

Devotions – January 31 – February 6, 2016

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Sunday, January 31, 2016

Text: Exodus 20:8

“Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy.”

In a culture where our phones must be able to multitask, soccer games for little kids are occupying the fields at 8:00 at night, and success is determined by the numbers we produce, the concept of Sabbath is becoming foreign to us. To set aside 24 hours of just simply being with God and one another, and not doing, doing, doing, seems impossible for so many people. Yet with each new year, with each new morning, the Creator offers us another opportunity to reprioritize and be re-charged through the gift of Sabbath. The gift of being still and knowing that the Lord is God, not us.

Let us pray: *Dear God, give me the wisdom and courage to know when to say yes, as well as no, to all that crosses my path. May I make you my first priority. Amen.*



Monday, February 1, 2016

Text: Matthew 26:26-28

“Jesus took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to the disciples, and said, ‘Take, eat; this is my body.’ Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, saying, ‘Drink from it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.’”

A few years ago, one of the youth who was part of the delegation traveling to Colombia to spend time with our companion congregation shared a powerful story that happened during his previous visit. He talked about meeting this extremely poor family, a mother and four daughters, who lived in a very tiny one room shack. One of them had briefly run out for a few minutes, and when she came back she had a bag of stuff. In wanting to be hospitable to their guests, they had splurged on buying a pop and something similar to a little snack cake. They poured a little bit of the drink into cups for everyone and broke the dessert into pieces making sure everyone could have some. To him, as he witnessed their profound generosity, even with this meager food which cost them a lot, this was communion, this was the sharing of a sacred meal amongst sisters and brothers in which Christ was very much present.

Let us pray: *Dear Heavenly Host, I give you thanks for your sacrifice, for your body and blood, so that all may have abundant life in communion with you and one another. May it strengthen me to surrender things in my life for the sake of others. Amen.*



Tuesday, February 2, 2016

Text: Genesis 2:18

“Then the Lord God said, ‘It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner.’”

I had been watching a show one evening and learned that orphaned baby rhinos in Africa actually die from having no connections. Because of how sensitive they are, when they are not bonded with other living beings, their stress dramatically increases. If this continues over a period of time, their cortisol levels will eventually be depleted and then they no longer have a way of coping with stressful situations, thus eventually leading to their deaths. In response to the serious poaching that is taking place leaving many young rhinos alone, a sanctuary has been rescuing them and pairing them with other grazing animals, thus helping them to survive and grow into healthy adults. As both creation accounts reveal, all the world is intimately linked to God and one another. Relationships and community are vital not just for plants and animals, but even for our own very existence.

Let us pray: *Dear Creator, though the world is broken by our sinfulness, and it’s hard sometimes to be vulnerable with others and even you, may your healing grace renew my relationships with family, friends, and even strangers. Amen.*



Wednesday, February 3, 2016

Text: Psalm 139:7-10

“Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there. If I take the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest limits of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me fast.”

After spending another day and how many hours staring at my computer screen, desperately trying to find *something* to say in my sermon, I became very frustrated. My brain was feeling fried, not just from that but from other contributing factors as well, and I wanted to call it quits so badly. So much so that I wanted to throw in the towel and be done with preaching altogether.

As my annoyance built, I found myself wanting to flee even God's presence. But then a little voice reminded me, "Where can you go that I will not find you?" At the time, I foolishly did not want to be found, I just wanted to be left alone. However, despite my childish and imprudent attitude, thankfully God did not abandon me, but patiently forgave me, remained by my side, and guided me through the fog.

Let us pray: *Dear Lord, I'm sorry for the ways I try to push you away. Forgive me and help me to trust in your faithfulness. Amen.*



Thursday, February 4, 2016

Text: Psalm 104:24-26

"O Lord, how manifold are your works! In wisdom you have made them all; the earth is full of your creatures. Yonder is the sea, great and wide, creeping things innumerable are there, living things both small and great. There go the ships, and Leviathan that you formed to sport in it."

Often when I play with my cat, and she's running around, jumping, batting at things, and just being silly, I can't help but laugh. During one of our play sessions as my cheeks were hurting and my stomach was getting a work out, I got to thinking about how much delight I was taking in this simple pleasure, and ultimately in her. Then a picture of Yahweh having fun with the sea creature, Leviathan, popped into my mind. Not a picture we often pull out when we talk or think about the Lord, but here you have it. God at play. As one who has at times allowed work to take over my days, this text reminds me that play is also important. It is a gift from the Creator, in whose image we were fashioned. As we learn in various scripture texts, God takes delight in us, and extends the same opportunity to you and me.

Let us pray: *Dear Father, help me to enjoy the simple pleasures of life that you offer, to take delight in your creation as you do, and take time for play. Amen.*



Friday, February 5, 2016

Text: James 5:13-16

"Are any among you suffering? They should pray. Are any cheerful? They should sing songs of praise. Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord. The prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise them up; and anyone who has committed sins will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective."

On my first trip to Colombia, we had visited this young man and his mother who had been part of a program called True Vine. Since they lived in a very small one room apartment and we were a good size group, we formed a tight intimate circle around his bed. During our time with them, three different languages had been exercised. So for example, when we asked questions in English, one of our guides would have to translate it into Spanish, and then his mom would translate it into Sign language. Since this young adult was dying of a brain tumor, he could only blink his eyes in response; his hands were no longer functioning. My heart broke for them. And then I was asked to pray. So I choked back my tears and attempted to do so. As we were leaving, the mother was saying goodbye to each of us individually. When it got to be my turn, she immediately threw her arms around me, as I did with her, and we just cried, together. Though we did not speak the same verbal tongue, in that sacred moment, the tears of love crossed those barriers, and we were united as children of God through the powerful gift of prayer.

Let us pray: Dear Jesus, at times it can be hard to find just the right words. However, you don't ask that we pray eloquently, but simply that we just do. May I carve out time each day to spend in conversation with you, talking and listening. Amen.



Saturday, February 6, 2016

Text: I Corinthians 12:4-7, 12-13

“Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good...For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body--Jews or Greeks, slaves or free--and we were all made to drink of the one Spirit.”

In the summer of 2014 a friend and I had traveled to Rome, Italy. It had been one of my dreams to visit there one day and see all of the sites, including the Vatican and St Peter's Cathedral. As we were roaming around looking at all the different artwork of St Peter's and reading about it, it came to our attention that there was worship happening in a cordoned section. We asked the guards if we were allowed in and to our surprise they said yes, but we were not allowed to take pictures. We of course understood, besides, that wasn't what we were there to do. Since worship had already begun, we tried to figure out where we were in the service. There were no bulletins, which we wouldn't have been able to really read anyway, and they were, of course, speaking Italian. So this made it difficult. However, because the church universal is united by the one and same Lord, who transcends all cultures, we did not necessarily have to speak Italian in order to follow along. Through the basic liturgy of Christian worship around the means of God's grace, Word and Sacrament, we were able to, together with our Italian brothers and sisters, worship the one and same Lord. The rhythm of word, prayer, song, and Eucharist transcended the language barrier and spoke to our souls. Thanks be to God.

Let us pray: *Dear Advocate, as you have poured varied gifts upon each of us, may we use them, not as walls of division, but as means to celebrate the diversity of life, in service to all of our neighbors, and in constant praise of you. Amen.*

