

Devotions – July 26 – August 1, 2015
Pam Durbin
First Lutheran Church, Gladstone, MI

Sunday, July 26

Text: Philippians 3:7- 8a (New Century Version)

Those things were important to me, but now I think they are worth nothing because of Christ. Not only those things, but I think that all things are worth nothing compared with the greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.

Summertime is a time of sorting for me; cleaning out closets, putting away, throwing away or giving away. I recently came upon an interesting artifact from my past. Not like the credentials that Paul attributes to his “confidence in the flesh,” but it gave me bragging rights in seventh grade. I had earned this certificate for second place in a middle school essay contest and remember being quite proud of that at the time. I probably have not thought about it or sorted through that box of memorabilia for twenty years. Tossing that certificate wasn’t a monumental event, but it reminded me of the need to recognize what is important in my life and what it is that will last. I am encouraged by Paul’s words: “... all things are worth nothing compared with the greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.”

Let us pray: *Dear Jesus, thank you for the opportunity to enjoy memories of special times in my life. Help me to turn from the past and walk eagerly each day with you. Amen*



Monday, July 27, 2015

Text: Philippians 1:29-30 (The Message)

There’s far more to this life than trusting in Christ. There’s also suffering for him. And the suffering is as much a gift as the trusting. You’re involved in the same kind of struggle you saw me go through, on which you are now getting an updated report in this letter.

Why me, God? Have you heard that question before? Perhaps thought it yourself when it seems you cannot handle one more hurt, trial or disappointment? And here Paul's words challenge us by calling our suffering a gift.

Following Jesus did not mean a struggle free life for Paul – he was writing to the Philippians from a prison cell! We should not be surprised to face struggles of our own as we walk a walk of faith. But can we see these struggles as gifts. More often we look for sympathy in our struggles, perhaps we whine a little to get it. It seems like whining is part of human nature. Working with children, I hear it all the time, but as adults, we like to whine about our struggles, too. Paul's words bring us up short when he says this suffering is as much an honor and privilege as believing in Christ, both of which bring glory to God.

Let us pray: *Heavenly Father, thank you for holding me close in my struggles this day. Show me how to use them only to bring glory to your name. Amen*



Tuesday, July 28, 2015

Text: Philippians 3:13-14 (Living Bible)

No, dear brothers, I am still not all I should be but I am bringing all my energies to bear on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, I strain to reach the end of the race and receive the prize for which God is calling us up to heaven because of what Christ Jesus did for us.

Have you ever made a big mistake? Can you remember something that was said or done without malice or evil intention, but that ended up causing pain for yourself and others? Perhaps something as simple as using poorly chosen words in a conversation that resulted in hurt feelings and damaged relationships. It was a small mistake that would take more than an apology to fix. I remember feeling trapped in a situation like this. All my efforts to repair the relationship did not work. I was ready to just give up. But Paul's words here gave me comfort (verse 9). I can be right with God because I believe in Christ and trust in him. I am encouraged to press on, forgetting the past and reaching for the prize God called me to in Christ. My efforts continue....

Let us pray: *Merciful God, when I blunder badly, I am reminded that I have not reached the goal you want for me. I need your strength to press on. Thank you for Paul's words of comfort and encouragement that remind me of your love. Amen*



Wednesday, July 29, 2015

Text: Philippians 4:6-7 (The Message)

Don't fret or worry. Instead of worrying, pray. Let petitions and praises shape your worries into prayers, letting God know your concerns. Before you know it, a sense of God's wholeness, everything coming together for good, will come and settle you down. It's wonderful what happens when Christ displaces worry at the center of your life.

I recently had the opportunity to sit in the hospital with a family whose loved one was having a heart catheterization. We had been passing time in the waiting room with magazines, knitting, conversation and the usual noises of T.V. and intercom announcements in the background. It was getting late in the afternoon when the intercom interrupted our thoughts with, "Code blue in the cath lab, code blue in the cath lab." We all had seen enough T.V. to know this could be very bad. The panic and fear I saw in the eyes of the others reflected my own increasing anxiety as my every thought became a prayer or plea to God for each person in this family. After ten minutes, which seemed like an hour, an angel of God, dressed as a worker at the information desk, came to our little group huddled together letting us know she had to leave for the day. She wanted us to move to another waiting room because the person we were waiting for had not even started his procedure yet and this room was closing for the day. How quickly my prayers of concern turned into words of gratitude and praise.

