

.....Daily Devotions

July 2-8, 2017

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New Evangelical Lutheran Parish

Ewen, Paynesville, Trout Creek

Sunday, July 2, 2017

Read: Jeremiah 28:5-9 and Matthew 10:40-42

“... whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple – truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward.”

The image went viral. It was an Australian firefighter holding a bottle of water as a Koala drank from the bottle. The compassion of the firefighter, the desperation of the Koala, and the moment of kindness captured by a fellow worker remind us that small gifts can make a huge difference to the vulnerable. The Koala survived her injuries, at least in part because of the firefighter’s gentleness and care.

It warms our hearts to see this sort of action taking place. Someone taking a moment to help a creature that cannot help itself – a generous gift to one who cannot possibly repay the favor – restores our hope that human beings can rise above selfishness and greed.

Jeremiah reminded the people that failure to care for the weak and vulnerable would result in disaster. Other “prophets” were telling the leaders that they did not need to change anything they were doing – God would watch over them. Jeremiah wished he could see it that way, but instead he speaks the word God has given to him. “You’re bringing disaster upon yourself, and God isn’t going to protect you from the consequences of your own actions.”

Jesus spoke a similar message to those who followed him. “When you care for the weak, the little ones, the vulnerable, you are caring for me.” God will see those actions ... even when the actions are done behind the scenes where no one else will notice. Blessings will follow from this sort of caring for others. Sometimes we think that we have to do something spectacular in order to make a difference in the world, but Jesus says, “to one of these little ones” – ONE ... not ten ... not fifty ... not a hundred ... ONE! Even a small gift makes a difference to someone who is vulnerable.

Where have you noticed a little one in need? How have you responded to that need? What actions have you taken to help a vulnerable person?

Let us pray: *Jesus, in the midst of a world filled with selfishness and greed, we feel too small to make a difference. Help us to see that small actions – a word, a phone call, a gift, a glass of water – can change the future of someone in need. Give us the courage to take action and to care for the vulnerable in our midst. Amen*



Monday, July 3

Read: John 14:1-7

Thomas said to Jesus ...

Nicknames are common in our culture. They may be a shortened version of our given name ... Steve, rather than Steven ... Katie, rather than Katherine. They may be a middle name, because another family member shares our first name. They may be derived from our last name ... Rick from Richter ... Mack from Maki. They may be related to an event or activity or some aspect of our appearance ... Slim ... Smiley ... Speedy.

Even the followers of Jesus are known to us by their nicknames. Today we remember and celebrate the life of the Apostle Thomas who is often referred to as “doubting Thomas” and sometimes known as Didymus or “the Twin.”

In today’s reading, this is the Thomas who says to Jesus, “We do not know where you are going, how can we know the way?” And you may remember a few other key moments in Thomas’ life with Jesus. When Jesus says that he will return to Judea after the death of Lazarus, Thomas says to his fellow apostles, “Let us also go [to Judea], that we may die with him” (John 11:16). This is the same Thomas who says, “Unless I see the mark of the nails ... put my hand in his side, I will not believe” and then adds “My Lord and my God!” as soon as he sees the risen Lord (John 20:25, 28).

Thomas may have his doubts, but he is not afraid ... not afraid to follow Jesus ... not afraid to die with Jesus at the hands of a hostile crowd ... not afraid to question Jesus when he doesn’t understand what Jesus is teaching ... not afraid to admit to his need for proof ... and not afraid to confess Jesus as Lord.

Perhaps Thomas has received the wrong nicknames ... brave Thomas ... curious Thomas ... bold Thomas ... faithful Thomas ... fearless Thomas ... or maybe just Tom. No matter how we name him, we remember his bold proclamation, “My Lord and my God!”

If you could choose a trait to be remembered by a thousand years from now, what would you choose? How would this nickname-worthy trait reflect your life with Jesus?

Let us pray: *Jesus, help us to courageously follow you, to constantly learn from you, and to boldly proclaim you as Lord and God. Amen*



Tuesday, July 4, 2017

Read: 1 John 4:1-12

Beloved, let us love one another ...

