

Devotions – April 23-29, 2017

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Sunday, April 23, 2017

Text: John 20:19-31, especially verse 29

“Jesus said to him, ‘Thomas, because you have seen me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.’”

I suppose like many of us, I used to believe that to doubt anything about my faith was a bad thing. I was raised in a pretty conservative Lutheran environment where even if doubt existed, it was not normally verbalized. I also think most of us believe that faith is a journey, and not usually one which follows a straight path. My own has certainly had its curves and detours.

Along my faith journey, I’ve had some pretty awesome mentors that have helped me grapple with difficult questions. I was lucky enough to attend a parochial school through the eighth grade, an education that gave me a strong foundation. I’ve had college professors, pastors, friends, and others who have been willing to talk with me about faith issues, to help me study and learn, and to realize that to question is not to disbelieve. It’s because we have questions that we study, and through study we learn. Though sometimes it seems that the more we study the less we really know (God is such a mystery!), it is through questions, and even through doubt, that we come to at least some understanding of the awesome God that we proclaim. We become more accepting of the mysteries of God and more grateful for all that we are able to learn about God through the revelation of the Bible and its testimony about the person Jesus.

Though poor Thomas has had to accept what has become the negative label of “Doubting Thomas,” in truth, doubt is something that can actually help us grow closer to our Lord. Jesus understood that those of us that were to come centuries after Thomas would also have to wrestle with questions and with doubt, and so he blessed us. He blessed us for study, for conversation, for growth, and for witness. We have not seen Jesus in the flesh as Thomas did, but thanks to God’s blessing, we do believe.

We pray: *Dear Lord, we are thankful for all those in our lives who help us wrestle with questions and sometimes even with doubt. We are also thankful that we have your blessing on our study and our efforts to learn more about you and your Kingdom. Praise to you for your goodness and your blessing!*
AMEN



Monday, April 24, 2017

Lessons from Lois, #1

Text: 2 Timothy 1:3-5

“I thank God, whom I serve with a pure conscience, as my forefathers did, as without ceasing I remember you in my prayers night and day, greatly desiring to see you, being mindful of your tears, that I may be filled with joy, when I call to remembrance the genuine faith that is in you, which dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am persuaded is in you also.”

My mother’s name was Lois. According to my trusty smart phone info, the name Lois means “good,” and for me, this shows that this was a great name for my mom because she truly was “good.” The rest of the week, I’m going to pass on some lessons I learned from my mom Lois, who also exhibited the same kind of “genuine faith” that Paul saw in Timothy’s grandmother Lois.

I imagine that in Timothy’s family his grandmother Lois was one of his first teachers. I’m not sure whether that included what we might call “book learning,” but it surely did include learning about faith. My faith was also ignited by my mom Lois, starting at the earliest of ages. It began with learning childhood prayers and simple Bible verses, with stories from the Bible and then later with conversation about the right way to treat people. It continued with her efforts to send me and my sister and brothers to a parochial school, even though this involved extra expense that was not easy for her to pay in those days. But education, and especially Christian education, was important to her, and so she made that extra effort to be sure we all received that training.

In the same way that Timothy’s grandmother Lois and my mother Lois saw the importance of training their children and grandchildren in the faith, we as present day Christians can hopefully create environments where the importance of faith formation is clear, and we can pray that the Holy Spirit will continue to work in our families and homes.

We pray: *Dear God, we pray that you will send your Holy Spirit to all our mothers and fathers so that they will see the importance of teaching their children about faith. We pray that we will all make Christian education an important part of our church lives. We pray in Jesus’ name. AMEN*



Tuesday, April 25, 2017

Lessons from Lois, #2

Text: Galatians 3:27-28

“For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

One of the main things I learned from my mom Lois was independence. Because my mom was a single mom at a time when that was much more unusual than it is today, she understood the importance of being able to “stand on your own two feet,” as she put it. She understood, and taught me and my sister, that we couldn’t necessarily count on anyone else to take care of us, and so she emphasized (over and

over again!) how important it was that we get an education and be able to support ourselves. She knew that even though we were girls, we had the gifts and abilities that would enable us to study, learn, and then work, and that we had much that we could offer to society.

