

**Devotions – November 22-28, 2015**  
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**Sunday, November 22, 2015**  
**Christ the King Sunday**

Text: John 18:37

*Pilate asked him, “So you are a king?” Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.”*

Television and I were young together. Television was black and white, and the test pattern was often all there was to watch, but it was television just the same and it was fascinating. I loved *Howdy Doody*, and I was a charter member of the *Mickey Mouse Club*. Another favorite show was *Disneyland*, and so it’s no surprise that for many years the word “kingdom” called up images of a fairy princess castle, just like the one we saw in the Magic Kingdom.

Now that I’m an adult, the word “kingdom” has come to have broader meaning, but it still conjures up certain images. If there’s a kingdom, then there must be a king. And if there’s a king, he ought to be mighty and powerful because that’s what kings are. The Pharisees and the Romans of Jesus’ time had their ideas about what a kingdom was, too, and their ideas weren’t all that different from mine. The king the Jews expected would be mighty and powerful, and he would restore God’s people to their rightful place in the world.

Jesus had a different idea. He said the Kingdom of God wouldn’t come with a lot of fanfare. In fact, Jesus says, the Kingdom is already here. We won’t find God’s Kingdom where we might expect it, in palaces or royal courts, but rather we’ll find it in the everyday world. We’ll find God’s Kingdom wherever there’s someone who needs something to eat or something to wear. We’ll find it where there’s injustice or oppression. We’ll find it in other people, and we’ll find it in ourselves. We’ll find it now and in the fullness of time as we become who God means us to be. The truth about God’s kingdom and about Jesus’ kingship can be found in a paradox: whoever will be Lord of all will be servant of all; whoever will be King will be slave, just as Jesus was. But the paradox is followed by the promise: we will also be raised when the Kingdom is finally here in its fullness, just as Jesus was.

**We pray:** *God of power and might, we thank you for the truths revealed to us in your Son, Jesus. Help us to be faithful workers in your Kingdom, servants to all. We pray in the name of the risen Christ. Amen.*



**Monday, November 23, 2015**

Text: Psalm 126, titled "A Harvest of Joy"

*"May those who sow in tears reap with shouts of joy. Those who go out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, carrying their sheaves." (Verses 5-6)*

The harvest theme of this Psalm reminds me of my grandfather. I grew up in Davenport, Iowa, in the midst of fertile and productive farm land. When I went away to college, everyone there assumed that since I was from Iowa I was also from a farm. Quite to the contrary, I was a city girl, as unused to farm life as anyone from Brooklyn or Phoenix would be. My grandfather, though, **had** grown up on a farm, and he had some great stories and memories about farm life. Even though as an adult he no longer lived on the farm, he never lost his love for planting seeds and for growing things, especially flowers.

I miss my grandfather; he was a wise and kind man. My mother used to say that he "puttered" in his garden. I think she meant that he took his time when he was out there. We know that you can't rush a seed into sprouting or a flower into blooming. These things will happen in their own time. We can only "putter;" the growth and the harvest will happen without our help. The Lord holds all our harvests in his hands. All we have comes from God, and along with the psalmist we rejoice in God's goodness.

All Saints Day, which we observed again so recently, is still fresh in my mind. Especially on that day each year I feel a closeness to all those who are now gone...my grandfather, my mother, so many more. This psalm reminds me that not only is God responsible for all the "harvests" of our lives, but that even when we mourn for someone, there will eventually be a harvest of joy. We will all come home together, carrying our sheaves and rejoicing.

**We pray:** *God the Father of the harvest and of all things, we thank and praise you for your goodness. We thank you for sharing that goodness with us, your people, and we thank you especially for sharing your Son Jesus. Send your Spirit to us so that we will always hold those truths in our hearts. In Christ's name we pray, Amen.*



**Tuesday, November 24, 2015**

Text: Joel 2:21-27

*"Do not fear, O soil; be glad and rejoice, for the Lord has done great things! Do not fear, you animals of the field, for the pastures of the wilderness are green...." (Verses 21-22a)*

As I'm writing this devotion, we have just been hearing about the brutal and horrific attacks on innocent civilians in the city of Paris, France. As with other recent disasters, it's a time when we cannot help but question the state of our world and ask ourselves just where we can find God in all of this.

In the book of Joel, there had been a disaster, too, a natural disaster in the form of a plague of locusts. This plague had wiped out the entire food supply of God's people the Israelites, and there was fear and grief everywhere. The people then had the same questions we have now: Where was God? Why didn't God help them? And, as many people in Paris are probably asking, why did I live and someone else die?

But then for Joel, and for us, too, a word of promise comes from God: "Do not fear, O soil....Do not fear, you animals of the field....O children of Zion, be glad and rejoice in the Lord your God." God promises to be with the people, telling them that they shall have plenty to eat and that they will be satisfied. He will deal with them "wondrously," and they will know that their God is Lord of all things, and He will be with them forever.

It is indeed sometimes difficult to see God in the midst of suffering and evil. What we can hold fast to at those times are God's promises. God promises to be with us. God was so invested in that promise that God actually became one of us, a true human, subject to the same fears and temptations as we are. Though we sometimes are afraid and can't understand the evil that often shows itself in our world, we can know that in the midst of it all God is with us and understands our fear. God is there then and always, with the comfort of God's Spirit to tell us again, "Do not fear," for I am with you.

**We pray:** *O God, we pray today that you will comfort all those who face war and oppression, all who are afraid. Be with them, and send your Spirit to surround them with your love. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen*



**Wednesday, November 25, 2015**

Text: 1Timothy 2:1-7

*"First of all, then I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for everyone...." (v. 1a)*

Really? Give thanks for **everyone**?? Even those terrorists who attacked the city streets of Paris and the World Trade Center? Even that politician who ridiculed his opponent mercilessly? Even that murderer, that thief, that addict? EVERYONE??

