

Devotions – July 17-23, 2016

By Various NGLS Pastors and Lay People

Sunday, July 17, 2016

By Pastor Scott Ehle, Bethel, Menominee

Text: Thessalonians 5:16-18

“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.”

How does one pray without ceasing? I have read this scripture verse often and thought that it was more of a metaphorical mandate that we have an active and structured prayer life. Recently, however, I came across a devotion that suggested that Paul had a particular prayer in mind as he wrote this letter to the church in Thessalonica. There is an ancient verse known as “The Jesus Prayer”:

*“Lord Jesus Christ,
Son of God,
Have mercy on me,
A sinner.”*

The devotion in which I found this prayer encouraged the reader to pray these words at every free moment, breathing in on the first and third lines, and releasing the breath on the second and fourth lines. Although short and very to the point, this is a powerful way to come into the presence of the divine. And the more I pray it, the words become ingrained in my brain. Now, I find that the words have become a sort of mantra that is running in my head throughout the day.

This prayer has helped me put many things into perspective, both joys and struggles. It reminds me that Jesus is my Lord and guiding my life and that he is sent from God to save me and all people from the brokenness of this world, and that although I am a sinner, his love for me is complete. What a wonderful way to live life with this constant reassurance!

I am not always able to pray without ceasing...but when I find myself becoming overwhelmed, I bring these words to the forefront, and more often than not, I find the peace of Jesus Christ descend into my mind, heart, and soul.

Let us pray: *Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner. Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner. Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner...*



Monday, July 18, 2016

By Pastor Kari Vadis, Trinity, Rhinelander

Text: Luke 24.46-48:

Jesus said to his disciples, ‘Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.’

I was almost a 7th grader as I spent my annual week at Mt. Cross Lutheran Camp in Santa Cruz, CA (near where I grew up) and on Monday night while at campfire I saw my mom, my dad and my pastor walking up the path toward the campfire. I knew immediately that they had no reason to come to camp mid-week... unless... they knew. I was caught. I was found out. I was in trouble. About a week before camp had started I had stolen some items and they knew it. Now, I knew my own ability to be “bad” but somehow it was really horrible to realize that they now knew it too.

A few months later I was sitting in the kitchen while my mom was washing dishes and I said, “*Mom, I don’t want to go to church anymore.*” I expected her to say, “*It’s not your decision to make. We are Olsons and we go to worship.*” Or maybe, “*You’re going and that’s that!*” But she didn’t say those things. She calmly sat down near me and asked, “*Why don’t you want to go anymore?*” And I said, “*Because I’m bad. Everybody else at church is good. But I’m bad.*” And as I tried to fight my own tears my mom had one of those moments when she knew just what to say (with the help of the Holy Spirit, I’m sure) and she said, “*Oh, Kari. If the people at church were so ‘good’ they wouldn’t need to be there. We all need Jesus. That’s why we go.*” That’s why we go? You mean we don’t go because we are “good church-going people?” And we don’t go because “we’re supposed to?” It was the beginning for me, of understanding that the church is a hospital for the sick, not a country club for the perfect. I might be able to fit in with a bunch of folks who don’t have it all figured out but are going to follow Jesus and try to love and serve one another.

Let us pray: *Dear Lord, forgive me for what I have done and for what I have left undone. And remind me that because of you, I am forgiven over and over again. Amen.*



Tuesday, July 19, 2016

By Jon and Sharon Babbitt, LLM’s

First, Grand Marais

The Compass

Text: Proverbs 3:5-6 (NRSV)

**Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight.
In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.**

When I was a little boy, I followed my Grandpa everywhere when he walked in the woods. He had a little brass compass that he pinned on my coat. He loaned it to me every time we went on an adventure in the deep dark forest. I knew I could never be lost as long as I had my Grandpa's compass with me. Boy, was I wrong. You see, getting lost is never fun. It can be very scary to be making your way through the woods only to realize you're lost, that you no longer know where you are. For us hunters, being able to locate your exact position or be in the areas that the big bucks frequent is very important. At times it could even be a matter of life and death. For many, many years, hunters and fishermen have utilized a little pocket compass or one like my Grandpa gave me to orient themselves, but it was often less than ideal because it requires some interpretation and skill to figure out. It can be affected by other metal objects that may come too close. My Grandpa taught me that as long as I had my shiny brass marble compass and paid attention to the sun, the wind and which side of the trees had moss, I would never be lost.

