

Devotions – September 6-12, 2015
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Sunday, September 6, 2015

Text: John 15:16

You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name.

We live in a world filled with choices. Do you want paper or plastic? Is this for here or to go? Please check credit or debit. Would you like to make that a combo for 69 cents more? Some of the best and some of the worst moments in our life have to do with being chosen. How many of us remember choosing sides to play a game of baseball? It didn't matter if you were not the first one picked, but you sure didn't want to be the last, and you wanted to be on the side that had the better players.

Being chosen is important stuff. It is important that we hear the word that Christ, the Chosen One of God, has chosen us. It isn't between saint and sinner, black or white, rich or poor. He wants us on his team; it doesn't matter if we can hit a home run or strike out, it isn't for our abilities or lack of them. He knows who we are, what we have done, and what we will do.

He has chosen us to be his friend and to have conversation with him about our joys and our concerns.

Let us pray:

Good and gracious God, we thank you for choosing us to be on your side. We pray that we may love as you have first loved us. Amen.



Monday, Sept. 7, 2015

Text: Ephesians 2:11-22

So then, remember that at one time you Gentiles by birth, called 'the uncircumcision' by those who are called 'the circumcision'—a physical circumcision made in the flesh by human hands—remember that you were at that time without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, so that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of*

the two, thus making peace, and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it.* So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone.* In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built together spiritually* into a dwelling-place for God.*

The Jerusalem temple had walls separating male and female, Jews and Gentiles. Trespassers who crossed those lines could receive punishment. Imagine how hard it was for either group to extend a hand of fellowship.

Paul invites us to look at ourselves and others in God's light. What does God's word say to the walls we have erected? What walls exist among us? Are there walls that divide the rich and poor, black and white? What about the less obvious: walls between the young and old, the ones with gray hair and other ones with piercings and tattoos; those with different sexual attractions and those who suffer from mental disorders?

Jesus tears down such dividing walls of racism, social class, culture, sexism, and language that prevent us from loving and caring for our neighbors. Christ brought us together through His death on the cross. He treated us as equals and that's what made us equals. Through Him we have access to the same Father.

Let us pray:

God of mercy, keep us ever mindful that we are all on in Christ. Amen.



Tuesday, Sept. 8, 2015

Text: John 6:51

I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.

There is truth in the saying, "You are what you eat," and when we eat the bread and body of Christ we take on the life of Christ. We are in him and he in us. There is nothing we do this week that is more important. We pray for daily bread as a reminder of our dependence on him for everything that is needed to sustain life.

The Lord's Supper is a meal where each of us comes as we are. We come to God as individuals but at the same time we come together as a family to be strengthened by the word and to receive the body and blood of Jesus Christ.

Bread is ordinary bread, simply for the eating, but the ordinary becomes powerful for those who eat what God has provided, the bread of everlasting life.

Let us pray:

Heavenly Father, may we always be open to your invitation to receive the bread of life. Amen.



Wednesday, Sept. 9

Text: John 6:1-9

After this Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, also called the Sea of Tiberias. A large crowd kept following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing for the sick. Jesus went up the mountain and sat down there with his disciples. Now the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near. When he looked up and saw a large crowd coming towards him, Jesus said to Philip, 'Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?' He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do. Philip answered him, 'Six months' wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little.' One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, 'There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?'

In the feeding of the 5,000, my favorite illustration is the story of the boy. I picture him leaving home with a lunch in a knapsack with no destination in mind. It doesn't say he had plans to go and see who this Jesus is. He sees that something is going on and wonders why the crowd gathered there.

He hears a rumbling about not having enough food so he offers his meager lunch to be shared and Andrew says, "That's a drop in the bucket for 5,000 people."

I put this boy in the same category as one of my favorite Christmas songs, *The Little Drummer Boy*. One of the lines is, "What can I give him poor as I am, if I were a shepherd I would give Him a lamb." But all he has is his ability to play his drum, and so he says, "I'll play my drum for Him," and so he does.

The boy in this miracle probably felt the same way...I don't have enough for 5,000 but I have something to give. We are never fully adequate to meet the needs of the work that Jesus has for us, but when we depend on him and not ourselves, it doesn't matter what the odds are.

Jesus wants us to be partners with Him in this miracle of feeding 5,000. It is one miracle we can do. It is about feeding one another, caring for one another and inviting them to experience the bread of life.

Let us pray:

God of grace, help us to feed those who are hungry, physically and spiritually. Amen.



Thursday, Sept. 10, 2015

Text: John 20:25

So the other disciples told him, 'We have seen the Lord.' But he said to them, 'Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.'

Jesus often expressed disappointment in the fact that his followers lacked in spirituality and were slow to believe in Him, yet he never lost patience with them. Jesus understands our doubts and questions that often accompany the major traumas of our lives and even those questions that creep in for no apparent reason.

Martin Luther was no stranger to doubt. He says, "I know how I sometimes struggle in the hours of darkness...I know how slippery the footing can be even for those who seem to be firmly established in their faith." Questioning our faith helps us to grow in our faith. Jesus hasn't promised to answer all of our questions to our satisfaction. It just means he isn't finished with us yet.

When we come to the communion table, Jesus is right there and through his body and blood he chases away our doubts and fills us with faith hope and trust in Him.

Let us pray:

*Lord of Life, amidst our doubts you offer us mercy and peace and for these we give thanks.
Amen.*



Friday, Sept. 11, 2015

Text: Romans 8:6

To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.

Eight years after my son was paralyzed in a car accident, he suffered from depression and turned to drugs. He died from methamphetamine poisoning. Someone who is physically crippled can be strong and able to care for themselves, but those who are spiritually crippled become paralyzed by their problems.

Scripture tells us that our greatest need is not in physical healing, but salvation, spiritual wholeness. We have to give ourselves to the power found in Jesus Christ. When we acknowledge our weakness, his power is magnified. The life of Christ is a message of hope, a message of mercy, a message of life in a dark world.

So we pray, Lord deliver us from evil, deliver us from the desire to do things our way, deliver us from worry and anxiety. Amen



Saturday, Sept. 12, 2015

Text: John 15:1-4

I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine-grower. He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me.

I think we could hear 50 sermons on how to bear fruit for Christ, yet the plants and the branches do not have to remind themselves to grow. They do not have to remind themselves to bear fruit, they simply need to be in the right place - the place that the gardener has prepared for it, the place where the conditions for growth are to be found.

For us the right place to be is abiding in Christ. Those who profess that Jesus is Lord and believe in their hearts that he has risen from the dead are part of the vine attached to Christ.

The conditions are perfect for our growth because God is the gardener. He has sprinkled us with a little bit of miracle grow...called love. He has provided us with good soil...people and places where we can be an instrument of hope and love to a larger community.

Let us pray to God our Gardener who has created us to be a blessing to the world. Amen.