The answer is clear: everyone indeed. The author of 1 Timothy goes on to remind us that God "desires *everyone* to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth," not only those we find to be "acceptable" or "okay."

This is not so easy. It is pretty easy to give thanks for our family and for our blessed and free country and for our friends and for all those we love, but to give thanks for our enemies?? Not so much.

Can we recognize in all others that image of God in which we are all created? Can we, in fact, be thankful for all our fellow humans, even the ones we fear and distrust? We know that we can never do these things perfectly, as our Lord Jesus did them, but our call is to follow his example in the best way we can. In 1 Peter, chapter 2, verse 21, we are told, "For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you should follow in his steps." We are called to be the ones who **can** forgive, who **can** give thanks for everyone, and it's by the grace of the Holy Spirit that we will seek to live out that calling.

**We pray:** *Forgiving Savior, we pray that you will send your Spirit to us, helping us to follow your example of love and forgiveness, giving thanks for everyone. Amen*



**Thursday, November 26, 2015**

**THANKSGIVING DAY**

Text: Matthew 6:25-33

*"Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?" (Verse 25)*

It seems appropriate to me that our Common Lectionary uses a text from the book of Matthew as the Gospel for Thanksgiving Day. I am especially fond of the name "Matthew," and in fact chose that name for my only son. The name "Matthew" comes from the Hebrew language and means "gift of God," which of course my son has been, but which also seems to make this text especially appropriate for today, a day when we remember how many gifts **we** have been given.

These verses, taken from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, remind us over and over again of all the blessings we have received from God. What we eat, what we drink, what we wear...these are all things that most of us have in more than enough quantity. But the gifts do not end there. We have also been given the gift of freedom from worry, the assurance that God knows what we need, thus ensuring that we can be free from both worry and fear.

There is one more gift as well, what Jesus calls the kingdom of God. "Make appropriate choices about the things I've given you," he seems to say, "and there will be other rewards, for you have been created to be the most responsible and purposive of all the earthly creatures. Strive to make those appropriate choices, and you will live into the kingdom of God, that place where peace reigns and all needs are met. Seek first to be in my kingdom, and you will learn to live a life that is free to serve without worry."

**We pray:** *O Giver of all Gifts, help us to maintain that attitude of gratitude that results in peace and harmony among all your creatures. Help us to see the needs of others and to supply them as you have so graciously supplied ours. We send our greatest thanks for your greatest gift, your Son Jesus Christ. In his name we pray. Amen.*



**Friday, November 27, 2015**

Text: Jeremiah 33:14-16

*"In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David; and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land." (Verse 15)*

It's hard to believe that the church year is drawing to a close. The days of 2015 have flown by, and now another year is nearly gone. It seems to be a common lament that time goes by more and more quickly the older we get. I'm not so old, though, that I can't remember how as a child the days seemed to literally crawl by as I waited for Christmas to arrive. How strange that now I want to hold up my hand like a traffic cop with a loud, "Slow down!!"

Jeremiah talks about the passing of time, too. In our text for today, his words carry both a warning and a promise about what will be happening in the future. The promise is that God will fulfill the commitment he made to Israel and Judah, his chosen people, that God would raise up a successor to King David, the promised Messiah. "The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah....I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David...." The warning comes soon after: this Messiah "...shall execute justice and righteousness in the land." God assures his people that he will indeed send the Savior they have been hoping and praying for (though as it turns out, they will be getting a very different kind of king from the one they were expecting), but there will be justice, too, and the establishment of a reign of righteousness.

I have this great little book titled Crazy Talk: A Not So Stuffey Dictionary of Theological Terms. In this book, the definition for "righteous" is this: "Everything that you are not, but that God wants you to be." This is where we'll be at the end of swift-passing time...in the kingdom of God where through God's grace we can live in a reign of righteousness, being exactly what God wants us to be. That is God's promise.

**We pray:** *Holy God, only you are righteous. As we look ahead to the coming days of Advent and the arrival of the promised Messiah, help us to live a life of justice that reflects your coming reign of righteousness. In the name of Jesus, the Promised One, we pray. Amen*



**Saturday, November 28, 2015**

Text: Psalm 25:1-10

*"Lead me in your truth, and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all day long."  
(Verse 5)*

Happy New Year! Today is the last day of the church year, tomorrow the first day of Advent. It's the beginning of a new church year, but unlike the celebration of the New Year's Eve on December 31, this new beginning has a more somber tone. We await this new church year with joy, to be sure, but also with a sense of awe and mystery, for we know that along with the joy of Christmas comes the sadness of Holy Week. The ultimate joy of Easter seems far off, for first we have to walk with Jesus on his earthly journey. We have to wait.

The author of Psalm 25 didn't have the advantage that we have of being able to look backward through the lens of New Testament Scriptures and see the revelation of Emmanuel, God with us, in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. But the psalmist did know that salvation was coming, that it would come from God, and that he would have to wait for it.

One definition of Advent that I've seen is "a time of expectant waiting and preparation." So that's our task, to set our hearts and minds, along with the psalmist, to wait expectantly for the salvation that we know is coming. Emmanuel – God with us – Happy New Year!!

**We pray:** *Holy God, as our church year draws to a close, help us to look forward with expectation once again to the coming of your Son, Emmanuel. Help us to wait patiently and to prepare our hearts to receive your inexplicable gift of love. Accept our thanks, and send your Spirit to stir us up for deeds of service and love. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.*