The New Colossus

Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame,
With conquering limbs astride from land to land;

Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand
A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame
Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name
Mother of Exiles. From her beacon-hand
Glows world-wide welcome; her mild eyes command
The air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame.
"Keep ancient lands, your storied pomp!" cries she
With silent lips. "Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"

~ Emma Lazarus (November 2, 1883)

This sonnet was written in honor of the Statue of Liberty and is inscribed on a plaque that is mounted on the pedestal of the statue. We often hear a few lines quoted from it, but we rarely hear the whole poem. It's worth listening to the whole context of the often quoted, "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free." It is also worth noting that the poem has redefined what the Statue of Liberty was all about. (And the book held in the Statue of Liberty's hand does not include the poem. It simply says "July IV MDCCLXXVI" (July 4, 1776) ... the day when the Declaration of Independence was signed.)

Originally, the statue was a gift from France at the end of the Civil War – a symbol of the friendship between France and the USA, a celebration of democracy, and a commemoration of the end of war and slavery. The poem transformed the statue into a shining beacon for refugees who were fleeing terrible situations in their home countries.

As we remember the end of slavery and the welcome of refugees, we remind ourselves that all people are created equal and all people are valuable – in our country and, more importantly for us Christians, in God's eyes. We memorize the poem to remind ourselves of our national values, just as we memorize Bible verses to remind ourselves of our Christian values.

1 John 4:7-8 was one of the first Bible passages that I memorized and for which I could cite chapter and verse. Of course, this was because I learned it as a song at Fortune Lake Camp.

*Beloved, let us love one another,
for love is of God and everyone who loveth
is born of God and knoweth God.
He who loveth not knoweth not God,
for God is love.
Beloved, let us love one another ...
first John four, seven and eight.*

Another song set another Bible passage firmly in my memory.

*Be ye kind one unto another,
tender-hearted, forgiving one another,
even as God for Christ's sake has forgiven you.*

*Doo doo doodly doo.
Ephesians four thirty-two.*

Interesting that both of these passages speak of caring for others ... love one another ... forgive one another ... be kind to one another ... reminders that all people are valuable in God's eyes, and should be in ours as well.

Let us pray: *Jesus, help us to love others as you have loved them and us. Fill us with your love.
Amen*



Wednesday, July 5, 2017

Read: Matthew 11:20-24

"Woe to you ..."

I love a challenge. Apparently, I always have. My parents have told me that, when I was a child, one of the best ways to get me to accomplish a task was to tell me it couldn't be done. I would, of course, then set out to prove them wrong. Task accomplished.

As a personal discipline, whenever I have been writing these daily devotions, I have used the daily lectionary. (You can find it at the bottom of the *Celebrate* weekly worship resource from Augsburg Fortress Press.) The text that is assigned for today is a challenge, to say the least.

The Gospels rarely show Jesus angry or frustrated, but this is one of those times. He has been doing work: healing the sick, raising the dead; the lame walk; the blind see; the deaf hear; but many of the people around him are not responding to what they have seen. They are not changing their lives based on Jesus' life or the gifts that he has brought to them. "Woe to you!" The future will not be a happy one if you continue on this path.

The ancient cities that are mentioned – Tyre, Sidon, and Sodom – are notorious for their actions in opposition to God's ways. Tyre and Sidon were prideful and materialistic, and were known for worshipping other gods. Sodom attacked visitors, rather than extending them proper hospitality. It is quite the condemnation when Jesus compares these cities to the ones who have seen his work. Pride, materialism, and lack of hospitality have something in common. They involve the powerful hurting the vulnerable. Pride makes powerful people into tyrants. Materialism creates an imbalance between the rich and the poor. Lack of hospitality creates a dangerous situation for those who are vulnerable and have no resources to draw on.

This gets me wondering about our world. Are our cities like Tyre and Sidon and Sodom? Do we attack strangers or offer them welcome and hospitality? Are we filled with pride or do we recognize our place at the foot of the cross? Are we focused on material goods or generous in our ways?

And so we are all presented with a challenge. We are the recipients of Jesus' greatest gift – eternal life. We have received grace upon grace. We have seen his powerful acts. We have heard the proclamation of his defeat of death. Are we living in ways that reflect the gifts he has given to us? Or are we like Tyre and Sidon and Sodom – hurting the poor, the vulnerable, and those in need?

Let us pray: *Jesus, help us to see your great works and to respond by changing our lives. Help us to repent and live with love, grace, and generosity. Amen*



Thursday, July 6, 2017

Read: Psalm 145:8-14

The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

I am constantly amazed when I watch talented teachers at work. They can take rowdy, overly-energetic, sometimes sassy children and youth and not only keep them under control but also help them learn something that they'll carry with them for the rest of their lives! Whether we're talking about a group of 5-year-olds or a group of teenagers, THAT is a remarkable feat!

