

Devotions – November 6-12, 2016

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New Evangelical Lutheran Parish

Ewen, Paynesville, Trout Creek

Sunday, November 6, 2016

Read: Daniel 7:1-13

“... the holy ones of the Most High shall receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever.”

It's All Saints' Sunday. Today many congregations across the world will remember the saints who have passed from this world into the next during the last year by reading their names during worship. Why do we do this? Why reopen a wound for those who are grieving? Hold on to that question, I'll come back to it. Many congregations will also celebrate the new saints among us by reading the names of those who have been baptized during the last year. What's this all about?

Now, as you enter the sanctuary for worship, take a look at the altar. Does your worship space have an “altar rail”? All three of the congregations I serve have altar rails in our worship spaces. These rails surround the altar in a semi-circle (or sometimes it's a squared area). If you imagine the full circle, it would extend through the wall behind the altar – so, in fact, the rail would completely surround the altar.

We who gather for worship kneel on the portion of the rail that is visible within the walls of our church buildings. We envision those saints who have passed into eternal life and those saints who will be born in the future gathering at the portion of the rail that we cannot see. As we worship our Lord and Savior, we are united with his faithful followers across the boundaries of time and space. As we kneel (or stand), we join our loved ones who have gone before us into the House of the Lord.

Are we reopening a wound of grief? Yes, and no. Those whose loved ones have died during the last year are already grieving, especially as the holidays approach. Often this is the first holiday season without the person who has passed and the pain of this loss is already building in their hearts and minds. With our All Saints' celebrations, we take a moment to remember that those who have died are still connected to us through the body and blood of our Lord. Our loved ones are not lost to us; they are living in God's presence, just as we are.

And when we name those who have been baptized, we celebrate that God's kingdom is on-going and eternal. We have not lost the saints of the past, and our future is secure in the presence of our Lord who holds all of time and all eternity in his nail-scarred hands.

Let us pray: *Jesus, your death and resurrection unites us with all of your followers past, present and future. Help us to remember and celebrate the lives of those we love, knowing that we will all be with you for eternity. Amen*



Monday, November 7, 2016

Read: Psalm 123

“I raise my eyes to you – you who rule heaven.”

We who walk by faith sometimes trip and fall in our walk of faith. If we trip often enough, we begin to watch our feet so that we know what ground we are putting them on. But when we focus on our feet, we can no longer see where we are going – we lose track of our goal.

These thoughts are not original to me. I heard them from a presenter years ago. Although I cannot remember who the presenter was or what the occasion was, I will never forget the implications of those words.

As we go through life, we do our best to live in accord with our faith. We make decisions that honor Jesus’ teaching to “love the Lord with our heart, soul, mind, and strength” and to “love our neighbor as ourselves.” And sometimes we fail in our attempts. Actually, we often fail in our attempts. We do not put God first. We do not show God’s love to our neighbors – at least, not in the way that we have received that love from God. We trip. We fall. We begin to watch our feet.

We begin to create laws for ourselves – rules that we must follow if we are going to be faithful followers of Jesus. We try to nail down every detail of what we must do each day. We try to create a list of “do’s” and “do not’s” so that we won’t fail anymore. We may try to hold others to that same set of rules, often without informing them of the standard we have established and even when we ourselves continue to fail in our attempts to follow the rules. And in the midst of making rules, we lose track of the Lord of love whom we are trying to follow.

The psalmist says, “I raise my eyes to you.” It is a reminder to us to shift our focus. Rather than trying to create a set of rules to live by, we lift our eyes to the cross. We look up to see that Jesus is walking beside us, as he did with the disciples on the road to Emmaus. We look up and we see Jesus and the love that he has given to us.

This is a love that gives life through grace and forgiveness. It is not a law or a set of laws that gives us life. It is God’s love that gives life. When we focus on the goal – walking with our Lord – then we truly begin to live in faith.

Let us pray: *Jesus, it is easy to get bogged down in all the little details of life. It is easy to listen to the Law, rather than to your love. Help us to see you more clearly as you walk beside us. Give us the grace to walk with you and to share your love with those who travel with us along the road of faith. Amen*



Tuesday, November 8, 2016

Read: 2 John 1-13

“Let us love one another ...”

I decided a while back that I would use the daily lectionary for this set of devotions. So, I am working my way through the scriptures that are listed in the “Preparing for Next Week” section of the Celebrate published by Augsburg Fortress. Of course, when I’d made my decision to use the assigned texts, I didn’t realize that I would be writing a devotion for today ... Tuesday, November 8, 2016.

Today is election day. What does this second letter of John have to say about our US American elections? What does the Word of God have to say about our US American elections?

