

Devotions – April 9-15, 2017

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Sunday, April 9, 2017

Read: Matthew 21:1-11

“Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!”

“Hello – Richters.” This is often how I answer the phone when I’m at my Mom and Dad’s house. My voice and my Mom’s voice are enough alike that most people cannot tell us apart on the phone. So, rather than having someone start talking with me as if I am my Mom, this answer lets people know that it’s not **Sandy** answering the phone. It’s easier for the caller, and for me, if they do not mistake me for my Mom. There are times, however, when I am acting on my Mom’s behalf – when I come in the name of Sandy Richter in order to do work for her.

It is both an honor and a responsibility to do something in the name of someone else. It is a wonderful feeling when someone trusts us enough to send us out with **their** authority – to be an ambassador, of sorts. It is also a great responsibility to carefully fulfill the work in a way that this person would desire. If there are any questions about the task at hand, we need to understand how the person who sent us thinks and what their preferences would be – rather than making decisions based on our own preferences.

When we hear about Jesus’ triumphant entry into Jerusalem, we often think of his coming AS Lord and Savior, rather than coming in the NAME of the LORD. Coming “in the name of the Lord” means that he is coming in God’s name – the LORD as it is used in our Old Testament. If Jesus is coming in God’s name, then he is doing God’s work. Jesus will be making decisions based on God’s ideas – reflecting God’s ways in the world. It may not be easy, but it will be God’s work.

The ELCA tagline is “God’s Work. Our Hands.” In what ways are we also ambassadors for God? How do we reflect God’s ways with our lives? Have we also been sent “in the name of the Lord”? As we continue our work in the world, it may not be easy, but we are called and sent to do God’s work with our hands.

Let us pray: *Jesus, help us remember that we are sent into the world in your name. Fill us with your Spirit so that we can reflect your ways to the world. Amen*



Monday, April 10, 2017

Read: Psalm 36:5-11

How precious is your steadfast love, O God!

While serving in a congregation in South Dakota, I was honored to be part of a celebration of a 60th wedding anniversary. It was a remarkable thing, since the couple was 30 and 36 years old when they were married. As they told stories of their 60 years together, it became clear that their deep love for each other had sustained them through many difficult times. Their eyes sparkled with joy as they shared the many triumphs they had celebrated during those years. Each seemed more proud of the other's accomplishments than of their own.

Their love was an earthly reflection of the steadfast love that they had received from God. They said that their wedding vows were not only promises made to each other. They had also received the promise that God would be with them every minute of every day – in the midst of their better and worse moments, their sickness and health, etc. Their promises were “‘til death doth us part.” God's promises extended beyond death to eternity.

What an amazing God we have! God's steadfast love never wavers. More enduring even than wedding vows that lasted 60+ years, God's promises of love for us will never fail. As we walk through the events of Jesus' last week on earth, we see how steadfast God's love truly is. Nothing will come between him and his love for his disciples. His love for his followers will drive him forward. Even in the garden when he questions his own ability to stay the course, his love for us does not falter. He clings to the hand of the Father and takes the next step. For better or for worse, he will do what needs to be done.

How do we respond to God's steadfast love for us? How do we live out that love? How do we celebrate God's accomplishments in our lives and the lives of others? How do we stick together in times of trouble? How do we show our trust in God's love – even in the midst of better and worse?

Let us pray: *Jesus, you have promised to love us with a steadfast and eternal love. Help us to open our hearts to that love, so that we can love you in return and love your people as you have loved them.*
Amen



Tuesday, April 11, 2017

Read: 1 Corinthians 1:18-31

For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

I love listening to Paul Harvey's *The Rest of the Story*. It is always fascinating to see how the little details add up to a “big reveal” at the end. This passage from 1 Corinthians makes me wonder what the events of Holy Week would sound like if told by Paul Harvey's *The Rest of the Story*.

The week began with a parade and a great celebration; it ended with another parade of sorts and another great celebration; but what happened in between is the rest of the story. There was a betrayal, a secret trial, another secret trial, and a public execution. The man who was betrayed, tried, and executed was named “king of the Jews” by some who were present. He was called “Jesus son of Joseph” and “Jesus of Nazareth” by others. He was declared innocent of any crime by the governor Pontius Pilate and by one of the guards in charge of his execution. He was executed anyway.

What you may not know is that Joseph was not really his father. This man was declared “son of the Most High God” by the angels who announced his birth. His death on a cross was not the end of his life, but the beginning of new life for all people. This Jesus who would be named Messiah – Christ – the Anointed One – was the only-begotten son of God. God who created the universe with a word and created new life out of death was truly his Father. Three days after Jesus’ death, the tomb where his body had been laid was discovered to be empty. Jesus himself greeted Mary of Magdala who had discovered the empty tomb, and his other followers ran to check things out for themselves – a parade to the place of his burial. He was not there. His heavenly Father had raised him to new life and promised that all who believed would also be raised.

The followers of this Jesus would become known for their generosity and kindness toward others. They would become known as “people of the way,” as they followed “the way” of Jesus. They would cling to the foolish notion that God had become flesh and blood in order to reveal God’s true nature to human beings. They would claim that God’s true nature is love. They would cling to the image of the cross – an instrument of torture and death – as a sign of God’s powerful love. And they would use this image of God’s own sacrifice as the foundation of their work in the world. In Jesus’ death, they would also be given new life.

They would be named “Christians” and now we await the rest of the story.

How will your life tell the rest of this story? How does your life reveal the wisdom of God and power of God as it has been told to us in the cross of Christ?

Let us pray: *Jesus, help us to tell your story with our lives. Amen*



Wednesday, April 12, 2017

Read: Isaiah 50:4-9a

It is the Lord God who helps me...

