

**Devotions – September 25- October 1, 2016**

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**Sunday, September 25, 2016**

Read: Luke 12:54-56

**“When you see a cloud rising in the west ...”**

Fall is here. The leaves are changing colors. The first frost has hit – some areas, at least. The summer clothing is moving to the back of the closet and the winter clothing is moving to the front. Soon the lawnmower will be tucked away into the corner of the garage and the snowblower will be brought to the front. Even though the grass is still green – very bizarre for September in this area – we watch for signs of the changing seasons so that we are not caught off guard by the first snowfall.

Jesus reminded the people of his time that they are also adept at reading the seasons and the signs of weather patterns. However, they had a tendency to miss the signs of God’s presence and power.

Are we like those whom Jesus chided for knowing the “earthly” signs but not knowing the “heavenly” signs? Do we watch for the signs of God’s presence as often and as carefully as we watch for signs of rain or snow or a killing frost? What would be the signs of God’s presence and power in our lives?

During our Vacation Bible School at the New Evangelical Lutheran Parish, we encouraged the students to watch for “Yeah, God” moments – naming where they saw God at work that day. Where do YOU see God at work? In the smile of a child? In the word of encouragement from a friend or co-worker? In the challenge to forgive a member of your family? In the taste of a freshly picked apple? In the smell of a newly cut field?

Watch for God’s presence and power. The signs are all around us.

Let us pray.

*Jesus, we know that you have promised to be with us always. Help us to see your face in the faces of those around us. Help us to see your hands at work in the wonders of creation. Help us to listen for your teaching in the midst of challenging times. Bless us with the ability to sense your presence wherever we are. Amen*



**Monday, September 26, 2016**

Read: John 11:1-44

**“Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”**

Far too often I find myself standing with a young adult ... standing beside a casket or an urn ... standing on the outside, but broken on the inside as we grieve the death of a wife or husband or child or even an unborn-nearly-full-term infant. Tragedy has come in the form of an accident or a disease or a totally unknown cause, and the loss is devastating. It is a loss, not only of the presence of the beloved, but also of hopes and dreams for the future. It is an entire lifetime of grief expressed in sighs and groans too deep for words.

In the midst of such a moment, we may hear echoes of Martha and Mary in our own hearts and minds. "Lord, if you had been here, my beloved would not have died." Where was God when tragedy struck? Where is God as we stand beside death?

Jesus walked with Martha and Mary out to the place where the body of their brother Lazarus was laid. And as he stood with them beside the tomb, "Jesus began to weep." As we stand beside death, Jesus is standing with us – weeping with us – just as he did with Martha and Mary. In the midst of our questions, Jesus listens to our cries, "Lord, if you had been here ..." He weeps at the pain in our hearts and he gives us a promise:

The day is coming when all things will be made new. There will be no more tears, no more pain, no more death. I have prepared a place for you. I have brought your beloved home, and I will bring you there, too.

"I am the resurrection and the life," Jesus says. "Your beloved will rise again."

And in the meantime, Jesus stands with us and walks with us – promising that nothing will ever tear us away from him.

Let us pray.

*Jesus, we are weeping because death seems to have won the day. Help us to see you standing beside us. Help us to believe your promise of new life – both for our beloved who now lives in your Father's house, and for ourselves as we continue to walk in this world. Lord, give us hope. Amen*



***Tuesday, September 27, 2016***

Read: Mark 10:46-52

**Jesus said, "What do you want me to do for you?"**

Many of us have a so-called "bucket list" – a list of things that we want to do before we "kick the bucket." What is on your bucket list? A special trip to a significant location? Accomplishing a specific goal? Achieving a particular way of life? Repairing a certain relationship? I'm sure there are many things on our lists of what we want to get out of life.

If Jesus stood before you and asked, “What do you want me to do for you?” how would you respond? Think carefully about this. Truthfully, honestly, from the deepest desires of your heart, how would you respond?

It’s a tough question, isn’t it? Would one of our “bucket list” items be worthy of Jesus’ time and effort? Would we want to change the world in some significant way? Would we think of ourselves or our loved ones as we made our request? Would we be prepared to hear Jesus’ response, if it meant that WE would have to do some of the work? Would we be ready to jump up and follow Jesus fully, as Bartimaeus did?

As we travel through life, we may run into challenges on the road to our goals and dreams. We may have people who tell us that we should just give up and change our goals or let go of our dreams. Like this blind man, we may even cry out to God for help in overcoming those challenges. Are we ready for the responsibilities that might come along with God’s answer to our prayers?

Let us pray.

*Jesus, help us to meet the challenges in our lives. Help us to also be ready to jump up and follow you when you call to us. Amen*



**Wednesday, September 28, 2016**

Read: John 1:43-51

**Philip said to Nathanael, “Come and see.”**

There is very little that is as compelling as a 5-year-old who wants to show you something. “Come and see!” my Godson exclaimed, as he grabbed my hand and began to drag me down the hall to his bedroom. The gift that he’d received for his birthday awaited my attention, and nothing was going to stop him from showing it to me.

What in your life has such appeal that you would take someone’s hand and call out, “Come and see!”? As we become more mature, we tend to lose some of that energy and enthusiasm, don’t we? Even when we are excited about something new or enthusiastic about something that we’ve created, we are not quite ready to jump up and grab someone’s hand and squeal, “Come and see!”

Philip, however, could not contain his joy at finding the Messiah. After Jesus has called him to be a follower, he heads out and finds Nathanael in order to share the good news. Nathanael is a bit reluctant, but Philip insists. “Come and see!” Perhaps he even took hold of Nathanael’s hand to pull him up from where he was sitting under the fig tree. He wasn’t going to take “no” for an answer. “Come and see!”

