

Devotions – June 12-18, 2016

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Sunday, June 12, 2016

Shameless

Text: Luke 7:36-8:3 The Message (MSG)

36-39: He went to the Pharisee’s house and sat down at the dinner table. Just then a woman of the village, the town harlot, having learned that Jesus was a guest in the home of the Pharisee, came with a bottle of very expensive perfume and stood at his feet, weeping, raining tears on his feet. Letting down her hair, she dried his feet, kissed them, and anointed them with the perfume.

Shameless. When I really believe in someone or something, I am shameless about that person or cause. For example I’ve yet to meet any adult who would not benefit from being literate; I have witnessed the light bulb coming on for an adult literacy student, and I have rejoiced, witnessing lives improved by literacy and the confidence and opportunities it brings. And so, I am shameless about telling others of the teaching methods in which I was trained and trained others, plus practiced in our previous town. I was shameless about fundraising for our adult literacy council.

But had I been the woman in the above Bible verse, “the town harlot”, and I had heard that Jesus was in town, how shameless would I have been? Would I have shown my face? Would I have sought him out? Maybe, just *maybe*, I would have gone to see him *if* I could be ambiguous, lost in a crowd. But to be a widely known shameful sinner in the community, and then to invite myself to the home of a prestigious person and stand right next to Jesus? Now *that* would be shameless! In her shoes, feeling unworthy and shameful, fearing that the Pharisee would banish me from his home, fearing the looks of disdain from guests if I did gain entry, fearing my unworthiness for Jesus to look at me, speak to me, or receive any gift I might offer... I may have stayed holed up in my home. But not her; instead of thinking, “Oh, what’s the use?” she was shameless.

Shameless means to be insensible to disgrace.

Grace empowered her to be insensible to disgrace.

Let us pray:

Oh, God, Giver of Grace,

Your grace delivers us from enemies, affliction, adversity – including our own distancing from

you. Your grace enables us through daily guidance, forgiveness, preservation. Thank you for this woman's example of seeking you, Jesus, of being right next to you, of offering you a bit of the abundant generosity you grant us. Thank you for her example of putting you ahead of fears, feelings of unworthiness, and despair. Holy Spirit, remind us that Jesus has cleared the path for us to be with him, regardless of all our disgraces. Amen



Monday, June 13, 2016

Facilities

Text: 2 Chronicles 29:1-19 The Message (MSG)

3-9: In the first month of the first year of his reign, Hezekiah, having first repaired the doors of The Temple of God, threw them open to the public. He assembled the priests and Levites in the court on the east side and said, “Levites, listen! Consecrate yourselves and consecrate The Temple of God—give this much-defiled place a good housecleaning.

My current employment involves operation and maintenance of facilities at a university. Nothing heroic or lifesaving about it, lots of behind-the-scenes, even mundane, details. I joke about “the endless list” of maintenance, cleaning, inspecting, and reporting. When my team complains that nobody knows what we do, I tell them, “That’s good! That means we have done our job!” We provide steam that makes possible warm water for the pool, the correct air temperature for the rat labs, cooling for offices and classrooms, all the while staying behind the scenes so teaching, learning, and other living can take place without facilities-related malfunctions.

When I read in today’s scripture, “...Hezekiah, having first repaired the doors of The Temple...” I thought, “Facilities work has been around for a really long time!”

Think of the times you or others have helped take care of the facility your congregation calls “our church”: cleaning, mowing, snow removal, cooking, planting, decorating, undecorating, and repairing. Is it any less holy work than that of the consecrated priests in 2 Chronicles? Any work that readies a place for praise of and learning about God; for mourning, comforting, celebrating, loving, and forgiving as Jesus taught; and for providing space and equipment for scouting, community classes, creating quilts and more is holy work.

