

Devotions – September 18-24, 2016

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Sunday, September 18, 2016

Read Luke 16:1–13

¹⁰ “Whoever is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much; and whoever is dishonest in a very little is dishonest also in much...”

My adult children will sometimes repeat back to me a phrase that they heard from me often as they grew up. *“Zebras have stripes and leopards have spots”*. In our family this means that no matter how things appear, things are probably pretty much the way they have always been. Just as a zebra cannot change the fact that stripes are a part of his life and appearance, so it is with people.

While the gospel transforms and makes new again, so often we find ourselves in our lives of faith doing the same things that we have always done and failing to grow. A matter of faith today which may seem to be difficult may become insurmountable in time of crisis. The practices of our faith (prayer, study, worship, fellowship, etc) need to be a part of our daily experience and routine. When we connect with God on a regular basis in the midst of the routine and normal, we will be better prepared to connect with God in helpful ways in the midst of the overwhelming.

Being faithful in little is being faithful when we think or feel that it might be trivial or unimportant. Being faithful in little allows us to be faithful in the midst of the chaos that comes when we least expect it.

Let us pray: God of caring, give us a nature of looking to you in all things. Open us to your grace in the midst of the normal, help us to see you in the midst of the overwhelming. Amen.



Monday, September 19, 2016

Read Mark 12:38–44

⁴⁴ “For all of them have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.”

I recently stopped by the grocery store to pick up a couple packages of cookies for a meeting that I was hosting at the church. It wasn't going to be much other than some choices of beverages and a plate of cookies. I had decided on the way in the door that I would pick up a package of Chips Ahoy cookies, but when I located them in the cookie aisle I could not find plain old Chips Ahoy cookies for all of the variations and choices that were available in amongst the shelves upon shelves of options that were there.

We have grown so accustomed to the variety of choices that we have, that we think nothing of it. We fail to see the abundance that surrounds us in the aisles of cookies and breakfast cereals and breads, etc. We fail to recognize the abundance that we have even as we make do within the confines of incomes that seem to remain static and the obligations that continue to come month after month.

Jesus points out the giving that has been given out of the abundance that some had. Generous giving in many cases, but often times given out of a calculation of what was needed to maintain a lifestyle and what could be spared. In an act of generosity and faith the woman gave all that she had – not what was left – but all that she had to live on.

I cannot speak for the woman's motivations in doing so, but I feel that trust in God's provision was a part of it. She had experienced God's faithfulness in the past and trusted in that faithfulness for the future. The abundance that we have grown so used to in our lives gets in the way of giving totally and completely of ourselves. Not only out of our financial resources, but also from our time and our abilities. Not only to the ministry of our church, but also to the community and the lives of others around us.

Jesus reminds us that abundance is not necessarily a quantity as much as a frame of mind.

Let us pray: God of abundance, help us to recognize the abundance already in our lives and to trust in your provision once again in order that we might give generously and unselfishly out of what we have to benefit others. Amen



Tuesday, September 20, 2016

Read: Matthew 19:16–30

²⁶ But Jesus looked at them and said, “For mortals it is impossible, but for God all things are possible.”

Everything about the faith seems to be so easy and at the same time so tough. The teachings of Jesus seem to make so much sense, but when it comes to making them happen in our lives it becomes a battle. From loving others, to handling our money, to just trusting God we know what we have heard, but our own habits and thoughts and desires get in the way. This passage specifically begins with a question of what it takes to truly be saved, to live eternal life in God's kingdom.

In whatever way we ask that question and whatever the answer to the question might be, we always turn away in despair as did the rich young man. Jesus' words give us great comfort reminding us that all things are possible for God, even when we fail.

Life with God continues to be about our reliance on God and on God's mercy towards us. In the midst of our failures of faith and related actions, God continues to forgive us and move us towards the goals of our faith.

Let us pray: *God of all things. Bring us to faith and eternal life in the midst of our failures. Fill us with thanksgiving for the grace that is always waiting for us in your kingdom. Amen.*



Wednesday, September 21, 2016

Read: Psalm 62

- ¹ For God alone my soul waits in silence;
from him comes my salvation.**
- ² He alone is my rock and my salvation,
my fortress; I shall never be shaken.**

It never ceases to amaze me how a variety of things continue to sneak into my life to become "my rock, my salvation, my fortress". Pure and simple this is idolatry – depending on someone or something else for my strength. It is not intentional but I find it to be subtle and real.