How do we respond to Philip’s invitation? “Come and see! Come and see the one about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth,” he calls to us. How have we responded? Have we invited others to come and see the one who has already seen us and who knows us so very well – Jesus, the Son of God?

Let us pray.

*Jesus, help us to make time to see you in our daily lives. Help us to invite others into the experience of seeing you and being seen by you. Amen*



**Thursday, September 29, 2016**

Read: Micah 6:1-8

**He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?**

While attending Luther Northwestern Theological Seminary (LNTS, now Luther Seminary in St. Paul), a group of students were discussing what “justice” was all about and what “justice” looked like. As we talked, a variety of descriptions of justice were brought forward. One of our professors – a man who taught Hebrew Bible – happened to overhear what we were saying. “You know,” he said, “that justice is a verb in Hebrew,” and he walked away.

“Justice is a verb.” Justice is not something that exists or that can be created. Justice is something that we do. Needless to say, the conversation shifted a bit as we students continued to talk about what “justice” looked like.

As Micah is speaking the word of the Lord to the people of his day, he brings a complaint from God to the people. God is not happy with the way the people are living – they are not “doing justice”. The Lord reminds the people that justice is the appropriate response to what God has done for them. “I brought you up from the land of Egypt, and redeemed you from the house of slavery; and I sent before you Moses, Aaron, and Miriam ...”

When we look at what God has done for us, how do we respond? Our Lord lived among us, died a horrible death, and rose again – bringing to us new life, now and beyond the grave. Is our response that of “doing justice, loving kindness, and walking humbly with our God”?

Let us pray.

*Jesus, help us to remember all that you have done for us. Help us to follow in your footsteps so that we live out Micah’s call to action – to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with you. Amen*



**Friday, September 30, 2016**

Read: Hebrews 10:19-25

**And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another ...**

A professor used the following illustration to teach her class a lesson. Placing a jar on the table, she began putting stones into the jar until the last one reached the rim. “Is this jar full?” she asked the class.

“Yes,” they responded. She then began to put pebbles into the jar. They fell into the spaces between the larger stones. When the last one reached the rim, she again asked the class, “Is this jar full?” Most said, “Yes;” a few hesitated. The professor began to pour sand into the jar. It flowed around the stones and pebbles, until it began to spill over the rim. “Is this jar full now?” she asked. Some in the class said, “Yes.” Others said, “No,” although they could not imagine what would be smaller than the grains of sand so that it would fit into the tiny spaces that remained in the jar. Finally, the professor began to pour coffee from a carafe into the jar, until it also started to spill over the rim. “What lesson can we learn from this?” she asked the class. Answers varied. A couple answers that many students agreed upon were:

- “Take care of the big things first, so that you have room for everything in life.”
- “There’s always room for more in life.”

But the professor shook her head each time. “The lesson is that there is always room in life for coffee with a friend.”

Fellowship is a high calling for us. Don’t neglect meeting together, says the letter to the Hebrews. This is the means by which we encourage one another in our Christian lives. It is how we provoke one another to love and good deeds. Somehow, the word “provoke” seems awkward in that sentence. It sounds like two children sitting in the back seat of a car screaming, “She touched me!” or “He’s in my space!” And yet, there is a certain amount of accountability that comes from meeting together with others who are Christians, too. It is encouraging during tough times – when others remind us of God’s promises for us. It is also challenging to us – when we are reminded that following Jesus can mean making sacrifices or choosing the hard road.

How are times of fellowship happening in your life? When has a friend challenged or encouraged you in your walk of faith? Have you been “provoked” into good deeds and love? Have you “provoked” someone else?

We can learn from this professor: “There’s always time for coffee (or a Coke) with a friend.”

Let us pray.

*Jesus, help us to gather with others in the community of faith. Help us to encourage one another and to hold each other accountable as people who bear your name. Amen*



**Saturday, October 1, 2016**

John: 21:1-19

**Jesus said to them, “Come and have breakfast.”**

Where two or more Lutherans are gathered, there will be food. ☺ Indeed, when we gather for church events, for fellowship, and even with friends at home, there is often food included in the gathering. Why do we have such a powerful habit?

We may be following the many examples of gatherings with food that we see in the Bible. Jesus is often described as attending a banquet or eating at someone's home. In Acts, we hear that the disciples of Jesus continue to gather and break bread together – both in Holy Communion and in shared meals. Paul's letters comment on the shared meals in those congregations. And here, Jesus prepares breakfast for the disciples who are tired after a long night of fishing. Why was this so important for those early Christian communities?

I think that the presence of food at our gatherings is a reminder of how important fellowship is. Just as we need food daily to keep our bodies strong and healthy, we need one another to keep our spirits strong and healthy. We need the reminder that we are never alone in this world of challenges and trials. We need the reminder that joy increases as we share our celebrations with others. We need the reminder that a person cannot be a Christian on his or her own; it takes a community, because part of a strong and healthy, living faith is to care for others.

Our US American culture tends to emphasize who we are as individuals, rather than as communities. Our Christian culture tends to emphasize who we are as a community, rather than as individuals. We are the body of Christ. We are each unique, and we celebrate that, but we are also needed as a part of the body doing God's work in the world. Together, we accomplish so much more than any individual can do on their own. Together, we hold one another accountable for living our lives as Jesus has called us to live. Together, we who are weak can be helped by those who are strong, and we who are strong can help those who are weak – and we all are and have been weak and strong at different moments in our lives.

Together, we feed our bodies and we feed our spirits, as Jesus taught us.

Let us pray.

*Jesus, help us to gather with others, especially when we think we are strong and don't need to. Help us to see the strength of community, so that we can be your body at work in the world. Amen*