Let us pray:

*Dear God, Thanks be to you for the talents and the inspiration you give your people to operate and maintain facilities where people can come together to praise you through song, word, and action. Churches! Neighbors' homes! Camps! Missions! Schools! Hospitals! Barns! Gardens! Shelters! Your work is holy! Your work, our hands!
Blessed be the name of the Lord most high! Amen*



Tuesday, June 14, 2016

Junk mail? RSVP

Text: **2 Chronicles 30:1-12 The Message (MSG)**

6-9 ...The invitation read: “O Israelites! Come back to God, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, so that he can return to you who have survived the predations of the kings of Assyria... Don’t be pigheaded as your ancestors were. Clasp God’s outstretched hand. Come to his Temple of holy worship, consecrated for all time. Serve God, your God... Your God is gracious and kind and won’t snub you—come back and he’ll welcome you with open arms.”

How would you respond to an invitation like this? And to top it off, from someone you don’t know, some new king? When was the last time you received an invitation that not only said not to be pigheaded, but to not be pigheaded as your ancestors were? Would you consider it junk mail? At best would you toss it aside and at worst would you rip it up and grumble something about insulting your family?

King Hezekiah was God’s mouthpiece. He was not delivering junk mail. Though we may consider God’s messages often to be unsolicited, God’s invitations and other messages are the absolute opposite of junk mail. No scam. No strings attached. OK, he might share your information with others... but mostly by asking you to personally share your faith journey story with others.

Here is my RSVP, God. Yes! Yes, I accept your invitation to spend time with you. I am making time for you, for *us*, in my busy schedule. I am putting you ahead of entertainment and distractions such as sports broadcasts, Pinterest, email, video games and more.

Thank you.

Amen



Wednesday, June 15, 2016

Preparation

Text: **2 Chronicles 30:13-27 The Message (MSG)**

13-17: The priests and Levites weren’t ready; but now, embarrassed in their laziness, they consecrated themselves and brought Whole-Burnt-Offerings to The Temple of God. Ready

now, they stood at their posts... Because so many in the congregation had not properly prepared themselves by consecration and so were not qualified, the Levites took charge of the slaughter of the Passover lambs so that they would be properly consecrated to God. 18-19: There were a lot of people... who did not eat the Passover meal because they had not prepared themselves adequately. Hezekiah prayed for these as follows: “May God who is all good, pardon and forgive everyone who sincerely desires God, the God of our ancestors. Even—especially!—these who do not meet the literal conditions stated for access to The Temple.”

20: God responded to Hezekiah’s prayer and healed the people.

Today’s complete reading (2 Chronicles 30:13-27) shows kind of a before and after account of a situation. In the before part, priests and congregants are unprepared for celebrating Passover. Next the priests got their act together and helped out the ill-prepared congregation. Then King Hezekiah prayed for those not partaking of the Passover meal because they had not prepared themselves adequately. And scripture tells us that God healed them. In the “after” shot, Passover was so splendid, that after 7 days of celebration, everybody decided to celebrate another 7 days “as joyfully as they began.”

The Bible includes lots of preparation. In Isaiah 4:3, the prophet declared, “...prepare the way for the Lord,” which Mark quotes in Mark 1:2 in his introduction of John the Baptist’s work. Biblical writings also include preparation of meals and incense, sacrifices and offerings, priests and lamps.

You may know that the Boy Scout Motto is “Be Prepared”. What’s the big deal about being prepared? The Scout motto means that you are always ready to do what is necessary to help others. It also means you are ready, willing, and able to do what is necessary in any situation that comes along. You are also being prepared to live a full and worthwhile life, being a physically fit, honorable citizen of strong character.

Let us pray:

Well, God,

Often we are not prepared, even when you’ve given us a heads up, directions, and encouragement. We get busy. Sometimes, you know, God, we figure we can’t be prepared for everything, so out of feeling overwhelmed, we simply stall. Be right beside us, Jesus, and help us discern what preparation is God’s will and what is just human marketing, sensationalism, and fear mongering. Thank you, God, for the peace, as well as the readiness to help others, that being prepared can bring. Heal us of our indifference, confusion, and fatigue so that we may be your hands and live your love. In Jesus’ name, Amen



Thursday, June 16, 2016

Who Asked You?!

Text: **Isaiah 65:1-9**New International Version (NIV)

2: All day long I have held out my hands to an obstinate people... “I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me; I was found by those who did not seek me. To a nation that did not call on my name, I said, ‘Here am I, here am I.’

