

Devotions – July 23-29, 2017

By Pastor Joe Iverson
Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
Chassell, Michigan

Sunday, July 23, 2017

Text: Psalm 51:10

Create in me a pure heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me.

If you grew up in the Lutheran Church, you probably heard music as you read this Psalm; it's ok, I did too. But if you're like me, as you grew up in the church, you may not have given much thought to what this means, it was just a part that you would sing, and probably stand as you sang it.

In this verse we see a petition, a prayer to God, and probably as unselfish of a petition as you could ask. We hear a desire to follow God, a hunger and thirst to live in the abundant life that we know as God's Grace. Is your heart not pure? Is your Spirit not 'right'? Well the good news is that there is never a bad time to come to God asking for a fresh start...that's the hard part right? Knowing that God will give this to you even if you don't deserve it. And especially if you've prayed this and fallen time and time again; but that is how grace works...

You don't deserve it? That's the point.

That's our God, that's love.

Let us pray: *Gracious God, give us the strength and faith to come to you, to receive your grace and accept the gift that you have given, that we might have life, in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen*



Monday, July 24, 2017

Text: 1 John 1:9

⁹If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

This is another verse, where if you grew up in the Lutheran church, you would most certainly recognize it from the liturgy. Sometimes we can say things like this verse without thinking about it very much, but it is such a central core belief in our faith.

We may sin in thought, word, and deed; three methods but in two of the three, we can also find

forgiveness. When we address God with our words or our thoughts and bring our faults to God, we are forgiven, just like that, from sinner to righteous.

Do you think of yourself as righteous, post confession when you are as it says “Cleansed from all unrighteousness?” Probably not.

If you are like me you probably sometimes confuse our system with God’s system, thinking at times only good people are truly righteous. Think of everything in “our system” based on merits: relationships, jobs, status in the community, and even how we feel about ourselves; Every one of these things can be built up or damaged by merits, but that’s not God’s system. Merits have nothing to do with how Grace works; if they did, Jesus could have saved himself a lot of trouble. God says to us, give me your grief, your guilt and your sin, I have called you by name and you are mine. And you are forgiven. Let God wrap you in God’s blanket of Grace, and know in your heart that God has cleansed you and made you new, a righteous child of God in Christ.

Let us pray: *Loving God, thank you for taking us in and calling us by name. Help us to place our trust in your grace that we receive life and bless others with this amazing gift you give us. Amen*



Tuesday, July 25, 2017

Text: Isaiah 49:16

I have written your name on my hand.

A lot of times when I read verses like this one I might think... “Well that’s cool, I’m glad we have a relational God that cares so much for the people he created.” I, probably like so many, often do better at speaking about God than truly connecting and speaking to God. But every once in a while it sinks in, just how important I am to this one ultimate and amazing divine God who created all of us.

How do you respond in those moments when it hits you and you realize in your core that the God who created everything, keeps you that close to Him. Sometimes when this sinks in, I might do a little bit better at trying to follow the commands Jesus gave us, but then I also remind myself at the days end, even if it didn’t turn out quite like I wanted it to, that God still keeps me close and in his Grace, tomorrow I get to get up and give it another go. Whether we are aware or not, we are still that close to God that he says things like “I have written your name on my hand.” God could just be forgetful, but I don’t think that’s it.

Let us pray: *Creator God, You knew us before we knew ourselves. In our faith let it sink in, just how much we matter to you. In your love, inspire us and equip us to head out and do our best to use our gifts and share your love with others. Amen.*



Wednesday, July 26, 2017

Text: Romans 8:16

¹⁶The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.

You are God's. You never have to question your identity. It has been sealed in your baptism. But when I was growing up, I attended a VBS of a more conservative denomination. I think this is where a fear was instilled in me. I felt as if I needed to be always repenting, because what happened if I died and I had unrepented sin on me?

It's a shame; I didn't tell anyone about these thoughts, but at my core I questioned my identity as God's Child.

That is no way to live, and it's not what God wants. It is written all over the Bible that we are Gods, that God's grace is sufficient, that he came that we might have life to the fullest. One of *the* most uttered phrases in the Bible is, "Do not be afraid." We have no reason to fear. Fear, if you think about it is quite the opposite of life to the fullest.

We are God's children, and God has shown us that he would do anything for His children He so loves.

Let us pray: *Holy Parent, may your Spirit continue to move within us, reassuring us of your promises, and blessing us with the life, that you came to walk among us, that we might have. Amen.*



Thursday, July 26, 2017

Text: Isaiah 55:12

You will go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and hills will burst into song before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands.

What beautiful joyous imagery, that even the creation joins in God's praises! I first learned this verse when I was a backpack guide at Rainbow Trail Lutheran Camp, and ever since it has been a favorite verse of mine. I mean if you think about it, could it get any better? You have peace, yet excitement, and the beauty of creation. This is what I imagine when I think of abundant life, this is an image that I think could be heaven.

Why don't we always feel this way in our faith? I'm not sure, but I am thankful that we do have moments where we feel like this in Christ, where there is a peace, yet a joy filled excitement, that we are God's, and in his grace, life has been given to us. Both when we feel it, and when we don't.

In God's grace, we are safe and we can live.

Let us pray: *Gracious God, help us to realize the extent of your love, at least as much as we can. Amen.*



Friday, July 28, 2017

Text: Jeremiah 29:11

For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.

According to Biblegateway.com, a pretty heavily used Bible resource site, this is the verse looked up most often only second to John 3:16. What can we make of this verse? We know that we all are part of God's plan and that we do have a hope in Jesus Christ, but too often this verse is quoted as saying something more along the lines of, life is going to be great for you, without all that hard stuff that usually does come with life. We can't build our faith on the idea that things are just going to be great, because then when we get out and live life and tragedies happen like cancer, miscarriages, days where you question your purpose in life, a faith built on the notion that bad things won't happen doesn't hold up; and really, that's not what the larger context of Jeremiah 29 is saying.

But God does have plans for you, God has given you gifts, and God does give all of us a hope in Christ Jesus. What can we cling to? We cling to the promises of God. We cling to Emmanuel God with us, both in times of prosperity and in times of hardship. God is with us through it all, thick and thin. Faith is up and down, all around, Lost and Found. And I appreciate the hope that I have, that God is always with me and that in Christ I can count on God's grace.

Let us pray: *Help me to remember always that you are with me, Lord, and to cling to you in whatever circumstance I find myself. Amen*



Saturday, July 29, 2017

Text: Hebrews 12:1

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.

Have you ever done a marathon? I go down to Hayward every winter and I ski the 50Km/31mile race called the Birkebeiner. You know what is especially challenging? Hills, Hills and more

Hills!! But on the hardest, steepest climbs there are always so many people that line the path with their signs, drums, bells and cheers. Now granted, some spectators prefer to go to the bottom of the hill on the descent hoping for a spectacular crash! But I want to focus on all those encouragers on the climb. They help me push on, as do the skiers that surround me, because while it is a race, for most it is just a challenge and there is good comradery on the trail...a cloud of witnesses so to speak.

Who's in your cloud of witnesses? Family, neighbors, coworkers, people you share a hobby with? God designed us for community, and the community helps us even as we try to help them. They help us run...ski with perseverance, endure the "race" marked out for us.

Let us pray: *Holy God, you put your own perseverance on display in Jesus Christ. Help us recognize the cloud of witnesses that you have blessed us with. And help us recognize that we are in their cloud too; both blessing and responsibility together, for which we give thanks. Amen.*

