

Devotions – January 17-23, 2016

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Foreword: This week we'll be using the Scripture that 1.5 million believers in more than 50 languages around the globe are using with us – the Daily Texts (www.mountcarmelministries.com/daily-texts-devotionals/). Let's listen together to God's word. I've added my reflections below that God has brought to my mind and heart as I've listened.

Sunday, January 17, 2016

***My people shall be satisfied with my bounty, says the Lord. Jeremiah 31:14
God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work. 2 Corinthians 9:8***

Tell me, are you a cup-half-full or half-empty kind of person? Through the prophet Jeremiah God not only promises God's bounty but also that there will be satisfaction with that bounty. What a promise! So...cup half-full? We get to live out something even better...as God's *fully* full people. After all, even if our proverbial cup half-contains, say, needed water, it also half-contains needed air. In other words, whatever our perceived circumstance, the reality of God's generous and faithful provision is sure. With such abundance St. Paul exhorts us this day to boldly follow God into the ministry of good works God has prepared before us to do. This day there is and will be enough – in fact, more than enough! – for you to walk with God in God's generous way of Christ-centered love. Thanks be to God!

Let us pray:

God of everlasting abundance, by your promise you are my God and I am your child. You surround me every day with your goodness. Open my heart and mind to your faithful generosity so that I may be satisfied and join you in lovingly giving myself away to your world...in Jesus' name, Amen.



Monday, January 18, 2016

***The Lord makes a way in the sea, a path in the mighty waters. Isaiah 43:16
Do not fear, only believe. Mark 5:36***

Images of the Exodus of God's people from Egypt through the sea swim in my mind as I read Isaiah's words. I wonder what it was like to walk on dry land where water had only recently been. What had been impossible one moment had become open and possible the next. Fear was replaced with joy. Certain death was replaced with new life. No doubt such images and stories

came to mind for the Babylonian captives as Isaiah first spoke God's promise and perhaps even as Jesus invited the father of a dead daughter to revived faith as Jesus determined to wake her up. What do you face this day? The Triune God goes with you, making a path of new reality, inviting you to follow.

Let us pray:

Holy One, you promise new reality to those who believe in you. When I am overwhelmed by the fear of death and the terrors of the night, you are always there, ready to lift me up out of my fears. Place me on your solid ground this day. Lord, I believe; help my unbelief...in Jesus' name, Amen.



Tuesday, January 19, 2016

Do not put the Lord your God to the test. Deuteronomy 6:16
If you love me, you will keep my commandments. John 14:15

Through Moses and Jesus, is God inviting us today to see the world in simple black and white fashion? There's right and wrong; the commandments have been given; just keep them? Don't "put God to the test" as if one were a spoiled child who won't accept "no," continuously voicing a worn request over and over, striving to finally gain "yes" surrendered from a wearied parental opponent? In fact, there is black and white, right and wrong built into God's world. We glimpse such in the Ten Commandments, the Great Commandment, the call to take up our cross, and more. Yet our perspective of the complete details within is incomplete, for we are not God. It reminds me of Quantum Mechanics, the area of physics that predicts and observes energy and matter at the atomic and sub-atomic level operating in discrete "quanta." Such precision! Yet within that discipline, Heisenberg's uncertainty principle asserts a fundamental limit to the precision of our knowing complementary variables of a particle (e.g., the position and momentum of an electron) simultaneously. We don't and can't "know it all." Following God's will isn't as simple as following one side of a list of rules while avoiding the other. What we can do, though, is humbly watch, listen, and relate to Jesus as He *is* the final interpreter of God's will, command, and promise. If it's really Jesus we're following, seeking WWJD (What Would Jesus Do?) is a good beginning.

Let us pray:

Father in heaven, your Spirit dwells with me forever. Yet I have a problem: my heart is attached to this world instead of you. Forgive me. Lord Jesus, give me the vision, heart, and the strength to follow you in all matters. Empower me to become a living witness to your truth...in Jesus' name, Amen.



