

Daily Devotions

Devotions – January 31 – February 6, 2021

*By Participants of the Lifelong Faith Formation
Galatians Class*

Sunday January 31, 2021

SET APART!

Text: Galatians 1:15

“But when God, who set me apart from birth and called me to his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son so that I might preach him among the Gentiles...”

Paul reminds his readers that he had been intensely persecuting the Christian church, but when Christ was revealed to him, he changed his behavior. Paul says that God marked him from birth to do this work. This reminds me of Abram who was obedient to God's commands, even though his personal life was something of a mess. For example, he had loaned out his wife to powerful men to ensure his safety. It reminds me of King David who sent Bathsheba's husband, Uriah, into battle to his death so she would be a widow and available to marry again. In other ways, David was obedient to what God wanted. God will use anyone, no matter how great a sinner, to do his work.

That must mean that he can use me, also a sinner. If this is so, then why do so many people in the church rush to judge others who have sinned, not just those outside the church but those who attend? God sees beyond our sins to the persons we could be if we are obedient to him. It would seem that God is not concerned about our failings as much as he is concerned that we do what he asks: love our neighbors as ourselves and love him “with our whole heart, mind and strength.” Not only that, but Paul is saying God planned when Paul was born for him to do this great work. He began as soon as he was called away from his great evil of persecuting Christians.

What does this mean for me? Was I marked from birth to have faith in Christ and to live as a Christian? Should I worry less about my daily sins and strive more to do God's work as he has called me? I know that studying his Word can prepare me for today's work and for possibly greater work tomorrow. His grace will help me live as he has marked me.

By Nikki Stillman, formerly, Porterfield Lutheran Church, Porterfield, Wisconsin

During the autumn of 2020, the Synod Lifelong Faith Formation Class met via zoom. The 13-member class studied the book of Galatians with Bishop Emeritus Thomas Skrenes. The class submits these daily devotions to you!

Monday, February 1, 2021

I HAVE GROWN

Text: Galatians 2:15

“We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; yet we know that a person is justified not by the works of the law but through Jesus Christ. And we have come to believe in Christ Jesus, so that we might be justified by Christ, and not by doing the works of the law, because no one will be justified by the law.”

I always need reinforcement when it comes to understanding and believing in the above sentences. My church upbringing told me that I had to pray for forgiveness and do things for other people so that I could be forgiven for any of the rules I had broken. Imagine my shock and the happiness it brought me to find out that Jesus loves me just as I am. I love reminding people that Jesus loves us and is always with us.

Let us pray: Dear Jesus, thank you for all you do for us. May we continue share your words and teaching to all. Amen

Galatians 5:22-24 “By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.”

In my “simple” life I’ve often wondered about these verses. After all, I really don’t buy the most expensive clothing on the market, I’m not always in need of something new to make me happy, I try to give my offerings on a regular basis, I don’t always have to have the most expensive cut of meat for supper and I only complain about things that aren’t working the way I want them and similar “small” things that irritate me.

As I have grown as a Christian there are several statements in the above paragraph that tell me I need a change of attitude. As a Christian I am not the center of attention. As I read this piece of scripture, I need to learn that fruits of the Spirit need to be freely shared with the people of this world. Not because I’m such a perfect person but they were given to us freely so we can help all persons in need.

Let us pray: Dear Lord, thank you for giving us these special gifts. May we use them to continue to care for all people. Amen

By Sue Hill, Sharon Lutheran Church, Bessemer, Michigan

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Tuesday, February 2, 2021

SEEING CHRIST

One lesson stands out to me from Paul's letter to the Galatians. Having always thought of Galatians as the "Fruit of the Spirit" book, I instead came away with a lesson I wasn't expecting. In chapter 2, Paul states, "Having been crucified with Christ, I no longer live, but Christ lives in me." Christ lives in me. What a stunning concept, but really, what in the salvation story is not stunning? But there's more. In chapter 3, Paul goes on to say that we are all one in Christ. Wait, what? If Christ is in me, and you and I are one, that must mean that Christ lives in you, too. Can I really accept that, with all that entails? Do I see Christ in the face of the single mom standing in line for a box of free food? Do I see Christ reflected in the tears of a dad who sees his only son going to jail? How about the angry, skinny kid who is always fighting on the playground? Or the tired, short-tempered associate at the superstore? If I don't see Christ in these, perhaps I'm not looking. And what of Christ? Where does Jesus stand on the issue? Oh, yes, Jesus was very clear. In Matthew 25, Jesus says, "Whatever you do for the least of these, you do for me."

Let us pray: Holy Lord, clear my vision that I may always find you in the downtrodden, the weary and the undeserving. Amen

By Lola Johnson, Calvary Lutheran Church Quinnesec, Michigan

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Wednesday, February 3, 2021

FOR US!

Text: Galatians 2:21 (NIV)

“I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing.”

The most precious gift God ever bestowed on us was his Son, Jesus Christ, who suffered and died for our sins because there was and is nothing we can do to save ourselves. We can only be saved by God's grace. This doesn't mean we should disregard the law, of course, we should always try to please our Father by doing our best to do what he wants us to do and be who he wants us to be, but at the same time we recognize that no human can fulfill God's law.