I believe that there is something more than skill at work in these moments. There is training and technique, but there is also a deep and abiding love for the students. That love – that steadfast love – is almost certainly a gift from God. It empowers the teachers to create an environment of love and grace, in addition to “doing their job” of imparting knowledge and skill to the learners.

Our Lord is also a talented teacher. Our God is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. We who are adults can be just as undisciplined and sassy as children – especially when it comes to living out our faith in our daily lives. We don't always pay attention to what our teacher has said; we argue with others around us; we selfishly take resources for ourselves rather than sharing them; we can be downright ornery at times. And yet our Lord continues to teach us his ways. Our God continues to walk beside us and coach us in how to be more faithful.

As you go through your day today, consider the lessons you have learned from our gracious and merciful God. Where have you done well at following God's instructions? When have you wandered off and failed to heed what our Lord has taught? How have you seen God's steadfast love in your life? Have you also been called to be a teacher – to show others what our Lord has shown you?

Let us pray: *Jesus, you are such a marvelous teacher. Help us to appreciate the teachers among us and to celebrate their gifts. Help us also to learn from you and from them and to pass along what we have learned. Amen*



Friday, July 7, 2017

Read: Zechariah 2:6-13

Sing and rejoice ... For lo, I will come and dwell in your midst, says the Lord.

Several years ago, I had my rotator cuff repaired. As you may know, recovery from this surgical repair involves the complete immobilization of the shoulder for 6 weeks after surgery. A friend of mine came to stay with me for the first week or so after surgery. It was a time when I could “sing and rejoice” in gratitude for someone who had “come and dwell” with me.

It was also wonderful just to have the time with this dear friend. We were not occupied with a workshop or a planned retreat. We weren't getting ready for a graduation or some other event. We could simply be together and enjoy each other's company.

Perhaps you've been in a tough situation and someone came to you and stayed with you during that difficult time. You understand how important it can be to have that person available and ready to help with whatever might be needed. Perhaps you've also experienced the joy of spending time with someone you love when there was no “agenda” that needed to be followed.

And then we hear the promise of the Lord to the people of Israel, “I will come and dwell in your midst.” What a powerful promise! I will be there with you. In the midst of troubles, in the celebrations of good times, in the ordinary days, I will be there with you.

While we often cry out to God during difficult days, we sometimes forget that God is also with us in the midst of the good times. We ask God for help when we need it, but sometimes forget to sit with God in the ordinary times or to celebrate with God in the great days.

Where are you in your life? Is it a difficult time for you? Are you moving smoothly through ordinary days? Are you celebrating something wonderful? Listen then, for God's voice, “I will come and dwell in your midst.”

Peace. Be still. The Lord is with you.

Let us pray: *Jesus, thank you for your promise to be with us always. Thank you for coming to earth and dwelling among us. Thank you for dwelling with us again today. Amen*



Saturday, July 8, 2017

Read: Luke 10:21-24

“I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants ...”

What is it that the poor have that the rich can never get? No matter how much money they spend, no matter how hard they work, no matter what they do, the rich can NEVER get what the poor have. What is it? This question was asked of many adults and very few could come up with the answer. Happiness or other such things were suggested, but some rich people have those things, too. The question was asked of children, and most of them answered quickly and correctly. Nothing. The rich cannot ever have nothing or understand what it is like to have nothing.

I recently saw a video in which children were paired up and asked, “What makes you different from each other?” Many of the children struggled to answer. Some never did figure out something that made them different from the child beside them. Eventually, some came up with things like, “She likes to dance, and I don’t” or “he likes X food, and I don’t” or “she’s good at math, and I’m not” or “he plays X position on the team, I play Y position.” The children had a variety of skin colors. Some wore glasses, some did not. Some were in wheelchairs, some were not. Some were girls, some were boys. Those things that seemed obvious to me as “differences” were never mentioned by the children.

Children often see things from a very different perspective when compared with what adults see. Sometimes the children get it right, and we adults get it wrong. Or we adults don’t “get it” at all!

As we move through the summer and watch the children play together, perhaps we adults can pause for a moment and see the world through a child’s eyes. Perhaps we will see God revealed in a new way.

Let us pray: *Jesus, help us to listen to the children among us. Help us to see you and your world and your people in new ways. Amen*