Well, let me tell you, I crossed my own tracks more than once using that little compass but I found my way out sooner or later and it means the world to me, not so much for the navigational function, but because my Grandpa gave it to me.

There is a guidance system available to us believers. It may not necessarily help you find your truck from deep in the forest when you're lost, but it will guide you out of the spiritual darkness of a fallen world. Those of us that know Jesus Christ have been given an internal guidance system. He is known as the Holy Spirit, and his mission is to guide us into truth. It is a gift from God that will help guide you when you are lost, comfort you when you are lonely, inspire you when the going gets tough, convict you when your course is set for destruction, and direct you onto God's path for your life. This guidance system cannot be purchased at any price. God gives it freely to those who give their hearts to his Son. Trust me...believe and trust in him and you'll always find your truck.

Let us pray: Heavenly Father, we thank you for your guidance in life. Help us to follow the path you have set before us and the peace in our hearts only you can give. May you be the direction we follow on our life's journey home. In your most precious name we pray, Amen.



Wednesday, July 20, 2016
By Pastor Julie Belew
Holy Cross, Baraga

Text: Matthew 13: 1-9, 18-23

We could easily read the Parable of the Sower as a description of various groups of people. As if there are certain people who are, well... just plain rocky soil. Some people have no depth. Then there are others who hang out with the thorns. Some happen to be good soil.

If types of soil are types of people then by making this distinction we've set ourselves up as a judge of others. But the truth of the matter is all these soils reside within each and every one of us. And depending on the day, or the moment, or the circumstance, we end up presenting one or the other.

The thorns, the rocky ground, the hard beaten path – these are obstacles (not people) to God's kingdom breaking into our lives; barriers that prohibit the life of God's word to take root in our lives on any given day.

For me today, it's striving too much. Striving to get "this" done, so I can get "that" done and when "that's" done, I can go on to the next project. What's *that* all about? Do I think the more I get done, the more brownie points I'll have to win God's favor?" It appears I'm "working" on tilling the soil so it will be fertile. So it will be good enough.

Jesus does not use this parable to exhort hearers to "be good soil". He tells us this so we are aware of the many obstacles to God's word being active in our lives, barriers that we construct that hinder God's creative word to take root and grow.

The good news in this parable is – Jesus, the active seed of God's word, gives of himself generously, continuously, regardless of our rocks, thorns, and hardness. The Sower keeps sowing extravagantly even in the least promising places. Jesus does not give up on us, but keeps working on whatever is hardened, rocky, or thorny in and among us.

Let us pray: *I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen* - Ephesians 3:16-20

Thursday, July 21, 2016
By Rev. Doug Schoen
Retired Pastor



Text: Romans 8:26-27

“Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.”

James Montgomery, in his hymn “Prayer Is the Soul's Sincere Desire,” writes, “Nor prayer is made on earth alone: The Holy Spirit pleads, And Jesus at the Father's throne For sinners intercedes.” With these words we are reminded that the Holy Spirit is our best friend. No one understands us better and no one speaks in our behalf more fervently than the Holy Spirit. This verse from Montgomery’s hymn captures the essence of what the Apostle Paul writes about so eloquently in the 8th chapter of Romans. The Holy Spirit works in tandem with Jesus our Savior bringing our needs to the attention of our heavenly Father. Our greatest need is for continual forgiveness as we “sin and fall short of the glory of God” on a daily basis. What a magnificent team we have working in our behalf! The Holy Spirit carrying our prayer requests heavenward and Jesus reminding the Father that we are ones for whom he died that we may be set free from the burden of our sins. Even when I am not aware of all my sins, and I cannot seem to find the words to express my needs and desires, the Holy Spirit takes my sighs, my feelings, my worries and concerns, my jumbled thoughts, and delivers them as eloquent prayers to God in Jesus’ name. Thanks be to God for such a friend!

