

Devotions – August 14-20, 2016

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Sunday, August 14, 2016

Text: Psalm 34:4

I sought the Lord, and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears.

Since I am preparing these devotions for our wonderful ministry entitled “Prayfaithfully,” I think an appropriate place to begin the week is with a psalm. I love the psalms because they put into words that which we feel deeply in our hearts. The psalter is able to portray our joy, our sorrow, our troubles and fears, our hopes and dreams and most importantly our confidence in our Creator God who loves us beyond human understanding.

Last year, I taught a Lay School for Mission class in Gladstone on the Psalms. Together, we discovered the diversity, complexity and beauty of these poetic gems which are composed of hymns, songs of devotion, laments, songs of trust, thanksgiving, sacred history, wisdom, royalty and liturgy of ancient Israel. I did something rather bold; I encouraged the students to write their own psalm. This assignment was reminiscent of an activity that I, along with other clergy, did at a meeting in which we were introduced to Pastor Katherine Finegan, our Assistant to the Bishop. I found this activity to be both daunting and rewarding. I think that the Lay School students experienced similar emotions. Those who felt comfortable shared their psalms with the class. It was an experience that brought us closer together and encouraged us to journal those psalms that spoke to us and gave us the freedom to explore our emotions and experiences through the creative process of the written word.

Psalm 34:4 portrays the act of prayer on our part and the promise of God’s continual presence with us and most importantly, God’s power to deliver us from all our fears.

Let us pray: *Gracious and merciful God, thank you for your continual presence with us as we walk along our faith journey. It gives us great comfort to know that you will answer our prayers and deliver us from all our fears. Thank you for the gift of your Word, especially the Psalms, because they put into words that which our hearts cry out. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen*



Monday, August 15, 2016

Text: John 14:27

“Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled. Do not be afraid.”

I have a confession to make. I am the “queen of worry.” My best friend, Lynn, knows me very well. She gave me a white refrigerator magnet that says in big, bold, BLACK letters “Put aside all anxious thoughts and be at peace” (Francis de Sales) so that every time I open the refrigerator, that message is up front and center in my line of vision. Jesus tells us that he gives us his peace, a peace that is not of this world; rather it is a peace that allows us to “put aside all anxious thoughts.” I am grateful for the WORD of God and the love of God revealed to me through wonderful friends who care enough about me to give me refrigerator magnets that remind me every day that I have a choice – I can worry or I can be at peace.

Let us pray: *Loving and caring God, thank you for your Son, Jesus Christ, who tells us in bold words about your gift of peace, a peace that surpasses our understanding. Thank you for the gift of friendship, those beautiful people who love us and support us and guide us. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen*



Tuesday, August 16, 2016

Text: Jeremiah 29:11-14

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.”

During my recovery from surgery, I had a LOT of time on my hands when I was restricted from many, many things:-no lifting, no driving, no stairs, no exercise, no work. Even sitting was difficult so computer access was limited. That pretty much confined me to the couch or the bed. Fortunately, I love reading. Many of my friends and family brought me books and magazines to enjoy. My sister Jean gave me a devotion book called “Blessings for the Morning-Prayerful Encouragement to Begin Your Day” by Susie Larson. One of the devotions includes the Jeremiah text referenced above. The devotion is as follows: “Remember and Dream With God – May you pause today, look back over your shoulder, and remember the ways God has been good to you, has come through for you, and has kept His word to you. May you look ahead in faith with expectancy, as you get a sense of the land He wants you to claim. May faith rise up within you as you take your first steps in that direction. And may you embrace a renewed resolve to walk intimately with the One who loves you and has a beautiful plan for your life. He deserves some sacred space in your day today!” (page 53)

These words brought me comfort, and I hope and pray they do the same for you.

Let us pray: *Gracious and generous God, we give you thanks today for your abundant blessings. We know that your plans for our lives will always be in our best interests. Help us to trust you to lead us to do your will. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen*



Wednesday, August 17, 2016

Text: Matthew 19:26

With God, all things are possible.