We have a need to trust in something. For the Christian that would be salvation in Jesus Christ through God's mercy and grace. What we know in our head, does not always translate well to our heart and our lives. Trust in other things in our lives creeps in until we have to honestly acknowledge our error and turn away from that idolatrous trust and back to God.

We can take comfort in God's steadfast love for us that never waivers. Unlike our thoughts that tend to wander and draw us into a false sense of security in other things, God's focus on us is like a laser and faithful to the end of time.

Let us pray: *God of grace, you are our refuge. Continue to remind us of that in those times when we drift toward a false sense of security in the midst of worldly things. Focus us on your presence, your grace and your love. Amen.*



Thursday, September 22, 2016

Read: Ecclesiastes 5:10–12

¹⁰ The lover of money will not be satisfied with money; nor the lover of wealth, with gain. This also is vanity.

In yesterday's reflection I had to face the reality of sometimes allowing my strength in life to come from a source other than God. Today I am convicted of thinking that money, enough money, will fix the issues of daily living.

The writer of Ecclesiastes speaks of money. Yet the concept spills over into so many areas of life. If we think that we might need just a little bit more then we will always desire a little bit more. We will look at the world and our lives as not having enough and we will fail to see the abundance of God's provision in our lives.

It is easy to fall into the trap. It is easy to notice that others seem to have more of something while not realizing that the abundance that you experience may be different than someone else.

An antidote to this is thanksgiving. Taking note of all that we do have and being grateful for it and generous with it. To paraphrase a statement that I heard long ago, "If we are actively thankful for that which we have, we won't have time to reflect on what we don't have."

Let us pray: *Give us thankful hearts, O God, and develop a spirit of generosity within us. Amen.*



Friday, September 23, 2016

Read: 1 Timothy 6:6–19

^{19b} so that they may take hold of the life that really is life.

Oftentimes a reflection on things important leads to wondering about the meaning of life. In conversations about the life and ministry of Jesus we oftentimes encounter the idea of the kingdom of God where God is in charge and things are different than the chaotic lives that we sometimes find ourselves in. We can talk about the Kingdom of God that comes near or those times that we get a glimpse of what God intends the kingdom to look like.

Paul here seems to be encouraging Timothy to live into the kingdom of God by trusting God in the midst of the chaos of daily life and living a life of thanksgiving and generosity toward others.

- To trust and to honor God by caring about and for others.

- To get a glimpse of the kingdom of God by being the kingdom of God.
- To take hold of the life that really is life.

The completeness and fullness of life will be ours for all eternity. Paul encourages us to seek some of that fullness as we live out our daily lives of faith.

Let us pray: *Guide us daily, O Lord, that we might live into your kingdom with lives full of thanksgiving and generosity. Help us to see opportunities to serve and to grow in faith, trust and grace. Amen.*



Saturday, September 24, 2016

Read: Psalm 113

¹Praise the LORD!

I think that I can safely say that God is a large part of my life. I am thankful to God for the many blessings that continue to pour into and be a part of my life. I express that thankfulness in many ways. And yet I too often fail to praise God for all of that goodness.

While giving thanks to God can be a form of praise, this psalm calls out to me to respond to God out of a sense of awe and faithfulness, rather than as a result of something that I have received. This form of praise is not the result of having received something from God, but rather is motivated from a different place within me that recognizes God in very real ways not “*because of*” but rather “*just because*”.

This week’s reflections have been about responding to God’s goodness and generosity in trust, thanksgiving and our own generosity. Yet in this reflection on praising God I find myself without adequate words. And maybe that is enough, to recognize all that God is to us in our lives and then to praise God without adequate words or adequate actions, but to acknowledge that there are so many things about God that remain mystery and that is all right too.

Let us praise the Lord for being who God is!

Let us pray: *In the mysteries of your presence Lord we give you praise. Help us to continue to know you better each and never day knowing that while you know us to the depths of who we are, we can only trust in your revealed grace and your unknowable mystery. Amen*

