know, devotionals that encourage us!" Well, the Bible goes where the Bible goes. We benefit from it all, and we ought to study all of it. Hang with me and let's see if we don't end up in an okay place.

Stephen's testimony from yesterday's devotional text continues here. What has he done that has the local religious officials so worked up? What will they eventually stone him for? We get some answers in Stephen's own testimony that began in yesterday's devotional text and runs through today's.

His answer to them has 3 main points, according to writer William Baird --

1) **The major events of the new, divine revelation have happened outside of Palestine.** That is, God is not confined to Israel. To his Jewish prosecutors, what Stephen believed was blasphemous.

2) **God's purposes are continually being misunderstood and rejected by Israel.** This flies in the face of everything the Hebrew faith and peoplehood had been founded upon.

3) **True worship of God cannot be confined to the Temple of Jerusalem.** God now dwelt in the hearts of believers. Stephen believed that Jesus had sent the word to "Samaria, Judea and to the ends of the earth."

You will notice quotation marks within Stephen's testimony, if you are reading carefully today. He is quoting scripture. V49-50 come from Isaiah 60:1-2 and v51-3 are also Stephen's compilation of Old Testament charges that Moses and the prophets used in Exodus 33:3 (stiff-necked people), Leviticus 26:41 (uncircumcised heart) and Jeremiah 6:10 (uncircumcised ears). To you and me, we might think Stephen had simply exercised his right to free speech and said some disagreeable things.

To the religious establishment, empowered by the might of the Roman empire, these were fighting words. This would usher in, or at least illustrate, a new wave of persecution the fledgling Christian church would face especially in Jerusalem. So, this frothed-up mob took off their cloaks and piled them at the feet of a zealous young instigator: Saul. (That name ring a bell?) They took up stones and executed Stephen.

Still with me, and looking for the "uplifting devotional?" Here goes:

- Stephen was right; they were wrong. God was doing a new thing that was not confined to the Temple and not confined to Palestine. These persecuted early believers took the word and scattered with it to all parts of the known world. Christianity, empowered by the Holy Spirit, went to the ends of the earth!

- Stephen's price for faithfulness was steep. Our current culture is not as friendly to Christian belief today as it has been. But they don't kill us for it. You and I enjoy relative freedom to practice and express our beliefs today. Be thankful to God!

- Neither Coronavirus nor cultural indifference will stifle the movement of God. God will do what God will do. Our Creator is still at work among humanity today, moving wherever the winds of the Spirit may blow. We have a chance right now to be faithful and take part in what God is doing. Will we?

Prayer:

Lord, today we give thanks that Stephen and the early believers sent the word through time and place, all the way to us. Now, may we not be complacent. Instead, lead us to faithful worship and service so that we can do as they did. Amen.

May 13 - Proverbs 3:13-18
by Rev. Steven R. Gibson
The True Wealth

13 Happy are those who find wisdom, and those who get understanding, 14 for her income is better than silver, and her revenue better than gold. 15 She is more precious than jewels, and nothing you desire can compare with her. 16 Long life is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honor. 17 Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace. 18 She is a tree of life to those who lay hold of her; those who hold her fast are called happy.

Devotion:

This section of Proverbs is a shortened version of Proverbs 31, commonly known as the Discourse on a Virtuous or Capable woman. What qualities does this woman contain?

- She is a person who finds wisdom and combines that with understanding.
- She is a person who is prudent so that she has enough to cover her expenses.
- Her income is better than gold, a commodity that was held in high esteem.
- She is more precious than even jewels.
- She is beyond compare -- nothing can compare with her.
- Her hands are full of long life (right hand) and riches and honor (left hand).
- She is a person of pleasantness and of peace.
- She is a tree of life to others.
- Happy are the ones who have a relationship with her.

This is a lengthy list of attributes. This list of attributes are not easily obtained, especially during this time of female inequality. What type of woman is able to obtain the attributes listed in Proverbs 3:13-18?

Proverbs are often referred to as "Sayings of the Wise" and as such, we find its contents instructive for our daily lives. These sayings help us frame our daily lives and assist us in the praise of God.

Wisdom is necessary for everyday life. Wisdom is needed to obtain a reverence for God. Wisdom is also needed for a working knowledge of how people and the world work. Wisdom has in its essence a knowledge of right and wrong. Wisdom has in its core an understanding of how things should be in our world. Wisdom also has at its base an understanding of how to proceed in tough situations. Wisdom has the ability to access the situation and make the proper decision. Wisdom also has the instincts to select the proper response to any situation. As such, we gain wisdom from two sources -- from being responsive to God, and gleaning from others.