Wednesday, January 20, 2016

We also will serve the Lord, for he is our God. Joshua 24:18
Think of us in this way, as servants of Christ and stewards of God's mysteries. 1
Corinthians 4:1

I am convinced that Israel had the best of intentions for follow-through as they gathered to Shechem and dialogued with Joshua, covenanting there with God. They were finally settled in the promised land. Put away your other gods and serve the Lord, Joshua encouraged them. We will, they said. Yet as soon as they voiced their faithful intent, Joshua warned them that they would not be able to follow through and that God, their betrayed covenant partner, would not forgive them. The worn path had been and would continue to be repeated: people sin against God; God justly disciplines; people repent and cry to God for mercy; and – with all due respect to Joshua's warning – God's grace is bestowed. Sound familiar? What makes us any different? It's not us that are different; it's the covenant that has been upgraded, the new covenant through the precious blood of Jesus Christ our Lord. This is the mystery that St. Paul speaks of, and although we try to make it a thing of analysis, it is best simply received and lived. This day...in Jesus' name, you are forgiven; in Jesus' name you can live and love; in Jesus' name you *can truly* serve the Lord! Thanks be to God!

Let us pray:

Faithful God, you have made me in your image to serve you and others. Yet I choose to forsake you by following other gods. Prone to idolatry, I need your just conviction and your merciful grace. For Jesus sake, give me a new and willing heart this day to serve you...in Jesus' name, Amen.



Thursday, January 21, 2016

Then we your people, the flock of your pasture, will give thanks to you forever; from generation to generation we will recount your praise. Psalm 79:13
With joy give thanks to the Father, who has made you fit to have your share of what God has reserved for his people in the kingdom of light. Colossians 1:12

While the final verse of Psalm 79 portrays a scene of peace and joy, preceding verses do not. Jerusalem lays in ruin; the temple was destroyed; conquered people have been marched to Babylon; and now the psalmist desires God's wrath to burn hot against the people that wreaked havoc on what had been home. Psalm 79:13 is a promise of praise to God for that hoped-for vengeance. The psalmist's hurt is raw, his sentiments honest. Can you relate at all? Well, right there into that spot of pain St. Paul's words to the church in Colossae flow. The invitation to joyfully giving thanks is extended amidst the anticipation and reality of difficult times that demand patient endurance. Yet the joyful thanks is not something that one needs to stir up from within; rather, it is gift of God and strength of God at work in you and for you right here, right now. Your experience of the world may seem otherwise, but God has indeed rescued you from

the power of darkness and transferred you into the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom you have redemption.

Let us pray:

Father in heaven, you have created us to praise your name, giving thanks in all circumstances. Thank you that we can be honest with you in our complaints, yet upheld by your strength in perseverance, faith, hope, and love. Help us to focus our eyes on you and the assurance of the world to come...in Jesus' name, Amen.



Friday, January 22, 2016

O give thanks to the Lord, call on his name, make known his deeds among the peoples.

Psalm 105:1

We may proclaim the good news in lands beyond you. 2 Corinthians 10:16

I love to tell the story...of Jesus and His love. In the church of my youth we would sing that hymn with gusto. I can close my eyes and see God's people around me as we sang out. There's Marge Ellefson who shared via flannelgraph the story of Jesus' redeeming visit to that wee-little man Zacchaeus. And there is Russ Solheim who taught me the Lord's Prayer in both the words and heart of Jesus. And over there is Robert Qualheim directing the choir in its weekly worship benediction "God be with you till we meet again." In many and various ways these and more proclaimed the story of God's mighty and loving deeds to me. Who shared that treasure with you? Today we are invited and privileged to join them in making known the Good News to others beyond. And you don't necessarily need a flannelgraph to do this, for God gives His story a unique voice through you.

Let us pray:

Gracious Lord, you created your people to praise you and to give you thanks for your works of mercy. You call us to go out into your world to proclaim your good news to others, but we are too often intimidated and silent. By your Spirit, please give voice to your healing story through us. Thank you...in Jesus' name, Amen.



Saturday, January 23, 2016

Anxiety weighs down the human heart, but a good word cheers it up. Proverbs 12:25

Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Philippians 4:5

Thanks be to God that we don't have to go it alone. Although very personal, our faith life is not a private affair. Together with the rest of the body of Christ, the church, you and I are blessed by God to care for each other, gently bearing with one another as well as bearing each other's

burdens. Does anxiety run deep for you today? Allow me to pray with you and speak Christ's own truth to you: You are not alone; Jesus loves you and is with you; your hope in the Lord is sure! And when I am anxious, please return the favor; speak to me Christ's own truth. Together we go. Together we bear witness of our hope – the Lord Jesus Christ.

Let us pray:

Lord of the Church, thank you for placing me together with others as the body of Christ. As members of your body, bless us to serve one another with the truth of your righteous justice and gentle mercy. Keep me from trying to go it alone. And when I am overwhelmed by fear and anxiety, bless me to experience and know that I am not alone...in Jesus' name, Amen.