We all know what it is like to have fair weather friends. In the midst of good times, there are people who hang around with us and share our joys. When bad times come our way, when we need help the most, there are those who disappear from our lives. We know who our true friends are because they come running to help when disaster strikes, they do not go running away.

Our God is a true friend, not a fair weather friend. Whether we have brought our problems upon ourselves or they have come upon us from circumstances beyond our control, God does not abandon us. Martin Luther said that in the midst of terrible times and in the presence of evil we can cling to the promises given to us in our baptism. Proclaim loudly, “I am a child of God!” and know that God will not let you go. God’s love does not leave us. God’s forgiveness comes to us when we have sinned. God’s Spirit sustains us when we have nothing else to rely on.

Isaiah reminds us that it doesn’t matter what the world has to say about us or what the world conspires to do to us. God is the one who has the final say in our lives. God declares us forgiven – innocent of sin – righteous in God’s eyes. God declares us reborn – gives us new life – and makes us a new creation.

Where will this confidence in God's power take you? In the waters of baptism, we are given new life. What will this new life look like for you?

Let us pray: *Jesus, we see in you God's power to take on the world and sin and even death. Help us to stand firmly and to trust in your power to guide us each day of our lives. Amen*



Maundy Thursday, April 13, 2017

Read: John 13:1-17, 31b-35

"Do you know what I have done to you? ... I have set you an example ..."

As we gather for worship on Maundy Thursday, we re-enact the moment when Jesus washed his disciples' feet, and we remember his mandate to "love one another – just as I have loved you." Washing someone else's feet or having our feet washed by someone else can feel very awkward, especially in the context of worship. But let's take a moment to examine Jesus' actions more closely, so that we don't miss the point of what he has done.

"Do you know what I have done to you?" Jesus asks. "I have set you an example," he goes on to explain. Jesus has been – and is and will continue to be – a servant for those who follow him. While he is the leader, the teacher, the Lord, **HE** is the one who loves and serves; it is not the other way around. This is a difficult thing for the disciples to grasp. You may remember that some of Jesus' disciples debated who would be the greatest in God's kingdom. Peter has challenged Jesus' attempt to wash his feet.

Jesus washes their feet so that they will come to know that they are not "above" the people whom they will teach. Jesus washes their feet so that they will understand how to serve others out of love. Jesus washes their feet so that they will know how to help others without seeking glory in the service they offer. Jesus washes their feet so that they will begin to understand what the mandate to love one another is all about.

"Do you know what I have done to you?" Jesus asks. Do we understand? Do we know what Jesus has done to us? Do we understand Jesus' example for us? How do we live out the mandate to love one another as Jesus has loved us? Or do we challenge Jesus' actions and debate who among us will be the greatest?

Let us pray: *Jesus, help us to serve others out of love. Help us to seek your glory and not our own. Amen*



Good Friday, April 14, 2017

Read: John 18:1-19:42

"It is finished."

We all know the satisfaction of completing a task, of reaching the end of a long period of preparation and toil, and of declaring the end to whatever project has been accomplished. "It's done!" we announce with excitement and joy.

When Jesus declares, "It is finished," we have a sense not of joy or excitement but of exhaustion. "I have completed all that I came to do. I'm done." According to John's telling of these moments, Jesus has accomplished all that he needs to accomplish, and he dies. And yet, a part of us wonders how this can be true, because we know that this is not the last thing that Jesus does. There are two more chapters in John's Gospel, after all!

Perhaps, this sense of accomplishment is like that declared in Genesis 2:2. "When God finished the work," God declared a day of rest. Creation was completed; God was finished; but God was not done working in the world that God had created. Here, as he hangs upon the cross, Jesus has completed the work of re-creating the world, but God is still not done working in the world that God has created.

There is perhaps another way in which Jesus declares his work completed. There is still much to be done, but perhaps Jesus has declared his work accomplished because he has passed the work on to his followers ... to us! Jesus has fulfilled scripture; he has prayed for all who will be his disciples in the days and years to come; he has shown his disciples what it means to love one another; he has taught them all that can be taught before the arrival of the Holy Spirit; and he has passed the work on to those who will come after him.

How are we continuing God's work? How are we bringing new life to others? How is creation being renewed through our actions? How are we following in Jesus' footsteps to and beyond the cross?

Let us pray: *Jesus, your death is the end of one life and the beginning of another. Help us to bring new life to others and to your world. Amen*



Holy Saturday, April 15, 2017

Read: Romans 6:1-11

Therefore, we have been buried with Jesus by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.

In an episode of the TV series *Babylon 5*, Captain John Sheridan returns from Z'Ha'Dum. He is greeted with the statement, "We thought you died at Z'Ha'Dum." His response is, "I did. But I'm better now."

I feel like Paul is saying something similar to the people of God at Rome. We died in baptism, but we are better now. We died to sin, and we were raised to new life in a right relationship with God. We died to our old life, and we were born into a new life as children of God. Yes, we died, and now we are a new creation.

As we await the dawn of Easter and the discovery of the empty tomb, we sit in darkness with the disciples. We experience the power of death. This is not an illusion; this is real. Jesus has died. We have died. We are not who we used to be.

As difficult as it is, pause here in the darkness of death – at least for a moment. As you look at your life, are there things that need to change? Are there things that need to die, if you are going to move forward with your life? Take the time to bury those things, here in the darkness of the tomb. Truly, bury them. Grieve for the loss of what had been. Leave the past at the foot of the cross and in the depth of the tomb. And know that tomorrow brings a new day and new life.

Let us pray: *Jesus, help us leave the past behind. Help us to break the bonds that hold us captive. Give us your Spirit so that we can rise into the new life you have promised. Amen*

