

Devotions – August 7-13, 2016

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Sunday, August 7, 2016

Text: Hebrews 11:1-3

1Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. 2Indeed, by faith our ancestors received approval. 3By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible.

Faith is a funny thing and it's no wonder that so many struggle with it, especially in today's world. After all, we are used to getting things, seeing things, and knowing things almost in an instant today. Library books can be downloaded to your favorite device, groceries can be delivered to your door via drone, and Google has good suggestions on what you're asking about before you even finish typing the search words. Our world revolves around things being present before us so that we know we can trust their authenticity for ourselves. Yet having faith, trusting in something impossible to see, feel, or touch, is at the core our belief in Christ Crucified. Our salvation comes by God's grace through our belief that God's promises of forgiveness and resurrected new life are true, and for each one of us who believes. Remember, we cannot embrace a promised gift if we do not believe the promise made. So while many things in life let us down, disappoint us, or leave us hanging, the word of God, through which "the worlds were prepared", never does.

Let us pray: *Heavenly Father, thank you for your word, love, and grace given to us each day. Help us in the times of our unbelief and grant us grateful hearts in the times when our faith is strong. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.*



Monday, August 8, 2016

Text: Psalm 89:1-8, 14

1I will sing of your steadfast love, O LORD, forever; with my mouth I will proclaim your faithfulness to all generations. 2I declare that your steadfast love is established forever; your faithfulness is as firm as the heavens. 3You said, "I have made a covenant with my chosen one, I have sworn to my servant David: 4I will establish your descendants forever, and build your throne for all generations." 5Let the heavens praise your wonders, O LORD, your faithfulness in the assembly of the holy ones. 6For who in the skies can be compared to the LORD? Who among the heavenly beings is like the LORD, 7a God feared in the council of the holy ones, great and awesome above all that are around him? 8O Lord GOD of hosts, who is as mighty as you, O LORD? Your faithfulness surrounds you. 14Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne; steadfast love and faithfulness go before you.

Oh what a world we would have if we kept the attitude the psalmist expresses in these verses! Here we have such beautiful language for offering praise to God and a beautiful reminder of God's eternal covenant with us. But more importantly look again at verse 14, "Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne; steadfast love and faithfulness go before you". So often we want to praise a God who is a certain way, acts a certain way, and does so in our timeframe. And when God does not meet our expectations, we get frustrated, angry, or disillusioned. What if the message of the psalmist isn't simply to praise God, but rather to remind us that God's kingdom is radically different than the reality we've created? Christ's righteousness, given in place of our unrighteousness, his justice for all people, given in place of our injustice for some and God's unwavering love and faithfulness freely, graciously, and generously given, though wholly undeserved. That is the God whom the psalmist invites us to offer praise and thanksgiving.

Let us pray: *Gracious Lord, thank you for the gifts of righteousness, justice, love, and faithfulness given to us so freely. Guide us always to reflect in the world your kingdom over what we think it should be. In Christ's holy name we pray, Amen.*



Tuesday, August 9, 2016

Text: Jeremiah 33:19-21a

19The word of the LORD came to Jeremiah: 20Thus says the LORD: If any of you could break my covenant with the day and my covenant with the night, so that day and night would not come at their appointed time, 21only then could my covenant with my servant David be broken...

Sometimes even those with the strongest faith have doubts about God's faithfulness to us or even God's very existence. Times of tragedy and crisis are particularly challenging for many people. Furthermore we sometimes have the image of God as distant from our lives and always serious. Well, take a closer look at what the prophet Jeremiah proclaims in verses 20-21a, "Thus says the LORD: If any of you could break my covenant with the day and my covenant with the night, so that day and night would not come at their appointed time, only then could my covenant with my servant David be broken...". This clearly shows that God has a sense of humor and understands our often-sarcastic nature because God is clear that, unless we can change the way the solar system works, God is not going anywhere. It may seem sometimes like God is not present, but literally from God's mouth to our ears; we know that's not true. Thanks be to God for that!

