

Prayfaithfully

.....Daily Devotions

May 28 – June 3, 2017

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Sunday, May 28, 2017

Text: *1 Peter 5:5*

...all of you must clothe yourselves with humility in your dealings with one another, for “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.”

How does one clothe oneself in humility? Too much of this good thing and one becomes proud of their humble garment, thus defeating Peter’s original call. True humility, though, is a blessing of God because it opens us to God and others. The first opening we’ll touch on tomorrow. As for the second, it reminds me of the fortune-cookie-type saying: “It is difficult to fill a cup that is already full.” Humility in our dealings with one another empties us of ourselves, so that we can be filled and blessed by the other.

Her name was Bernice. One Sunday morning she raked me over the proverbial coals. I had said something while leading Sunday worship – or more precisely, did not say something! – that triggered an emotional landmine of her beloved daughter’s psychic scars. Her daughter had fled from worship in tears, so Bernice took me to task following service, venting her anger on this clueless pastor. To be truthful, my pride was hurt, and I wanted to simply dismiss her as unrighteous and unjust. Yet God’s grace blessed me not to act on that urge. Instead, I pursued conversations with both daughter and mother at their respective homes that Sunday afternoon. In God-given humility – it was not from me! – I went to listen to them, and what I discovered was not a need for me to defend myself but of their greater story of love and hurt and hope, a story that started long before me. Bernice and her daughter shared themselves with me, and I was blessed with their story as well as the ability to walk with them, even as they returned to walking with me.

Peter’s path is a path to life in community: “Clothe yourselves with humility in your dealings with one another.”

Let us pray: *Dear Lord Jesus, grant us this gift. Amen.*



Monday, May 29, 2017

Text: 1 Peter 5:6

Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you in due time.

To pick up from yesterday, true humility is a blessing of God because it opens us to God and others. We now focus on the first opening – to God. It’s amidst suffering for the faith that Peter (or a disciple of Peter’s) originally penned these words. No doubt there were those among the battered 1st century church who wondered about God’s truthfulness, intention, power, and love. Yet Peter promises nothing less than God with them as they humbly trust.

His name was Oliver, my father. At the time of his death he had been ordained for 55 years. In his 25th year he had entered a parish setting filled with enough dysfunction that his call, along with the other pastor’s, ended amidst two congregational meetings, one “illegally” called, the other “specially” called. At the first, both pastors were fired *and* given raises. Christ’s church can be fickle! At the second, the firings were affirmed.

Through those years, I witnessed my Dad’s struggle under tremendous pressures that he did not deserve, yet walking humbly before both people and God. One especially dark night of the soul, he heard the Lord Jesus speak to him during prayer – “Oliver, all you need is me.” God’s exaltation had begun! For me it would climax 11 years later when I had the privilege of preaching at Dad’s retirement service from his next congregation, a church that had been dying in schism when he first arrived. Together we celebrated how God had blessed and exalted both a wounded pastor and a wounded congregation with 11 years of healing balm and vital mission with one another.

Let us pray: *Dear Lord Jesus, grant us this gift. Amen.*



Tuesday, May 30, 2017

Text: 1 Peter 5:7

Cast all your anxiety on [God], because he cares for you.

I have a confession: I’ve used this verse hundreds of times from hospital room to divorce court, but until recently I had not taken notice that “anxiety” is singular. From faulty memory, I have quoted Peter in the plural, connecting “anxieties” to all the “issues” that my parishioners were facing. “Big deal,” you may yawn, but I challenge back that a singular “anxiety” shifts the focus of the problem, the one we’re casting on God. The problem is not simply the outward circumstance of life through which we’re living but the inner way we’re living with it – anxious

and not at peace. And the reason we're anxious – I'll be bold! – is that we don't truly trust many of God's promises in the first place. Consider Jesus in Matthew 6 who tells us amidst God's promises for daily supply that we don't have to be anxious about having enough to eat, drink and wear. Intellectually I believe Jesus' promise. It's easy to trust when I have a job, yet deprive me of my income, credit/debit cards and cash and suddenly my emotions probably betray my lack of trust and peace. I emotionally buy into a lie that God can't provide.