The first thing I do when I am going to use a scripture verse is do a Google search to find and quote the translation that I think works best. When I decided to use this text for today's devotion, I followed my procedure. It's amazing what you find out when you do a Google search. Did you know that "With God, all things are possible" is the motto of the U.S. state of Ohio? It is the only state motto that is quoted directly from the Bible. This Matthew 19:26 verse was adopted as the state motto in 1959 and even survived a federal constitutional challenge in 2001 (Wikipedia). I think that is a wonderful state motto. In the future, if you are ever playing Trivial Pursuit, you will know the answer to the question: "What U.S. state has the motto "With God, all things are possible"? Those on your team will be impressed and grateful!

Let us pray: *All powerful God, thank you for the hope and promise that with you "all things are possible." Help us to remember, especially when we are brought to our knees, these words of comfort. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen*



Thursday, August 18, 2016

Text: Colossians 2:1-7

For I want you to know how much I am struggling for you, and for those in Laodicea, and for all who have not seen me face to face. I want their hearts to be encouraged and united in love, so that they may have all the riches of assured understanding and have the knowledge of God's mystery, that is, Christ himself, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. I am saying this so that no one may deceive you with plausible arguments. For though I am absent in body, yet I am with you in spirit, and I rejoice to see your morale and the firmness of your faith in Christ. As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.

The selected text for today's devotion comes from a letter written to the church in Colossae by Paul from his prison cell in Rome. Paul uses this form of communication because he is unable to meet with the church members face to face. This story reminds me of the telephone conversations I have on a regular basis with a lovely 91 year old women from Bethany who is residing in a nursing home three hours away from her home church and community. We use

these conversations as a way of staying connected to the people that she holds near and dear to her heart. The news that I share about all her friends and what is happening in “her church” allows her to still feel connected to that which she can no longer physically be “face to face” with. Brene Brown says: “Connection is the energy that exists between people when they feel seen, heard, and valued; when they can give and receive without judgment; and when they derive sustenance and strength from the relationship.” I couldn’t have put this any more eloquently if I tried, so I won’t even try! I know beauty when I see it!

Let us pray: *Loving and Almighty God, thank you for the gift of love that you revealed to us through your Son, Jesus Christ. Thank you for the “cloud of witnesses” that shares your love with each and every one of us. Help us to welcome all into this community of faith with open arms. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen*



Friday, August 19, 2016

Text: Proverbs 3:5

Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight.

The Book of Proverbs’ purpose, according to the Introduction to the Book in the College Edition of the New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha (NRSV) is “to transmit the insights whereby a youth might learn to cope with life.” Proverb 3:5, in today’s world, seems almost counter-cultural and goes against our intuition.. We are encouraged from a very early age to be independent thinkers, to figure things out on our own, to stand on our own two feet. This pithy advice says the exact opposite. It instructs us to put all our trust in God and not trust our own intuition. Why on earth would we do that? Well, the answer to that question is quite simple. “Those of steadfast mind you keep in peace - in peace because they trust in you.” (Isaiah 26:3) Peace is a beautiful state of being. I’ll take that any day.

Let us pray: *Loving God, Lord of all, thank you for your constant presence in our lives. Keep us steadfast in our trust in you so that peace will be in our hearts. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen*



Saturday, August 20, 2016

Text: Philippians 4:10-13

But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned *before*, but you lacked opportunity. Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every

circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.

As this week of devotions comes to a close, I chose this text from Philippians because I believe that Paul, despite his incarceration while awaiting trial, gives us the best advice ever for living our lives and that is that he has learned “to be content in whatever circumstances” he finds himself in. The secret he has discovered is that he can do all things “through Him who strengthens” him. I have a nice big coffee mug that has this message on it. As I do my devotions, sipping a cup of nice strong coffee, this text reminds me that whatever I am going through, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” As I journey through life, I strive to reach that level of contentment that Paul writes about, knowing that it is possible with Christ.

Let us pray: *Empowering God, thank you for the words of wisdom from your loving servant, Paul. He has shared with us the lessons he has learned so that we, too, can learn to be “content in whatever circumstances” we find ourselves in, knowing that you are with us. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen*

