

## ***Good News Daily***

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### **Sunday, February 5**

John 7:37-46 *The officers answered, "Never did a man speak the way this man speaks." (v.46 NAS)*

As a teenager in the early 70s, I recall the popular film *Godspell*, a contemporary version of the gospels which takes place in New York City where a band of hippies break away to follow the young Victor Garber who portrays Jesus.

Back then we painted everything with rainbows and flowers including our cars, shoes, and faces. In *Godspell*, the actors were likewise decorated in 60s fashion. But seeing Jesus himself portrayed in clown shoes, colored suspenders, and a superman T-shirt, I began to feel a little defensive. Where they going a bit too far? The new zealot in me bristled. I did not appreciate how the theatrics challenged me, that is, until Victor Garber began to quote Matthew. I heard the words arise from that laden costume the way seedlings break through asphalt—unscathed. All that makeup could not diffuse the poignant words of Christ.

Soon I began to discover that whether it was a clown or a high priest quoting the gospels it is very hard to mute the Word of God.

Isaiah 57:14-21; Psalms 93, 96; Hebrews 12:1-6

### **Monday, February 6**

Mark 9:30-41 *"If anyone wants to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all." (v.35b)*

Years ago PBS revisited the 1956 Australian National Championships. During the third lap of the 1500 meters final, Olympian John Landy was trailing fellow athlete Ron Clark, who suddenly fell. Landy stumbled over Clark then did something unheard of—he stopped to help his fellow athlete get back up. Seeing Clarke was okay, Landy quickly resumed the race—now 35 yards behind the pack. I sat spellbound. What runner, in their right mind, would stop in the middle of a race that is measured in milliseconds to do such a thing? Could I do such a thing?

Despite losing 7 seconds, Landy regained his stride. But he not only regained, he excelled. Landy began to pull ahead, farther and farther, to the point where he actually won the race. The second place runner was 2 seconds behind.

In today's reading, Christ says if any man wants to be first, he shall be last. I later learned that John Landy went on to become the 26<sup>th</sup> Governor of Victoria.

Isaiah 58:1-12; Psalm 80; Galatians 6:11-18

### **Tuesday, February 7**

2 Timothy 1:1-14 *Wherefore I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God that is within thee... (v.6 KJV)*

Recently doctors told me I suffered from "frozen shoulder" syndrome. This occurs when inflammation in the shoulder causes muscles to freeze up in reaction to excruciating pain. The protocol is to force the shoulder to loosen, which can be painful but the consequence of not doing so is increased limitation.

It reminded me of another time in my life when I froze up—this time, emotionally. I was once diagnosed with "mild agoraphobia." I began to avoid driving long distances and closed-in areas like stadiums or elevators. I later found great relief in cognitive behavioral therapy which stressed exposure rather than avoidance to the phobias. Again, the consequence of not doing so was further limitation.

The puzzles of life often make me want to protect myself. Fortunately, we are told that God has come to set us free. When Timothy urges us to "stir up" the gift that is within us, I am reminded of at least two times in my life where that was proven advice.

Isaiah 59:1-15a; Psalm 78:1-39; Mark 9:42-50

### **Wednesday, February 8**

Mark 10:1-16 *“Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it at all.”* (v.15b NAS)

I was a very average student in high school and only later excelled in academics. Things changed in college as my interests developed. Studies morphed from being tedious to discoveries full of wonder.

My college years paid off as well. I was able to secure good jobs in my field and even published a book later in life. Studies help me understand life by giving me tools to negotiate and probe. But there is something snobbish about knowledge. Some universities will reject you if you are not smart enough. I found that very different from what Christ required of me.

I converted at the age of sixteen, prior to that I had never so much as heard a Bible story in my life. I was that average high school student who knew nothing back then, a little disillusioned by the 60s drug scene, and eager for something real. I came to Christ without status or degree.

I will always be grateful for my education but it will never compare to what I received as a “child” that summer night I met Christ. Learning changed my mind. Christ filled my soul.

Isaiah 59:15b-21; Psalm 119:97-120; 2 Timothy 1:15—2:13

### **Thursday, February 9**

Psalm 147 *The LORD builds up Jerusalem; He gathers the outcasts of Israel.* (v.2)

Nadia Bolz-Weber is a tattoo-ordained Lutheran pastor at Denver’s House for All Sinners and Saints. Before that she was an alcoholic stand-up comic.

It was the death of a fellow comic that called Nadia to the ministry. In her book *Pastrix*, Weber chronicles a profound ministry reaching addicts, thieves, transgenders, and others on the fringe that might not otherwise have a seat in most churches. The narrative takes an interesting twist when Weber herself is challenged by hoards of “straight” people showing up for her service after recent publicity. She could deal with sinners—not so sure about saints.

This hit a cord with me. Although I have been a boring celibate gay man all my life, I have always felt the stigma of an outcast. Weber’s tale raised a question for me as well, which is, who are my “outcasts?” Who do I feel is beneath me because they seem bigoted, judgmental, or hypocritical? And who am I to outcast anyone if the Lord, in His grace and mercy, ultimately hopes to gather the outcasts?

Isaiah 60:1-17; Psalms 83, 146; 2 Timothy 2:14-26; Mark 10:17-31

### **Friday, February 10**

Psalm 88 *I have become like a man without strength, forsaken among the dead...* (vv.4b-5a)

I have a friend who says she will never be happy until there is no hunger in the world. I have a similar angst. I will never be happy until all the skeptics of the world experience their own epiphany with God.

Loneliness and isolation are often two tough issues. I recall the angry words of one skeptic who complained, “The world’s just a like a little tennis ball and God has whacked it out of His court.”

For someone who is quite a homebody I have moved more times in my life than I can count. One time I had to give up a relationship and move away. It was very painful. I was angry, hurt, tormented, and lonely—much like today’s lament: “I have become like a man without strength, forsaken among the dead...”

Still, every time I face the hardest obstacles in my life, ultimately, I am reminded why Christ had to suffer. To show this cynical world (which includes me!) that he also knows pain having suffered it himself—and not just pain, but humiliating pain in loneliness and isolation.

Isaiah 61:1-9; 2 Timothy 3:1-17; Mark 10:32-45

### **Saturday, February 11**

Psalm 90 *So, teach us to number our days, that we may present to Thee a heart of wisdom.* (v.12)

I once threw my niece out of my parents' home. But first, I stole her clothes, and then I threw her out. I was desperate. My parents were elderly and frail, my niece was not. My niece suffered from clinical depression but was also a down-right brat during her teen years and had left my entire family exhausted.

Ironically, it was my mother who was my niece's eternal champion. She would insist we care for my niece, be patient, and never abandon her.

When my parents met my father was a prisoner of war in Japan where my mother had grown up. They met "through the fence." My mother spent most of the war smuggling food to him. Even her romance required high-stakes wisdom.

With the exception of money management issues, my niece today has blossomed and is often the life of the party. In her will my mother left all her assets to be divided equally to the family with the exception of my niece, whose equal share was to be given incrementally.

Isaiah 61:10—62:5; Psalm 87; 2 Timothy 4:1-8; Mark 10:46-52

*by William Bacon*

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