

Devotions – November 13-19, 2016

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Sunday, November 13, 2016

*May the God of steadfastness and encouragement
grant you to live in harmony with one another,
in accordance with Christ Jesus, so that together you may with one voice
glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

*Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.
Romans 15:5-7*

Imagine yourself traveling through several small towns on your way to a vacation destination. Perhaps it is a route you are not familiar with but the GPS or map shows it to be the shortest distance to get to where you want to go. Lunch time rolls around so you stop at a local diner in one of these small towns. As you open the door the bell rings out the arrival of your presence and all eyes turn in your direction. You know the feeling...everyone knows you are not from “around here” and you are keenly aware that you are not “one of them”.

There have been times I visited an unknown church in a strange place where it felt just like this local diner experience. Hungry for a good meal, I simply wanted to enjoy my meal without feeling awkward. We can help visitors in our congregation eliminate that awkward feeling simply by recognizing them as “one of us”; a member of our family sitting around the table of Christ.

Worship begins with gathering. The Holy Spirit calls diverse individuals together from different places to become one worshipping assembly. Each person who comes through the door *becomes* the assembly. We all come hungry for a good meal... ready to share Christ together.

Prayer for the day: *Gracious God, as we open the doors of our community for your people, open our hearts to see your presence in them. Make us grace-filled hosts. Give us courage to welcome one another, that together we may glorify you with one voice, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen*



Monday, November 14, 2016

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the spirit.

I Thessalonians 5:16-19

Who would have thought November would bring a day of 72 degree weather?! As I take advantage of this rare gift sitting in the sun, gratitude flows. The warm air, the bright light, the vitamin D soaking through my skin; all merit rejoicing. Giving thanks comes easy today. On other days not so much. The old folktale, *The Farmer's Luck*, speaks of good days and bad days.

There was old farmer who had worked his crops for many years. One day, his horse ran away. Upon hearing the news, his neighbors came to visit. "Such bad luck," they said sympathetically. "Maybe," the farmer replied. The next morning the horse returned, bringing with it two other wild horses. "Such good luck!" the neighbors exclaimed. "Maybe," replied the farmer. The following day, his son tried to ride one of the untamed horses, was thrown off, and broke his leg. Again, the neighbors came to offer their sympathy on his misfortune. "Such bad luck," they said. "Maybe," answered the farmer. The day after that, military officials came to the village to draft young men into the army to fight in a war. Seeing that the son's leg was broken, they passed him by. "Such good luck!" cried the neighbors. The farmer simply replied, "Maybe."

The farmer doesn't seem to be moved by the labels of 'good' or 'bad' luck. Perhaps he's discovered how fleeting situations can be or that the outcomes of any given circumstance are bound to change.

There are many insights one can extract from this little folktale depending on the reader. I like to think of it through the lens of I Thessalonians 5:16-19 to give thanks in all circumstances (not 'for' all circumstances). Not getting attached to certain outcomes opens our heart and mind to God's creative movement. All circumstances have the potential for unknown opportunities.

Prayer for the day: *Gracious God, you are omniscient- knowing all things. In whatever situation I find myself in today I place it in your hands. I am grateful that you are a God who knows how to make beautiful things out of dust. May your peace that passes all understanding guide my soul. Amen*



Tuesday, November 15, 2016

I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power.

Ephesians 1:17-19

On the shelf behind my office desk sits a small icon of Catherine of Siena sitting at her desk, writing. Saint Catherine (1347-1380) wrote hundreds of letters and prayers, and to her testament "The Dialogue of Divine Providence" (composed of four treatises).

I was given this icon by my mentor while in seminary for inspiration and encouragement to remain steadfast in my duties of writing, writing, writing, papers! I was fortunate to study part of "The Dialogue" in my Christian Ethics class and St. Catherine did indeed inspire me! One of the things that deeply moved me was her fervent devotion to Christ. Her call to discipleship was based on her marriage to him as this was how she understood her relationship with him- a partnership.

