Devotional Reflection, Friday, August 14,2026
Proper 14, the week of the eleventh Sunday after Pentecost
The Rev. David W. Perkins, Th.D.

Who's In and Who's Out?

Key phrases for reflection from today's reading:
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 18until another king who had not known Joseph ruled over Egypt.

You will find the full text of today's epistle reading at the end of this reflection.

Daily Office Lectionary Readings (*BCP,* 979)
AM Psalm 102; PM Psalm 107:1-32
Judges 14:20-15:20; Acts 7:17-29; John 4:43-54

Today we celebrate the Feast of Jonathan M. Daniels. (See below.)

David's Reflections

Elitism—that sense of personal or group superiority—takes many forms. Who's in and who's out? Those who see themselves as the elite guard the boundaries of their eliteness and resist tenaciously those who seek equality and admission. I recall vividly the hazing I endured as a high school freshman from upperclassmen on the football team. How dare I go out for spring football practice and compete successfully with them.

Today's Acts reading contains Luke's report of a portion of Stephen's speech before the Sanhedrin, the governing council of Jerusalem and Judea. He had been arrested because of his inflammatory statements about the Temple, statements evidently not unlike those Jesus had made. On first read, the speech appears to be merely a recitation of great events recorded in Hebrew Scripture and leaves one wondering why they stoned Stephen at its end.

Closer attention to the place names reveals that Stephen has focused on those events in Israel's history, like Moses at the burning bush and the Exodus from Egypt, that took place outside the boundaries of Judea itself. Stephen's point, driven home forcefully, was that God's presence in the world works irrespective of the boundaries of Judea and irrespective of the Jew-Gentile distinction.

Such a theology undermined his adversaries' view of the Temple as the holiest place on earth with their corresponding denigration of nonJews as distant from God and of lesser importance. Lest someone hears a hint of anti-Semitism here, the preacher himself was Jewish, as were Jesus and almost all his earliest followers.

Are there any individuals or groups toward whom I feel a similar type of disdain? Those nonbelievers who mow their yards and wax their cars on Sunday certainly are missing what God is doing at the altar during Holy Communion. They must be far from God. And, even when one of them shows up, becomes a believer, and begins regularly worshipping, do we see them immediately as an equal and welcome them as other than a stranger? Does our disdain disappear?

I have not mentioned those we suppose might be even farther from God—violent criminals, those living grossly immoral lives, those into drugs or other addictions, the very poor of our own and other races, those of other ethnic groups, those of other world religions, those of another sexual orientation, those rejecting traditional gender identity. Those of a different political stance. Not a closed list, of course. Add your own.

The perspective the author presents through Stephen's speech feels quite refreshing—God works pervasively in the world among all people, seeking them, drawing them. That's where we belong, wherever God is at work. The boundaries of the worshipping community must remain permeable to those who take courage and approach, seeking the God for whom they hunger and thirst, the God who has been seeking to gather them. Those boundaries must be active, not passive. We don't await the arrival of the stranger; we seek to stretch the boundaries by actively engaging the stranger. Only those who exclude themselves remain outside; and we do not take their "no" as final. We keep praying and welcoming and inviting.

Who's in and who's out? If God's intent prevailed, no one would be out. Meanwhile, our mission calls us to join God's seeking love on mission and refuse to be pulled into the 'who's in and who's out" dynamic. Perhaps a bit of humor will make the point without furrowed brows and anxious looks in the mirror.

Outwitted
He drew a circle that shut me out--
Heretic, a rebel, a thing to flout.
But Love and I had the wit to win:
We drew a circle that took him in!+

+From Edwin Markham's poem "Epigrams." http://www.english.uiuc.edu/maps/poets/m_r/markham/poems.htm

Collect of the Day, Proper 14.the eleventh Sunday after Pentecost
Grant to us, Lord, we pray, the spirit to think and do always those things that are right, that we, who cannot exist without you, may by you be enabled to live according to your will; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen*. (BCP, 232)

Today we celebrate the Feast of Jonathan M. Daniels, seminarian, social activist, and martyr (died 14 Aug 1965 CE)
http://satucket.com/lectionary/Jonathan_Daniels.htm
https://libguides.vmi.edu/digital-exhibits/Daniels

Collect of the Feast of Jonathan M.Daniels
O God of justice and compassion, who puts down the proud and the mighty from their place, and lifts up the poor and afflicted: We give you thanks for your faithful witness Jonathan Myrick Daniels, who, in the midst of injustice and violence, risked and gave his life for another; and we pray that we, following his example, may make no peace with oppression; through Jesus Christ our Savior, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Of the Holy Cross
Especially suitable for Fridays
Almighty God, whose beloved Son willingly endured the agony and shame of the cross for our redemption: Give us courage to take up our cross and follow him; who

lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.* (BCP, 253)

For those in the Armed Forces of our Country
Almighty God, we commend to your gracious care and keeping all the men and women of our armed forces at home and abroad. Defend them day by day with your heavenly grace; strengthen them in their trials and temptations; give them courage to face the perils which beset them; and grant them a sense of your abiding presence wherever they may be; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.* (BCP, 823)

A Prayer for Light
Almighty God, we give you thanks for surrounding us, as daylight fades, with the brightness of the vesper light; and we implore you of your great mercy that, as you enfold us with the radiance of this light, so you would shine into our hearts the brightness of your Holy Spirit; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.* (BCP, 110)

A Collect for Mission
Merciful God, creator of all the peoples of the earth and lover of souls: Have compassion on all who do not know you as you are revealed in your Son Jesus Christ; let your Gospel be preached with grace and power to those who have not heard it; turn the hearts of those who resist it; and bring home to your fold those who have gone astray; that there may be one flock under one shepherd, Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen*. (BCP, 280)

Daily Office Epistle, Acts 7:17-29
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 18until another king who had not known Joseph ruled over Egypt. 19He dealt craftily with our race and forced our ancestors to abandon their infants so that they would die. 20At this time Moses was born, and he was beautiful before God. For three months he was brought up in his father's house; 21and when he was abandoned, Pharaoh's daughter adopted him and brought him up as her own son. 22So 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. 24When he saw one of them being wronged, he defended the oppressed man and avenged him by striking down the Egyptian. 25He supposed that his kinsfolk would understand that God

through him was rescuing them, but they did not understand. 26The 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?" 27But the man who was wronging his neighbor pushed Moses aside, saying, "Who made you a ruler and a judge over us? 28Do you want to kill me as you killed the Egyptian yesterday?" 29When he heard this, Moses fled and became a resident alien in the land of Midian. There he became the father of two sons.

Daily Offices in the Book of Common Prayer

Morning Prayer, Rite 2, page 75, *The Book of Common Prayer*
Noonday Prayer, page 103, *Book of Common Prayer*
Order of Worship for Evening (Vespers), p 109, *Book of Common Prayer*
Evening Prayer, Rite 2, page 115, *Book of Common Prayer*
Compline (Night Prayer), page 127, *Book of Common Prayer*
Daily Devotionals, page 136, *Book of Common Prayer*