Let us pray: *O God, thank you for never abandoning us both in times of sorrow and times of joy. Remind us always of your steadfast love and presence and bring us the peace of truth when doubt tries to creep in. In your name we pray, Amen.*



Wednesday, August 10, 2016

Text: Luke 12:48b

48b From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required; and from the one to whom much has been entrusted, even more will be demanded.

If the easy road is your plan for following Jesus, you might want to look elsewhere. It's not that anything is required or necessary in order for the promised hope of resurrected life to be yours, but some faithful response sure would be nice. Jesus tells us a parable about being a servant and illustrates for us God's desire and expectations that we would want to respond to the glorious and unmerited blessings that God has given us. Remember, God has invited and called us into the work of the kingdom. Shouldn't we respond, though we'll fall short, because of God's extravagant love? Really it's pretty exciting that God chose us and entrusted us with so much. It may not always be easy, but what a joy it is to serve God and one another.

Let us pray: *Holy Lord, thank you for calling us to be workers in your kingdom and blessing us with so much. Give us the strength and perseverance to carry out your mission in and for the world. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.*



Thursday, August 11, 2016

Text: Hebrews 10:26-27

26For if we willfully persist in sin after having received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, 27but a fearful prospect of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries.

The bar is set about as low as it can go in terms of obtaining our eternal salvation. In fact we could not do anything to earn it. However, belief that the promise is true is essential because if we don't believe the promise is true, then it is meaningless. We will and do sin daily. We are also forgiven daily. Luther termed this *simul justus et peccator* (simultaneous saint and sinner). But if we turn away from God and choose to believe that God's promises are not real or not for us, then we "willfully persist in sin after having received the knowledge of the truth". The key here is to remember that it is not God breaking God's promises to us; it is we choosing not to believe that they are true. And when we do that, we do indeed face "a fearful prospect of judgment". Let us then always strive to remain in the "knowledge of the truth".

Let us pray: *Merciful God, thank you for your everlasting gift of forgiveness of our sins against you. Bless us with repentant hearts and lead us always back to you. In your name we pray, Amen.*



Friday, August 12, 2016

Text: Hebrews 10:32-36

32But recall those earlier days when, after you had been enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, 33sometimes being publicly exposed to abuse and persecution, and sometimes being partners with those so treated. 34For you had compassion for those who were in prison, and you cheerfully accepted the plundering of your possessions, knowing that you yourselves possessed something better and more lasting. 35Do not, therefore, abandon that confidence of yours; it brings a great reward. 36For you need endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised.

Sometimes it hurts following what you believe in. Any cause, organization, movement, or idea can have growing pains and times of unrest. Our Christian faith is no different and certainly not immune to such trials. But what we can grasp hold of is the knowledge that God has called each one of us by name, empowered us by the Spirit, and sent us into the world to do God's will. Our mission as the body of Christ is not some 'fool's errand'. What God has called us to is life in the kingdom and in that promise we can have strength and confidence.

Let us pray: *Loving God, thank you for calling and empowering us to do your work in the world. Lift us up when we are down and mend us when we feel broken so that your will, not ours, is done. In the name of Christ we pray, Amen.*



Saturday, August 13, 2016

Text: Matthew 24:23-24a

23Then if anyone says to you, 'Look! Here is the Messiah!' or 'There he is!' — do not believe it. 24For false messiahs and false prophets will appear and produce great signs and omens, to lead astray...

We are a broken people sitting in darkness. It is easy for us to want to cling to anything that looks like the light. We constantly search for and seek out that which is life-giving. Yet the truth is, only one thing is the light and gives life, Jesus Christ. Our sinful nature blinds us at times to that joyful reality. Any human being would have given up on someone rejecting them over and over again long ago; but not Christ. He remains with us, even warning us of pitfalls, every step of every day, no matter what. And why does he do this? Because he is the one true Messiah and pure love for all who believe.

Let us pray: *Almighty God, thank you for your steadfast love and merciful forgiveness. Guide us toward the foot of the cross where healing and wholeness is granted to us always. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen*