Let us pray: *Gracious God, thank you for the blessing of angels speaking words of comfort during troubling times. Bring to mind the peace of Christ that can displace worry when he is placed in the center of our life. Amen*



Thursday, July 30, 2015

Text: Philippians 4:4 (King James Version)

Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice.

I cannot read this verse without humming that tune I learned at Fortune Lake Lutheran Camp. My heart is then full of wonderful memories, faces of people who touched my life and the lives of my children over the past thirty years. This time of year we especially remember the young people working as counselors to lead children along the path of faith development as their own faith is nurtured in the process. Just a couple days of focused Bible study, praise and worship music, and fellowship with friends old and new in those beautiful surroundings, refreshes my spirit. I am then better equipped to rejoice in the Lord all days – even the difficult ones.

Let us pray: *Almighty God, thank you for all those that work with outdoor ministries. Your creation is so beautiful. Watch over campers of all ages and bless them as they grow closer to you. Amen*



Friday, July 31, 2015

Text: Philippians 4:11-13 (Living Bible)

Not that I was ever in need, for I have learned how to get along happily whether I have much or little. I know how to live on almost nothing or with everything. I have learned the secret of contentment in every situation, whether it be a full stomach or hunger, plenty or want; for I can do everything God asks me to with the help of Christ who gives me the strength and power.

Daily we are bombarded with media reminders that we are not content or should not be. We lack something that will give us that feeling of contentment we all seek. *And for just \$19.95 we can call this number and have one sent to us. Or*

better yet, for just a few dollars more we can get two! Everyone knows if one is good, two must be better.....

Paul tells us it is not like that, his satisfaction comes from strength in Christ.

But does Paul really know what it is like to stretch a Social Security check over monthly expenses, unexpected medical bills and deal with water in the basement on the 22nd consecutive day of rain??

We do know a bit of what Paul went through. He speaks of learning contentment through times of plenty and times of want, as he writes this letter from a prison cell. And this encourages us also, to learn contentment by turning to Christ who will give us the strength and power we also need.

Let us pray: *Gracious Father, thank you for walking with me in every circumstance of life. Help me to turn from false promises of short cuts to happiness and rest at peace in your love. Amen*



Saturday, August 1, 2015

Text: Philippians 4:8-9 (The Message)

Summing it all up, friends, I'd say you'll do best by filling your minds and meditating on things true, noble, reputable, authentic, compelling, gracious- the best, not the worst; the beautiful, not the ugly; things to praise, not things to curse. Put into practice what you learned from me, what you heard and saw and realized. Do that, and God, who makes everything work together, will work you into his most excellent harmonies.

I'm not a big fan of puzzles. I just have a hard time visually finding similar edges of pieces and seeing how they will fit together. One person in our family has this gift – I consider it a gift – and I admire it. We have gone so far to stump him, as to send all the pieces from a puzzle in a plastic bag so he has to work the puzzle without knowing the final picture. There is no way to know what the picture is by looking at one piece. And he does it!

This is a life lesson. Many aspects of our daily life are meant to work together. They make us who we are, body, mind and spirit. As unique individuals, we are interconnected with each other and woven together to make up the tapestry of humanity. And the end result can only be the creative work of God. So we each must do our own part, not the part of someone else.

A promise from the words of Paul:

Put into practice what you learned from me, what you heard and saw and realized. Do that, and God, who makes everything work together, will work you into his most excellent harmonies.

One instrument playing a tune can be very nice, but part of God's design is also the music of a symphony, many instruments doing their part, together.

Let us pray: *Thank you God, for making me the person I am. As I celebrate my unique edges, show me how and where I fit best in your grand design. Help me to celebrate the different edges of my neighbor as we work together for you. Amen*