Paul reminds us in Galatians that in Christ we all have something to offer, too. We all have gifts and abilities that we can use in support of the Body of Christ. It doesn't matter if we are male or female, young or old, American, Canadian, or Mexican: we are all one in Christ Jesus, and we all have something to offer. We are called to work together and to see each other's strengths, not each other's gender or nationality.

So I celebrate the lesson I learned from my mom, that I am as able and strong as anyone, male or female, in what I have to offer to an employer and to society. And I celebrate the lesson I learned from Paul, that in Christ Jesus, we are ALL strong in our ability to serve the Kingdom.

We pray: Dear Lord, we thank you for our differences, and we celebrate with you our unity. Strengthen our desire to work together...male and female, Jew and Greek....to further your Kingdom. We pray in Jesus' name. AMEN



Wednesday, April 26, 2017

Lessons from Lois, #3

Text: Matthew 9:24-25

"He said to them, 'Make room, for the girl is not dead, but sleeping.' And they ridiculed him. But when the crowd was put outside, he went in and took her by the hand, and the girl arose."

When I was 12 years old, there was a tragedy in our family. My baby sister, only one month old, died suddenly. It was what was then called a "crib death." Today we would know it as Sudden Infant Death Syndrome. My mother was devastated. Losing a child is of course always a horrible thing, and this was made even more horrible by the fact that my mom somehow felt responsible. She should have known something was wrong; she should have heard something; she should have known! And the baby had not been baptized yet, another devastating fact for my mom.

I know that for a long time my mom was angry with God about this. Why did God let this happen? Why to this little innocent baby? And why to us, to our family, to my mom? There were so many miracles recorded in the Bible, like the raising of the little girl in Matthew's story above; why could there have not been just one more miracle, the saving of this one little child?

My mother was a woman of faith, however, and in time the sadness eased, though I'm sure it was never completely gone. So what was my lesson from Lois in all of this? Just this: in the midst of the most intense sorrow, God is still there with us. God, who became one of us in the person of Jesus, knows all our sorrows and understands them because God in Christ actually lived them. Jesus knew the sorrow of

loss and the pain of suffering, and because of that I can know that he feels my pain and is with me to help me deal with it. I am never alone.

We pray: *God of all hope, let us feel your healing presence, even in the midst of great sorrow. We pray in Jesus' name. AMEN*



Thursday, April 27, 2017

Lessons from Lois, #4

Text: Matthew 11: 28-30

“Come to me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

My mom Lois had a lot of knick-knacks. She also had a few wall plaques and signs, some of which I remember still. For example, for all the years I can remember, she had a sign in her kitchen that said, “The hurrier I go, the behinder I get.” (This was a great sign for my mom, by the way, because she was always, ALWAYS late!) She also had a little block of wood with a sign that was glued to it that was placed on the window sill above her sink, where she, and anyone else using the sink, would see it often. It said, “God helps those who CAN’T help themselves.”

As mentioned in an earlier devotion this week, my mom was a great one for independence and control. She was a divorced single mother of four at a time when divorce was not really a socially acceptable practice, nothing like what it is today. She HAD to be independent and in control; she really felt she had no choice. But she, like all of us, learned that we really don’t have control of many of the things that happen to us in life, and I think she came to lean heavily on promises from Jesus such as the one Matthew relates in chapter 11, above. “Come, and I will give you rest.”

My favorite parts of Scripture are the promises, for I truly believe that God will keep God’s promises. I know that in most ways, I cannot help myself, but that I CAN rely on God to give me the help I will need because God has *promised* that he will. When I think of the words on my mom’s little wooden block, I’m also reminded of what Martin Luther says in his explanation to the Third Article of the Creed: “....I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him....” Faith is a gift, one I can’t gain on my own or by my own actions. I cannot help myself, but God WILL help me.