In our baptismal liturgy we pray for the Holy Spirit to sustain the baptized: "the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the awe of the Lord, the spirit of joy in God's presence, both now and forever."

Called as disciples through the waters of baptism may we be inspired to live out our faith as she did, married to Christ, with hearts united to his. In her "Dialogue" with God she says, "You, eternal Trinity, are a deep sea. The more I enter you, the more I discover, and the more I discover, the more I seek you."

A Prayer by Catherine of Siena

Power of the eternal Father, help me. Wisdom of the Son, enlighten the eye of my understanding. Tender mercy of the Holy Spirit, unite my heart to yourself. Eternal God, restore health to the sick and life to the dead. Give us a voice, your own voice, to cry out to you for mercy for the world. You, light, give us light. You, wisdom, give us wisdom. You, supreme strength, strengthen us. Amen



Wednesday, November 16, 2016

*The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it,
the world, and those who live in it;
for he has founded it on the seas,
and established it on the rivers.*

Psalm 24:1-3

My husband and I live in a little cabin in the woods. It was purchased in 2000 without a well for water, no indoor plumbing, a plywood interior, and a wood stove as the only source for heat. There was, however, electricity. The cabin lacked modern amenities but it had vast potential.

Throughout the years, much labor and money was invested to make this cabin a home. A well was dug. A kitchen sink, counter, and cabinets were put in. A wood floor, strip by strip, was nailed onto the plywood. And eventually, after 4 years, the cinder

block basement with a sand floor was transformed into a living room with an actual indoor bathroom! WooHoo ...no more cold fanny! We transformed and built upon what already existed.

Consider thinking about the earth like this cabin only it is much more than a plywood shell. The earth has everything we need to build, create, and manage for the betterment of our lives. All of the natural resources we use to maintain a comfortable lifestyle: natural gas or wood to heat our homes; petroleum to run our cars; granite for our kitchen counters... all of it was here long before we were, created by God. Yet, we seem to think once it comes into our hands and is reused for our purpose – we can claim it as our own.

No such transfer of ownership has occurred. God has created all that is, and God continues to own all that is. Everything we have still belongs to God. The proper response to the blessings in our life is not for us to take credit for what we have. The proper response is to give God thanks and praise for the privilege to take of what God has entrusted us with.

Prayer for the day: *Dear God, help me to understand that everything I have is a gift from you. Thank you for making me part of this beautiful creation you have made. Amen*



Thursday, November 17, 2016

"Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to his disciples to set before the people; and he divided the two fish among them all. And all ate and were filled; and they took up twelve baskets full of broken pieces and of the fish."

Mark 6: 41-44

The other day I was talking to a friend who was having difficulty finding balance between faith and practicality. God gave us a brain to use *and* faith to believe. How do we discern and function holding faith and practicality in tension through tough situations?

Tough situations that involve a future outcome like buying a new house; relocating our family for a higher paying job; changing school districts; changing careers. In all these situations we assess and evaluate the information available to us in order to make wise choices. On the other hand, as we process the information at hand the choice isn't always so clear, in fact, many times it is not. There are always pros and cons to any given situation. These are the times we rely on God for faith to move toward in an unforeseeable outcome hoping for the best.

It appears to me the story of Jesus feeding the five thousand demonstrates one of these tough situations. The disciples were trying to be practical with what was available to them to determine what they should do to feed the hungry crowd. Should they send the hungry people away to find food in the neighboring village? Or should they go to the next village, spend a day's wage for bread, and give them something to eat? Or...

We can spend an inordinate amount of time wanting to make the perfect decision not only for the problem at hand, but also for any consequences that might arise in the future.

In the midst of the dilemma, Jesus took what was in front of the disciples (five loaves and two fish) and blessed it. Whatever we are facing, whatever decisions need to be made, put it all in a basket for God to bless. Placing it in God's hands gives the Holy Spirit the opportunity to create a miracle. What comes out of the basket may surprise us. What comes out of the basket may be unexpected. Inviting the blessings of God in our decision making process opens our heart in faith. We've done what we can with what we have-- trusting God with the outcome.