Jesus, who was both human and divine, did this for us and then "was crucified, died and was buried." This bestowed us with God's unmerited mercy, his grace, as a gift to each of us for all time. It is usually during the last parts of the season of Lent that we focus on the brutality with which Jesus was treated and ultimately killed. Let's think about it now for a little while: from the prayer in the garden at Gethsemane when he suffered God's wrath while bearing all of our sins in himself; being arrested, spit at, beaten, mocked and humiliated; being nailed to a wooden cross surrounded by criminals to slowly suffocate; crying out to God, "Why have you forsaken me?"

This horrible suffering and death with all of our sins; yours, mine and all of humanity piled on and in him is the price that Jesus paid for our redemption. This is how we are saved by grace. In Galatians, Paul is reprimanding the people in Galatia because they have come to believe that there are things they can do to save themselves, like being circumcised and following other points of the law. Paul tells them in this verse, "if you could be saved by following the law, then all the suffering and the death of Jesus was for no reason, it was meaningless."

This is a lesson we all need to be reminded of, not just at Easter time, but every time we berate ourselves, or our neighbor for doing something to break God's law. We cannot help ourselves. We are saved by grace alone.

Let us pray: Heavenly Father, we know we cannot save ourselves and everyday our thoughts and actions betray us. Thank you for the greatest gift, Jesus Christ your Son, whose death saved us by your grace. Amen.

By Pamela Long, Grace Lutheran Church South Range, Michigan

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Thursday, February 4, 2021

HAVING A FATHER

Text: Galatians 4:4-6

“But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, 5 in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children. 6 And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!”

When I was eight years old my father died. I needed a father. It was calming to know God was there to fill the void.

He was always there tapping on my shoulder when I would experiment or stray into the dark underworld. No matter what I did, or how far I strayed, He was there to guide me back.

When I finally decided to come back home, like the prodigal son (or daughter in this case), His door was open wide, and His arms were extended. He even came running to me in a gallop, not the other way around.

Having a father like that is invaluable, and something to cherish forever.

Let us pray: You, O God, are our Father. We give thanks that you love us and hold us forever. Amen.

By Elaine Hendrickson, Our Saviour’s Lutheran Church Atlantic Mine, Michigan

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Friday, February 5, 2021

NO LONGER WEARY

Text: Galatians 6:9

“So, let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up.”

My husband gave me a beautiful amaryllis plant about ten years ago. After all these years of caring for this plant and after moving it to a different spot in the house each year, it just would not bloom. Not once!

Growing up on a farm, my father planted his corn and oats each year. He watched the weather. He fertilized the fields and he waited patiently to reap the harvest at the proper time.

He modeled to me that we should not become weary in doing what's right and that we should just keep on doing the right thing and to trust in God.

This summer I was getting weary of the pandemic. I was tired of having to stay home. I missed travel. I was lonesome for our children and grandchildren. I missed my close friends. This summer I tried moving my amaryllis outside to the back porch. In the midst of my weariness over the pandemic this plant produced huge, beautiful flowers! I almost gave up on the plant many times over the years. For almost the entire summer these flowers brought joy in the midst of my weariness!

It is easy to do well and not give up when we can reap immediate rewards. But, like with my amaryllis, it is difficult not to get weary when we don't see results.

In Galatians Paul tells us to not become weary in doing well. At the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Paul did not grow tired of doing well. He wrote that we should not give up, for in due season we will reap. What an encouragement!

Let us pray: Dear Heavenly Father: May I not become weary in doing good but rather be persistent working diligently and enthusiastically, keeping in mind the rich harvest you will send at the proper time. Help me to continue to do the things that I should do – even when frustrated at the lack of results. Give me patience and trust which only comes from you alone. In the name of Jesus, I ask these things. Amen.

By Luanne Skrenes, Immanuel Lutheran Negaunee, Michigan

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Saturday, February 6, 2021

PARADOXICAL COMMANDMENTS OF LEADERSHIP

(By: Dr. Kent M. Keith)

“My friends, if anyone is detected in a transgression, you who have received the Spirit should restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness. Take care that you yourselves are not tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.” Galatians 6:1-2

Some people are illogical, unreasonable and self-centered.

Love them anyway.

If you do good, some people will accuse you of selfish ulterior motives.

Do good anyway.

If you are successful, you will win some false friends and true enemies.
Succeed anyway.
The good you do today will be forgotten tomorrow.
Do good anyway.
Honesty and frankness make you vulnerable.
Be honest and frank anyway.
The biggest people with the biggest ideas can be shot down by the smallest people with the smallest minds.
Think big anyway.
People favor underdogs but they follow only top dogs.
Fight for a few underdogs anyway.
What you spend years building may be destroyed overnight.
Build anyway.
People really need help, but they may attack you if you help them.
Help them anyway.
Give the world the best you have and you get kicked in the teeth.
Give the world the best you have anyway.
~ Dr. Kent M. Keith

Let us Pray: “Lord Jesus Christ, who didst stretch out your arms of love on the hard wood of the cross that everyone might come within the saving reach of your embrace: So clothe us in the Spirit that we, reaching forth our hand in love, may bring those who do not know you to the knowledge and love of you; for the honor of the Name of Jesus. Amen.”
(From the Episcopal Prayer Book and Hymnal, p.58)

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