And last, this lesson from Lois reminds me that it is also up to me to help all the neighbors I have who cannot help themselves. It is up to me to stand up for justice and to work for changes that will benefit all those in need. It’s up to me to live out my faith through service, not because of what it will do for me but because it’s what I’m called, as a child of God, to do for others.

We pray: Dear God, please give me the courage and the will to help others who may not be able to help themselves. We pray that you continue to send your Holy Spirit upon us so that we can continue to live out our faith, seeking always to do your will here on earth. AMEN



Friday, April 28, 2017

Lessons from **Lois**, #5

Text: Revelation 14: 13

“Write: ‘Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord...’ ‘Yes,’ says the Spirit, ‘that they may rest from their labors.’”

My mother Lois died at what I consider to be too early of an age; she was 69, the very age I am as I write this. My sister, my brothers, and I were all at my mother’s bedside when she died. My aunt, my mother’s sister, led us in saying the Lord’s Prayer not long before my mom passed away. But shortly before she died while still able to talk, my mom had some advice for my siblings and me. What I think were her very last words to us were these: she said, “Don’t fight.”

I’ve often thought of the fact that those were her last words to us and why those are the words she chose. Now, you need to understand that my sibs and I were not given to fighting among ourselves. We are very fond of each other and have never feuded or otherwise been in fights or conflicts. So why would our mom have used these as her very last words to us? While of course I can’t know for sure, here is what I think. I think our mom simply wanted us to live in love for each other, and this was her easiest way to say it. Don’t fight; care for each other; try to make things easier for each other. I think that is what she really wanted to say, but was too close to leaving us that she couldn’t quite say it all.

I love our reference in the Creed to the Communion of Saints. Every time I say those words I think of my mom and of how she and all the other Saints are there with me every Sunday as we celebrate the Eucharist. I think of how she is now resting from her labors and is part of that great body of Saints in the Kingdom of God. I still think of my mom every day, and will always miss her. I still think of her admonition to me and my sister and brothers to live with and for each other in love. I think of all the things she taught me, and I am grateful.

We pray: Heavenly Father, we thank you for the all the Saints who have gone before us. We thank for their teaching and their service. Help us to live the lessons they have taught us. Bring us all at last into that great Communion of Saints. We pray in Jesus’ name. AMEN



Saturday, April 29, 2017

Lessons from **Lois**, #6

Text: Proverbs 3:5-6

“Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him and he shall direct thy paths.”

After my mom Lois died, it fell to me to go through a lot of her papers and accounts. As I was sorting through a pile of miscellaneous stuff, I found a small piece of paper with a Bible verse written on it. I recognized my mom’s handwriting, so I knew she was the one who had written it. The verse was the one above, from Proverbs. I kept that little piece of paper in my mom’s own handwriting, and I’ve thought of the verses often.

It does not surprise me that these would be verses that my mom would choose to highlight for herself. I noted in previous devotions my mom’s need to feel in control of her life. So many things had been outside her control that I think it only natural that she wanted to control everything that she could. It had been a constant battle for her, I think, the need and want to hand control over to God, but then the equal need to want to pull it back. It’s hard to give up control; I feel that same conflict. It reminds me of the Old Testament stories about the Israelites and how they, too, wanted to be “in control” and were often reluctant to rely on God and God’s promises.

This, then, is the final Lesson from Lois that I will leave with you: *Trust in God’s promises*. Do not rely on your own understanding, but rather let God guide you. Though it’s often hard to do, trust that God will not let you down. This is what my mother believed, what she worked very hard to embrace in her everyday life, and what she passed on to me. Trust in the Lord with all your heart.

We pray: *God of all strength, we come to you in prayer asking that you send your Holy Spirit to increase our trust in you. Help us to feel your presence and to know that we can rely on you to keep your promises; help us trust that you will lead us. We pray in Jesus’ name. AMEN*