Today, we can apply the wisdom of Proverbs to life situations. If you cannot find a Proverb that speaks to your situation, continue to look, because Proverbs is full of wisdom for living.

If you become overwhelmed during this pandemic, look to Proverbs. If you are not able to connect to others, continue to pray for them. If you do not see a clear path forward, look to Proverbs, especially 3:5-6. (One of my favorite passages in Scripture.)

If you feel depressed, please contact Charles or myself and we will pray for your specific needs daily.

If Proverbs teaches us anything, it teaches us that life is best lived in the community of others -- namely your Franklin Baptist family.

Until we can worship together, (however and whenever that happens), stay focused, stay strong and keep the faith. Remember the message on our beautiful new sign: #STRONGERTOGETHER.

Prayer:

Sustaining God, thank you for your daily presence with us. Along with Scripture, may we also find strength from these words written by Thomas A. Dorsey in 1932.

Precious Lord, take my hand, lead me on, help me stand -- I am tired, I am weak, I am worn; through the storm, through the night, lead me on to the light -- take my hand, precious Lord, lead me home. Amen.

May 14 - Psalm 66:8-20

by Rev. Steven R. Gibson

Praise for God's Goodness to Israel

8 Bless our God, O peoples, let the sound of his praise be heard, 9 who has kept us among the living, and has not let our feet slip. 10 For you, O God, have tested us; you have tried us as silver is tried. 11 You brought us into the net; you laid burdens on our backs; 12 you let people ride over our heads; we went through fire and through water; yet you have brought us out to a spacious place.

13 I will come into your house with burnt offerings; I will pay you my vows, 14 those that my lips uttered and my mouth promised when I was in trouble. 15 I will offer to you burnt offerings of fatlings, with the smoke of the sacrifice of rams; I will make an offering of bulls and goats. *Selah* 16 Come and hear, all you who fear God, and I will tell what he has done for me. 17 I cried aloud to him, and he was extolled with my tongue. 18 If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened. 19 But truly God has listened; he has given heed to the words of my prayer.

20 Blessed be God, because he has not rejected my prayer or removed his steadfast love from me.

Devotion:

"Hear ye! Hear ye! These attention grabbing words indicate an important announcement that was about to start. Many announcements are intended to share bad news, but this portion of Psalm 66 is different. "Come and hear, all you who fear God, and I will tell what he has done for me." (v16) The Psalmist has important news for us, news that is both joyful and thankful.

Psalm 66 continues the theme of praise found in Psalm 65. The Psalmist's announcement is good news, reminding the reader of the faithfulness of God to each of us.

People have a habit of remembering bad news before they remember good news. I do not understand why, but that is a general truth. Because we tend to remember bad news first, I'm convinced that is the reason the Psalmist opens with praise. Yes, praise! Praise, because of God's faithfulness to us! Praise is due to God because of the multiple blessings shared with us. If there was any doubt, the Psalmist shares a litany of praises:

- God has kept us among the living.
- God has not allowed our feet to slip.
- God has tested and refined us.

- God has brought us into the net.
- God has led us through difficulties and brought us to a better place.

After remembering God's provisions, we are naturally inclined to worship -- to enter God's house with praise and burnt offerings. When we enter God's house, we remember the promises that we made to God when we were in trouble. This is a joyous time because, despite our human limitations, God provided. It is in this spirit of thankfulness, that we offer to God our best.

"Come and hear" are words spoken to begin a celebration, a feast day. The Psalmist is thankful because God heard and did not reject his prayer.

Friends, how are you coping during this time of pandemic? Do your thoughts center on the abundance of negative news? Do you have needs that others might be able to assist you with? Do you feel isolated from God? If so, please reread today's passage to recall a portion of God's blessings.

Franklin Baptist will celebrate its 150th Anniversary in 2021 and many are working hard to make the celebration last the entire year! Perhaps we could frame 2021 as a year when the members of Franklin Baptist proclaim to the world to come and hear the wonderful works of God!

Finally sisters and brothers, take heart and rejoice because the God who has led us in the past continues to walk with us every day.

Hear ye! Hear ye! Let each of us proclaim the goodness of God.

Prayer:

Sustaining God, remind us that you are faithful, even when we are unfaithful. Amen.