I'll call her Grace. Through the years, she had been very close to her mother, but distant from her father. He had left the family through both divorce and distance. As Grace and I met for prayer, her mother had recently died, and her estranged father had returned home in need of care during his elder years. We listened to and prayed about Grace's anxiety that flared every time she entered her father's apartment. It would have been tempting to look no further than this present outward issue, but instead she turned toward her inner anxiety. Physically Grace still sat beside me at church. Emotionally she stood as a youth on a school gymnasium floor, feeling the grief and crush of lies that had been birthed into a new child of divorce. Standing in memory, Grace named her false, youthful convictions that had since unconsciously erupted with anxiety every time an adult Grace entered her father's apartment. We asked Jesus what He wanted Grace to know. Suddenly Grace began crying – this time for joy! – as she saw a vision of Jesus coming to her on that gym floor, giving her young self a hug, assuring her that everything was going to be OK. The next time Grace entered her father's apartment, she did so without anxiety. Refocusing from “anxieties” to the “anxiety” opens us to cast the right thing on Jesus, receiving his gift of truth and peace both in the past *and* in the present.

Let us pray: *Dear Lord Jesus, grant us this gift. Amen.*



Wednesday, May 31, 2017

Text: *1 Peter 5:8*

Discipline yourselves, keep alert. Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour.

Have you ever watched Hollywood portrayals of the demonic? Those I've seen tend to be loud, raw, and in-your-face, like a roaring, prowling lion, looking for someone to devour. But is that a true portrayal?

His name was Mark. We shared an apartment during our college years, and he was fascinated with the end-times, predicting the end of the world – or more precisely, the so-called rapture of the saints – to the year and month and day. Within the first year of living with Mark, I could look at any set of numbers, from UPC barcodes to odometer readouts, and somehow transpose them into 666, the mark of the beast from Revelation 13:18. And after listening to Mark's deliverance

ministry recordings, I would awake from nightmares to the sound of my own voice calling out, “In the name of Jesus Christ and by his precious blood, I bind you and cast you out....” The devil was loud, raw, and in-our-faces, and Mark had his eye on him.

It was during our second year, however, that Mark discovered the devil’s subtler prowling when *she*, a college coed, entered Mark’s life. Be careful. I’m not suggesting that this dear, young woman was the devil. Rather, the devil showed up in the details of their mutual attraction – two young kids who prior to this encounter had little experience in resisting sexual temptations without benefit of disciplining parental restraint. To be blunt, they became sexually active with each other, celebrating God’s gift of biology without the wisdom of God’s accompanying gift of the 6th Commandment. Decisions were made in the heat of the moment without thought as they stepped away from God’s protective, life-giving teachings. What they surrendered to would change the course of their lives, adding further challenges for which they were not ready and under which they would know despair. And the devil no doubt howled with delight.

Discipline yourselves, keep alert to all the devil’s tactics. Daily seek your Savior’s discerning wisdom and promised strength. Yet know that when the devil howls with delight over you, you can always find shelter in the compassionate, grace-filled service of your Savior Jesus Christ, the One who silenced the devil’s delight when he died on the cross for you.

Let us pray: *Dear Lord Jesus, grant us this gift. Amen.*



Thursday, June 1, 2017

Text: *1 Peter 5:9*

Resist him, steadfast in your faith, for you know that your brothers and sisters in all the world are undergoing the same kinds of suffering.

What is it about community mutually facing suffering that makes the experience of suffering bearable? To know that one is not alone but connected with another who understands is truly a God-given wonder that preserves sufferers in the face of their challenges. In the body of Christ, we are privileged to bear one another’s burdens and share the hope and joy Jesus brings and is.

Her name is Marcia, and she is my wife of 31 years. For the past seven Marcia has been challenged not by the persecutions of Roman emperors (as were Peter’s first readers) but a disease within known as ovarian cancer. We had hoped seven years ago that the surgery removing offending organs, along with accompanying chemotherapy, would have stopped the cancer’s assault. Not so. It attacked her lymphatic system next. Each reoccurrence of the cancer, in turn, was battled back with further chemotherapy, yet the cancer has always returned. The current wrestling has lasted almost 1-1/2 years, and Marcia is now receiving her fifth different

type of chemical cocktail in this round. Moreover, the cancer's aggressive nature in her neck, restricting airflow, has led to palliative radiation treatments and Marcia's movement to official disability status.