Prayer for the day: Lord, we lift our basket of indecisions and worries to you. Bless our fragmented thoughts. Give us faith to trust and hope, knowing you always have our best interests at heart. Through the one who makes all things possible, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen



Friday, November 18, 2016

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Romans 12: 2

The chickadees are the most frequent flyers to our bird feeder. Without a doubt we have increased their population. At any given moment as many as fifteen chickadees wait on nearby branches for their turn to dive in. Because these birds are such a delight to watch I decided to look up some facts about them (www.allaboutbirds.org). Several of these facts were simply amazing but the one that caught my eye was this: “Every autumn Black-capped Chickadees allow brain neurons containing old information to die, replacing them with new neurons so they can adapt to changes in their social flocks and environment even with their tiny brains.” I chuckled to myself thinking, “Wouldn’t that be great for humans?” And here’s why.

Many times in conversing with others I listen to harbored resentments. Often the person speaking will continue to hold onto hard feelings until the other party involved apologizes. Unknown to the person harboring the resentment is that change begins with them no matter who is at fault. Wouldn’t it be nice if the neuron holding this old information (the past injury) died, replacing it with new neurons so they can adapt to changes in their social flocks?

I am reminded of the letter Paul wrote to the people of Corinth where injured feelings took place. He urges them to put these feelings aside and seek forgiveness and restoration. He says that “if anyone is in Christ there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses

against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us (2 Corinthians 5:17-19)".

May today's reminder be from our feathered friends the chickadees. God, the creator, can erase old information making all things new through Christ.

The Prayer of Saint Francis:

Lord, make me an instrument of Your peace.

Where there is hatred, let me sow love;

where there is injury, pardon;

where there is doubt, faith;

where there is despair, hope;

where there is darkness, light;

where there is sadness, joy.

Grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console;

to be understood as to understand;

to be loved as to love;

For it is in giving that we receive;

it is in pardoning that we are pardoned;

it is in dying that we are born again to eternal life.



Saturday, November 19, 2016

Where can I go from your spirit?

Or where can I flee from your presence?

If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me,

and the light around me become night,"

even the darkness is not dark to you;

the night is as bright as the day,

for darkness is as light to you.

Psalm 139: 7, 11, 12

As we approach the end of November we will be experiencing more darkness than light. Many of us see darkness as a vast unknown that beckons fear (literally and figuratively). Many view darkness as evil, scary or bad. Many of us simply struggle without sunlight and are susceptible to depression or experience Seasonal Affective Disorder.

Living in the northern part of the northern hemisphere this is something we learn to cope with. Some of us still struggle. Gray day after gray day becomes quite dreary. During these long months of darkness I find myself hoping for even one little sliver of a

ray of sunshine. I am the type of person who craves the sun so often during the winter I have this nagging angst for light to come. It is unnerving.

One way I found to cope was to entertain the idea of looking at darkness differently. I don't have to view it as the absence of light; a deficit. I don't have to see it as something bad. Maybe there is something to explore here, I mean didn't God create the world out of darkness?

From an article in the April issue of 2014 Time Magazine, Barbara Brown Taylor reminds us that God appeared to Abraham in the night and promised him descendants more numerous than the stars. The exodus from Egypt happened at night. God met Moses in the thick darkness atop Mount Sinai to hand down the Ten Commandments. The Apostle Paul's conversion happened after he lost his sight. Jesus was born beneath a star and resurrected in the darkness of a cave. God is present in darkness.

Throughout biblical history darkness was often the setting for humanity's closest encounters with the divine. We, in the northern part of the northern hemisphere, have ample opportunity to explore it. Be not afraid, for God is with you.

Prayer for the day: Dear God, it is comforting to know that even the darkness is not dark to you. Remove my fears and increase my trust. What may be unknown to me is not to you. Take my hand and lead me when I cannot see. Amen