Let us pray: Dear heavenly Father, thank you for giving me the Holy Spirit to be my Advocate, interceding in my behalf when my feeble prayers fall flat. Forgive me today, in Jesus’ name, according to your promise. Amen.



Friday, July 22, 2016

By Susan Anderson

Immanuel, Rhinelander

Text: Psalm 51: 1-2.

**Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love;
according to your abundant mercy, blot out my transgressions.
Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.**

Psalm 51, the greatest of the “penitential Psalms”, begins with a very deep consciousness of having messed up a relationship with God. Tradition connects this psalm with King David asking forgiveness for his affair with Bathsheba and for having her husband killed. What’s useful to us is the intense language and the idea that if God can forgive David’s great and public sins, our more private sins can also be forgiven.

The word translated “transgression” refers to rebellion against God and God’s ways; “iniquity” means intentionally going astray; “sin” alludes to willfully “missing the mark.”

The three words are not meant to describe different types of sin but to encompass **all** the ways we fail in our relationship with God. It’s similar to our common confession of things that we have done and left undone in failing to love God and our neighbor. We are left standing before God without an excuse.

But it's not hopeless! Even in the act of confessing the brokenness of the relationship, we come trusting in the "abundant mercy" and "steadfast love" of the Lord, mercy shown so clearly in the death and resurrection of Jesus for us. Because of that mercy, we can count on God to act on our lives to straighten us out, to do the "blotting", "washing", and "cleansing" needed to free us from guilt and shame so that we can live joyful lives that show love for this gracious God and for the people in our lives.

Let us pray: *Relying on God's promises in Christ, we can pray those familiar words found later in this psalm: "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me." Amen.*



Saturday, July 23, 2016
By Bishop Emeritus Dale Skogman

"In Focus"

Text: Romans 12: 2

"Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect."

I am an amateur photographer. In retirement my wife and I have been privileged to travel to many parts of the world and I have taken thousands of pictures of natural wonders, historic places, soaring cathedrals, majestic palaces, local populace and many other things of interest.

I have spent countless hours editing the photos, documenting their location and creating informative and, hopefully, interesting narrative to accompany the photos. These "travelogues" have been shared with many church and community groups who have made kind comments about the engrossing nature of the presentations.

Unless you have compiled such programs, you undoubtedly have no idea of the time, thought and energy that goes into these presentations which last about sixty minutes in length. Based on my photographic and travelogue endeavors the following quote had particular meaning for me:

"Life is like a camera: Focus on what's important, capture the good times, develop from the negatives, and if things don't work out, take another shot." (Author unknown.)

As Christians we are called and challenged to live our lives with a spiritual focus. In our scripture passage from Romans the Apostle Paul admonishes us to focus not only on the things of this world, but to focus on the things of God.

I pray that all of us, as we encounter the sights and landscapes of this world, might maintain a spiritual focus in our lives. I'm challenged, every day, to put the same amount of time, energy and thought into focusing on my spiritual journey as I do on my worldly travels. Our unknown author provides a roadmap for our spiritual journey:

- Focus on what's important!
- Capture the good times!
- Develop from the negatives!
- If things don't work out, take another shot!

Let us pray: *Heavenly Father, I am on a journey through life. Help me to keep a spiritual focus in all I experience. As I pursue the twists and turns of life's highway and edit the travelogue of my experiences, I pray that I will always invite You to be a part of the adventure. Amen*