Yet it is in cancer that Marcia has discovered a wondrous place – the chemotherapy lab where cancer patients sit together, receiving their noxious cure and the loving ministrations of medical staff, some of whom have intimate knowledge of the disease. It is there that Marcia has found stories of courage and mutual ministry. Her fellows have even shared the hope of Jesus and held each other in prayer. Marcia returns home telling me of God's inspiring angels she has encountered in that sacred place.

As for me, I too have experienced strength from others as I helplessly watch my wife struggle, grieving and crying over her present condition as well as that which might (and, I fear, probably will) take place. God has sent me many inspiring angels, including a sister in Christ whom I recently paired up with for a simple get-to-know-you session at a church event. Our conversation may have begun simply enough. "Name?" But quickly went profoundly deep. She shared, "I know joy again, and I never thought I would!" Her first husband had died after years of battling cancer. She had recently remarried. I tried to avoid where this conversation was leading, but my partner noticed the tear running down my cheek and would not ignore my pain. Our deep sharing of mutual suffering began, and through her God blessed me. I was not alone. Courage to resist the enemy, even cancer, is found in God's gift of community.

Are you facing something alone? Why? God offers you community.

Let us pray: *Dear Lord Jesus, grant us this gift. Amen.*



Friday, June 2, 2017

Text: *1 Peter 5:10*

And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, support, strengthen, and establish you.

I learned how to hate as a teenager when I watched my dad and family experience the pain of four years of church dysfunction and false blame that climaxed in two different congregational meetings during which my father was falsely accused and he and the other pastor were fired twice over. During and after, I suffered with an unforgiving heart.

Her name was Beth. She had been a classmate of mine who belonged to this chaotic congregation, as well. Fair or not, I viewed her mother as a key player in the unjust dysfunction, and in my heart Beth got lumped into her mother's fate – my hatred and unforgiveness.

Advance some years. By then I thought that I had forgiven Beth. Apparently, I had not. I saw her for the first time in years at a mutual friend's wedding. Hugs all around I gave to my old high school gang. Then I got to Beth. I held out my hand for a shake, holding myself outside of hugging distance. By evening's end, I was saying my goodbyes to my classmates with hugs and laughter. I got to Beth. Fortunately, she stood across a large table from me. I extended my hand to her, not bothering to circumvent the table. "Beth, it's been good to see you." Right! At that moment, Beth began to cry. "Steve, can I have a hug, too?" I tell you the truth: In that moment, I felt my Savior take the hatred and unforgiveness from my heart. The Spirit of the Living God himself restored, supported, strengthened and established me. Surrendering, I walked around that table and wrapped my arms around Beth. There we knew God's own grace.

Let us pray: *Dear Lord Jesus, grant us this gift. Amen.*



Saturday, June 3, 2017

Text: *1 Peter 5:11*

To him be the power forever and ever. Amen.

His name is St. Peter. Amidst great challenges experienced by himself and fellow disciples of Christ Jesus, he wrote this statement of praise to God, affirming that God is the One truly in charge. With brevity – to him be the power forever and ever! – Peter surrenders to God in all the ways we've shared this past week – and more! – concluding "Amen." Yes, it shall be so!

There's one more story I'd like us to share this week, but it's not one that I probably know. I invite *you* to share *your* story of humble surrender to and discovery of God's faithful and loving power in your life. You're welcome to email me (PastorSteve@ImmanuelNegaunee.org), yet I encourage you even more to invite God's guidance in sharing it with someone God places in your path this day. After listening to their story, as God nudges, open your mouth and humbly share yours. I'll even help you get started: "Hi, my name is...."

To God be the power forever and ever! Amen.

Let us pray: *Dear Lord Jesus, grant us this gift. Amen.*