“Well, who asked you?” we might say to someone who seems to have butted into our lives, stating advice or opinions -- unsolicited. Sometimes we hear, “Who died and made you Pope (or King or President)?” in response to someone who seems to aspire to a much higher rank than he holds.

I would never say to God, “Who asked you?!”... or *do* I? Maybe not in so many words. But, when I ignore him, does that send the same message that what he has to say is not valuable to me?

Let us pray:

Hey, God, I really appreciate you always being available and reaching out to me. Sorry I am a little bratty sometimes, putting way less important things ahead of you. Thanks for your patience and mercy! Holy Spirit, help me to knock it off when I am rude to God by sort of waving him off with “not now, can't you see I'm busy”. God, you give me so many amazing signs of your presence. Thank you, thank you for giving me my sense of wonder to notice ways in which you reveal yourself!

*Well, who asked you? I'm asking you, right now, God: Please, stay with me forever!
Amen!*



Friday, June 17, 2016

Who is in Charge?

Text: **Psalm 22:19-28** The Message (MSG)

27-28: From the four corners of the earth people are coming to their senses, are running back to God. Long-lost families are falling on their faces before him. God has taken charge; from now on he has the last word.

Ever since I can remember, I have been aware of some hand wringing by church members, by family members, by clergy -- lamenting a family leaving the church, a member's attendance dwindling, teenagers dropping out, an overabundance of activities crowding out church time. All

followed by questions. “What more can we do?” “How can we stop this?” “What are other churches doing?” “We need to become the emerging church, but what does the emerging church look like?” So deep seated are these lamentations, I feel it is a part of my church’s culture.

But bigger than that is this part of the bigger church: What is God up to? And where? And with whom? And what is my part in that?

A short Sunday school lesson and breakfast burritos for the little kids running around under the bleachers at their older siblings’ Sunday morning soccer game? Painting fingernails of nursing home residents while learning from them about their God journey?

Listen! Hear with your heart the words of today’s Psalm! “People are coming to their senses, are running back to God. Long-lost families are falling on their faces before him. God has taken charge...”

Let us pray:

God,

What are you up to? I take great comfort in knowing you have the last word. Thank you for taking charge. As people run back to you, help us to rejoice like the father of the prodigal son and not to be like the brother in that story. Holy Spirit, equip us to welcome and be a part of the changes that God is stirring up! In Jesus’ name, Amen



Saturday, June 18, 2016

Graduation Robe

Text: Galatians 3:23-29 The Message (MSG)

23-24: Until the time when we were mature enough to respond freely in faith to the living God, we were carefully surrounded and protected by the Mosaic law. The law was like those Greek tutors... who escort children to school and protect them from danger or distraction, making sure the children will really get to the place they set out for.

25-27: But now you have arrived at your destination: By faith in Christ you are in direct relationship with God. Your baptism in Christ was not just washing you up for a fresh start. It also involved dressing you in an adult faith wardrobe—Christ’s life, the fulfillment of God’s original promise.

As I write this, we have recently attended several high school graduation receptions and still have more in the coming weeks. I enjoy seeing photos of the honoree at different stages of his or her life and in different activities and settings, observing in just a few frames, a rapid maturation. Hard to believe! An exciting time full of hope for the graduate’s future, but also a time for the graduate to soon miss the ebb and flow of life at home, the consistency of high school or even of

college. For some graduates it's a period of fear and feeling very small. For some, it's "Ready or not for the next step, here I come!"

How about you? Do you believe, as today's scripture proclaims, that you have arrived at your destination? That by faith in Christ you are in a direct relationship with God? Some of the scriptures may still make your head spin. Praying aloud with others may make you nervous. You may have times full of doubt about or anger towards God. But, through faith in Jesus Christ, you are dressed in an adult faith wardrobe. And it suits you well!

Let us pray:

Who, boy, God!

Sometimes I don't feel like I'm ready for the next step in a relationship with you. Help me to know, to really know, that you have created me to be unique and to have purpose, your purpose, in ways no one else can. Give me certainty, Holy Spirit, that I am Jesus' and Jesus is mine!

Thank you for my beautiful wardrobe of adult faith, a customized fit, a gift from you!

Amen

