

Prayfaithfully

.....Daily Devotions

May 21-27, 2017

By Rev. Dr. Judy Kincaid

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Escanaba, MI

Sunday, May 21, 2017

Text: Psalm 23 (KJV)

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

The 23rd Psalm is a beloved piece of scripture. It is chosen so often for funerals that it is sometimes hard to hear it as a psalm for living instead of a psalm about dying. Having your soul restored and having your soul guided and refreshed is a way to truly live. We have a table set in the middle of our enemies. There will always be enemies. For most of us, no one will be trying to kill us. We will face the enemies of illness, regret, doubt, and shame. They will be there but we won't face them alone. My favorite part of Psalm 23 is the part about dwelling in the house of the Lord forever. When I was younger, I imagined that meant Heaven. I thought the psalm meant I got to go to heaven with God—in God's house when I die. It does mean that, but it means more than that. I get to start dwelling in God's house right now. The church is God's house here on earth. I get to dwell in God's house even when I am not in the church building. God's people are the church. Together, we are the house of the Lord forever. Forever is a long time, but it starts right now.

Let us pray: *Dear Good Shepherd, thank you for leading me down righteous paths and giving me everything I need. Help to remember that wherever I roam and whatever dangers I face, I have already found my home in you. Amen*



Monday, May 22, 2017

Text: Isaiah 42:6-9 (NIV)

“I, the LORD, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles, to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon those who

sit in darkness. “I am the LORD; that is my name! I will not yield my glory to another or my praise to idols. *See, the former things have taken place, and new things I declare; before they spring into being I announce them to you.*”

I am attending a continuing education event in San Antonio. It is called the “Festival of Homiletics”. (Homiletics means preaching.) My hero, Walter Brueggemann, spoke yesterday. What I got out of his lecture is that we have to stop looking backwards. He said in the Old Testament, God wanted the people to stop talking about the Exile. God wanted the people to notice the new thing that God was doing. Dr. Brueggemann said we love to tell the same old story over and over, but it is time to stop talking about the baby Jesus and look forward.

It is tempting to look backwards to times that we thought were better. “Remember when our Sunday School was full?” and “Remember when attendance was better?” and “Remember the things we used to do that we don’t anymore?” **We need to stop thinking like this!** If we keep looking backwards, we will miss all the blessings we could be experiencing right now! Maybe God wants to take your hand and help you do something new and important. Maybe you or your congregation is being called to open the eyes of the blind or free captives of poverty or sin. God is declaring a new thing. If we keep trying to get back the old things, we might miss it.

Let us pray: Dear Lord, help me to recognize your call. Take hold of my hand and lead me to be a light for someone’s darkness. Help me to look forward and not back. Don’t let me miss the new things you are announcing. Amen



Tuesday, May 23, 2017

Text: Luke 10:29-37 (NIV)

...Jesus said: “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Look after him,’ he said, ‘and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.’ “Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?” The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.” Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.”

I saw Nadia Bolz Weber speak yesterday. She was talking about how hard it is to read the news these days. I agree! Sometimes when I read about the things that are going on in the world I feel

a sense of hopelessness. She pointed out the story of the Good Samaritan. It starts out pretty bad. Robbers beat a man, take his things and leave him to die by the side of the road. The thing to notice about the story is that it is not about the robbers. It is not about sin and evil. There is sin and evil in the story, but the story is about the Good Samaritan and how he helped a member of a group who hated his people.

If the news were reporting this story, they would concentrate on the robbers. Violence gets ratings. Mercy and goodness make bad news stories, but mercy and goodness are out there. There are far more good people doing good things, than violent or deranged people. Evil has the news cycle but not the victory. Evil doesn't get our hearts and we won't give it more attention than it deserves.

Let us pray: *Dear God of Grace and Mercy, help me not to be afraid when I read the news. Help me to remember that, even if it doesn't seem like it right now, evil has already lost. Make me a vehicle for your goodness. Amen*



Wednesday, May 24, 2017

Text: John 17:9-18

(Jesus said) I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours. All I have is yours, and all you have is mine. And glory has come to me through them. I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name, the name you gave me, so that they may be one as we are one. While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me. None has been lost except the one doomed to destruction so that Scripture would be fulfilled.

“I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them. I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world.

I always think a lot about my late mother this time of year. Like most moms, she worried about her children all the time. She was full of good advice and she was always delighted to hear from us. The thing that I miss most about her is that she held us in constant prayer. She was praying about every aspect of our lives every night. She prayed for us and we knew it. She wanted nothing more from God than that we were okay. It felt good to have an advocate like that. Jesus was an even better advocate than my dear mother. As he prepared to be crucified for sins he did not commit, his main concern was his disciples. He prayed to God to care for them and protect them. It feels good to know that I am loved like that.

Let us pray: *Dear Jesus, guardian of my soul, Thank you for loving us more than you love yourself. Help me to model that kind of love for others. Amen*



Thursday, May 25, 2017

Text: Matthew 23:37

"Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing."

Jesus used the image of a mother hen to explain how he felt about the people of Jerusalem. He just wanted to gather them in and protect them. The only problem with that beautiful image is that chickens are not much protection from anything. A fox, a hawk, a coyote or just about anything else with teeth can kill a chicken. If we are the chicks and Jesus is the hen, how can we be protected? The answer is we simply won't be protected in the way we might want. We will still get hurt in body, mind and spirit. Being a Christian does not guarantee safety. It only guarantees love. Jesus loved us enough to gather us to himself and give everything for us. When we let ourselves be gathered in, we receive the warmth of unconditional love and the assurance of peace for our souls.

Let us pray: *Dear Mothering God, please keep gathering me in, even when I try to run away from your love. Help me give up my foolish struggle to make it on my own. Amen*



Friday, May 26, 2017

Text: Romans 12:2 (NIV)

Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

There is a teenage girl in my confirmation class who is struggling at school. She is not struggling with math or science or English. She is struggling to have friends. She is an introvert so it isn't always easy for her to make friends. She had a small group of girls she ate lunch with and sometimes saw outside of school. This girl is white and her friends think it is okay to tell racist jokes. They say it is just funny and not really hurting anyone. The girl I was telling you about insisted it is not funny and not okay. They think she is too serious and maybe too judgmental. She would not budge from her conviction that there is nothing funny about racism. She only had a few friends and she risked losing them for the sake of what is right. Some days,

she has no one to hang out with. It breaks my heart but it makes me proud. She is not conformed to the pattern of this world but transformed by the renewing of her mind through the power of Christ. I wish I could be so brave.

Let us pray: *Dear God of Righteousness, help me to resist the urge to conform to the pattern of this world so that people will like me or approve of me. Bend my will to your good, pleasing and perfect will. Amen*



Saturday, May 27, 2017

Text: Psalm 56:8 (NLT)

You keep track of all my sorrows.

You have collected all my tears in your bottle.

You have recorded each one in your book

Do you ever feel like no one notices you? Are you ever sad or angry or afraid and no one seems to get it? My sister, Pam, was the middle child and she always said no one listened to her. To this we replied, “What? Did you say something?” It is bad enough to be in pain but it hurts even more to think that no one knows that you are suffering. The writer of Psalm 56 took comfort in knowing that even though his enemies were after him, God knew exactly what was going on. God knows each tear that falls from our eyes and each wound that is inflicted on our hearts. We are never alone.

Let us pray: *Dear Ever-Attentive God, thank you for not ever letting me suffer alone. Take away all my pain and sorrow today and let me move on to new life. Amen*