“Dear friends, I am requesting that we love each other. It’s not as though I’m writing a new command to you, but it’s one we have had from the beginning” (2 John 5, CEB). As we continue reading this letter, there is a strong teaching about the Incarnation. Don’t let anyone deceive you about this teaching! Jesus really did become a human being! Why would the instruction to love one another be backed up with the teaching that Jesus became human?

“The Word became flesh and lived among us” ... “God so loved the world ...” Jesus, the Word of God, came into the world as a human being because of God’s love for us. Jesus taught his followers, “love one another as I have loved you” and “love your neighbor as yourself.” The second letter of John reminds us that the command to love is not a new one – the command to love one another has been with us from the beginning ... and it is a command that will remain with us for as long as we are followers of Jesus ... it is a command backed up by God’s deep and abiding love for all of creation – for all people created in God’s image.

In the midst of the campaign leading up to today’s elections, I fear that many of us have forgotten this command to love one another. It doesn’t matter which political party we embrace. It doesn’t matter which candidates we vote for. It doesn’t even matter which candidates wind up being elected. Jesus’ instruction to love one another based upon his love for us far outweighs the rhetoric of this election cycle. Jesus is Lord. Period. Presidents, representatives, senators, judges, commissioners, and other officers in the United States will come and go. Jesus will always be Lord.

Our Lord loved us enough to come into this world as a human being. He loved us enough to die a horrible death at the hands of a temporary human government. And he loves us enough to remind us that we need to see his face in the face of other people. “Love one another as I have loved you.”

My friends, let us love one another. No matter what happens with these elections, let us live out our citizenship in the Kingdom of God. Jesus is Lord. Period.

Let us pray: *Jesus, because we live in this world, we forget that you call us to live in your Kingdom. Bless us as we cast our votes and as we live beyond the elections, so that we will fulfill your command to love one another as you have loved us. Amen*



Wednesday, November 9, 2016

Read: John 5:19-30

“I don’t seek my own will but the will of the one who sent me.”

Every child knows what it is like to carry the authority of a parent with them as they deliver a message. “Mom sent me to tell you that dinner’s ready. Come in and get washed up so we can eat.” “Dad said to get off the computer and to mow the lawn.” What a privilege it is to be the bearer of someone else’s authority! And what a great responsibility it is, as well!

When we carry the authority of someone else, we expect the message to be heard ... we expect the command to be obeyed ... as if the sender was speaking directly to the receiver of the message. The message “Mom sent me to tell you that dinner’s ready” could be delivered to an adult, after all.

When we carry the authority of someone else, we are also expected to deliver the correct message ... we are expected to also obey the command of the sender of the message, too. Indeed, the message “Dad said to get off the computer” should not be delivered as “Dad said to let me use the computer”.

Privilege and responsibility. Jesus also understands privilege and responsibility. He has been sent by the Father and so he carries both privilege and responsibility. And he sends us out with that same privilege and responsibility to deliver his message faithfully.

This section of John’s Gospel has an important message for us. “Whatever I hear, I judge, and my judgment is just.” Jesus is the judge. The Father has given that responsibility to Jesus. Jesus is the judge, and his judgment is just. How do we deliver that message?

We need to remind people that Jesus is watching and he is the judge. It’s a tough message for us to deliver at times, because we have to be incredibly careful to say “Jesus is watching” not “Jesus is watching and this is what he is seeing”. We must deliver the message, “Jesus is the judge and his judgment is just” not “Jesus is the judge and his judgment is X.”

We also need to remind ourselves that Jesus is watching and he is the judge. Jesus is watching. He is listening to the message that we are delivering. Jesus is the judge, and his judgment is just. How will Jesus judge the message that we are delivering?

Let us pray: *Jesus, help us to watch our own words and the messages we deliver in your name. Bless us with the ability to bring your Word to others without judging them. Keep us faithful to your Word so that we need not fear the judgment that you bring with you. Amen*



Thursday, November 10, 2016

Read: Psalm 98

“Sing to the Lord a new song because he has done wonderful things!”

I’m looking at forecast highs of 50s & even 60s for the week of these devotions. I’m astounded that it can be November with green grass and very mild temperatures ... and even predictions of rain. It ought to be snow. Amid concerns about global climate change, the wonders of creation still astound me.

Recently, I’ve seen the Northern Lights dancing on the northern horizon, I’ve watched a Bald Eagle soar on unseen air currents, and I’ve listened to coyotes yipping and howling at the dawning of the sun. God’s incredible creation contains many wonders. It deserves our respect. It also sends us a message from our Creator. Are we listening?

This psalm reminds us that all of creation sings God’s praises ... the sea roars, the rivers clap their hands, the mountains rejoice ... because God establishes justice. “The Lord has made his salvation widely known; he has revealed his righteousness in the eyes of all the nations.” As amazing as creation is, the greatest wonder our God has created is salvation.

Salvation ... that great and wonderful gift given to us through Jesus ... salvation ... the gift that makes each of us a new creation. As God created the universe with all its amazing sights and sounds, so God created each of us – human beings, unique and complex, marvels of flesh and blood and spirit. This same God became a human being and proclaimed to us the gift of new life through Jesus’ flesh and blood. As God brings new life to nature through the cycles of the seasons, so God brings new life to each of us – through the waters of baptism and the gift of faith.

“Sing to the Lord a new song because he has done wonderful things!”
Sing to the Lord ... because he has given us life.

Let us pray: *Jesus, you have given us life. Help us to grow in faith and wisdom. Grant us the ability to live fully this new life that you have shared with us. Bless us with the insight we need to also care for creation so that all people can live abundantly. Amen*



Friday, November 11, 2016

Read: 2 Thessalonians 1:3-12

“Brothers and sisters, we must always thank God for you ... because your faithfulness is growing by leaps and bounds, and the love that all of you have for each other is increasing.”

What a joy it is to celebrate with those whose faith is growing! Whether it is as a parent or Godparent, teacher or pastor, it is deeply moving to see a young person taking steps forward – living out their faith in new ways, in new circumstances, in greater responsibilities. How often do we give thanks to God for such growth in another person?

Recently, I’ve had the marvelous experience of receiving brief notes from a member of my parish – simple notes of thanks or encouragement. She has developed a ministry of writing notes to people ... just because. Somewhere along the way, she received a note at a key moment in her life and she realized how large the impact could be for someone else, and so she began this ministry. What a deep blessing it is to receive these notes! What a wonderful ministry she has in sharing these blessings with others, as well! (If you’re reading this, you know who you are. And now you know how much I appreciate the notes!)

This greeting to the Thessalonians reminds me of the notes I have received. How wonderful it is that Paul and Silvanus and Timothy shared their joy with the people of Thessalonica! How wonderful that they thanked God for the people and their faithful service! And what a great blessing to the people to be reminded that others see their faith and are blessed by their faithfulness.

Have you noticed someone else’s faithfulness? Have you seen someone take strides – large or small – in their life of faith? Have you thanked God for what you have seen? Have you sent a note to that “someone” telling them that you have thanked God for them?

Perhaps today would be a good day to sit down, to thank God, and to write a note to someone whose faith has touched your life.

Let us pray: *Jesus, thank you for the people of faith who surround me. Thank you for their witness to your goodness and love. Grant that I may pass along the blessings that I have received. Amen*



Saturday, November 12, 2106

Read: Luke 17:20-37

“God’s kingdom is already among you.”

My dog Oedi has an uncanny knack for finding the most inconvenient spot on the floor to lie down while I'm working, so that I am continually tripping over him. He's a Lab mix, and I think that this is an instinct that resides in Labrador genes and is passed down from one generation to the next. Oedi is incredibly good at choosing the worst possible moment to interrupt me with a whine that says he needs to go outside, too. This four-footed, furry critter also has the amazing ability to sense the best time to stick his nose in my face for a cuddle, because I need the hug that he's offering. Perhaps, these are Labrador instincts, as well. I suppose that these habits are his way of saying, "Don't you see? I'm right here! I need your attention and I will give you mine!" I can't imagine that I would be able to forget that this 90-pound, chocolate-colored creature is in my home. But, I suppose, we all get so used to the way things are that we sometimes "forget" what is completely obvious.

Perhaps the Kingdom of God is like that, too. "Don't you see? The Kingdom of God is already among you," Jesus says. Isn't it obvious that God is at work here? Don't you understand that wherever God's people are the Kingdom of God is present? I suppose, we get so used to the people around us that we forget we are the Kingdom of God. We are the reminders of God's power at work in the world. Perhaps, we also forget just how important we are in making God's Kingdom visible to others.

I wouldn't suggest that we take up Labrador tactics for reminding others of the presence of God's Kingdom. However, it wouldn't hurt for us to develop our own instincts for being aware of the Kingdom all around us. Perhaps, we could make the Kingdom more visible by offering our help as someone else is struggling to get some work done. Perhaps, we could make the Kingdom more noticeable by noticing what is deeply important to someone else and supporting them as they pursue their goals. Perhaps, we could make the Kingdom more apparent by sharing God's love when we notice someone who needs it.

Let us pray: *Jesus, open our eyes to the needs of others so that we can make your Kingdom known in the midst of those needs. Amen*

