

..... Daily Devotions

March 18 - 24, 2018

By Susan Anderson

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Sunday, March 18, 2018

Text: Mark 1:14-16

After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee proclaiming the good news of God. "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!"

Susan: Hello God. It's been so long since I prayed, I think I should introduce myself. My name is Susan.

God: Uh-huh. How are you?

Susan: Embarrassed.

God: That's appropriate.

Susan: Even ashamed.

God: That fits, too. What has kept you away?

Susan: Well, this is embarrassing...a novel I've been reading.

God: My Word?

Susan: You're funny! You know.

God: Yes, but it is important that you tell me. That's confession.

Susan: I was going to Texas and found a book called "Texas Heat."

God: Did you like it?

Susan: OMG! This is **really** EMBARRASSING!

God: Were you talking to me or swearing?

Susan: I'm sorry. I feel like Adam and Eve in the garden. I want to run and hide.

God: Isn't that what you've been doing?

Susan: (bows head and looks down at her feet). Yes.

God: You know I am not going to hurt you or send you away. Remember the story about the merciful father or the prodigal son...or in your case, daughter? I am always going to welcome you home.

Susan: You're awesome! And scary...I don't know what you might expect of me.

God: I think you do.

Susan: You're right, of course, I do. As if you didn't already know that. I love you!

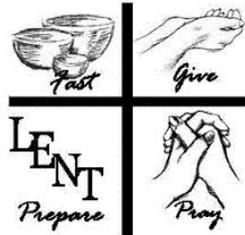
God: Good! Now act like you are loved.

Susan: I will try. I need help.

God: Naturally. You are human. I AM GOD. I am always here to help.

Susan: Thank you. Help me to desire your help.
God: Now you're praying! I love you, too.

Let us pray: *Thank you for going to any means necessary to break through our resistance to you. How forgiving you are to us when we allow distractions to turn us away from you. Help us heed your Son's first words of ministry, "Repent and believe the good news." Thank you for your eternal, loving, welcome home. Amen.*



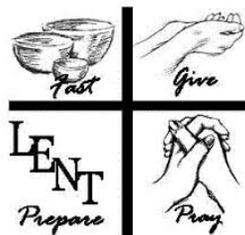
Monday, March 19, 2018

Since this is the year of Mark in our lectionary, we will hear much of that gospel. It is a fast paced one where one event tumbles rapidly after another. In just the first chapter, Jesus is baptized by John, calls the first disciples, drives out an unclean spirit, heals Simon's mother-in-law, and heals many of diseases and demons. Then, early in the morning, Jesus goes off to a solitary place to pray.

There is something special about a one to one relationship. A caring parent, a beloved spouse, a best friend, a favorite aunt, a valued mentor and others you can name, help and support us every day. We, too, can benefit from stopping our busy routines and having a quiet moment with God. After all Jesus' activity, even he felt the need for a time out for restoration of his soul.

If we are uncertain about starting a disciplined prayer life, about how or what to pray for, our NGLS Synod and the ELCA have resources to help. A breath prayer (one that can be said in one breath), daily devotions, and a prayer calendar are available at nglsynod.org under "Programs/Prayfaithfully." At ELCA.org under the menu "resources", there is a Bible study. The ELCA also spearheads "Christ in Our Home", a very short daily devotion booklet in our church or by subscription. Our spiritual leaders, our pastors and council members, can offer resources and pray with us and for us. Last and definitely NOT least, we can always sit in stillness and silence, waiting for God to speak to us through the Holy Spirit. God is always ready to welcome us home.

Let us pray: *Thank you, Merciful God, for your ever open arms, your loving embrace, your forgiveness of our wanderings, and your great joy in our return to you. Bless us in our prayers that we may grow in your wisdom and grace all the days of our lives.*



Tuesday, March 20, 2018

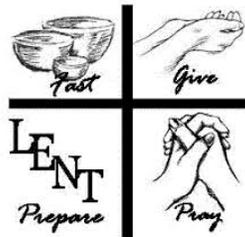
Text : John 1:1-2,14.

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father full of grace and truth.”

Watching the birth of a baby, seeing a spectacular sight like the Grand Canyon for the first time, holding a distraught friend, receiving a tender Valentine card, events like these give us a glimmer of the most amazing phenomenon of all: The Incarnation. God became human in Jesus to experience life and death as we do. Just as we share the joy of weddings, Jesus celebrated at the marriage feast in Cana. Jesus shared the grief of those he loved by crying at the death of Lazarus. Jesus asked God to “Let this cup pass from me” like we recoil from physical, emotional, or spiritual pain. Whatever becomes part of our lives, God knows first-hand our joys, sorrows, fears, hopes, agony, the desires of our hearts, because in Jesus, God lived like us and died like us. By becoming incarnate, God closed all separation between the human and the divine.

God reminds us of this constant presence with us when Jesus said, “I will not leave you as orphans.” John 14:18(a). The psalmist foreshadowed this message in writing “If I rise on the wings of dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me. Your right hand will hold me fast.” Psalm 139:9-10. In communion, we lift up our hearts, celebrating taking God’s presence into our bodies and thereby our lives.

Let us pray: *Thank you God for us, Jesus with us, and Holy Spirit within us, that you bless us with so many ways to tell us of your presence in our lives.*



Wednesday, March 21, 2018

Text : Luke 11:9-10

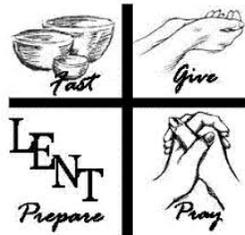
“...I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.”

In these verses, Jesus clearly tells us God wants to hear from us. Sometimes we think we can go it alone. Our culture reinforces this idea that whatever we achieve happened by our own efforts. Inevitably, at some point, our life becomes unmanageable without God’s help.

We were not put here to live life on our own. Even the hairs on our head are numbered. Does this sound like a God who would censor, reject, laugh at what we pray about? (Except if we shared a joke with God!) We can tell God anything, no matter how trivial our concern. We can even talk to God about the hairs that were counted, if we think the numbers fell short or the color isn't right.

God, as well as we, are at work in prayer. Prayerful conversations with God change us. What is valuable becomes clear; a sifting of important matters occurs, priorities change, wisdom comes to us. We realize it is JUST HAIR, not the state of our soul!

Often our requests to God center around health. We ask for healing from broken bones, broken relationships, surgery, pain, cancer, and many other things for ourselves and for others. If what we ask does not happen, we can change our prayer to asking that we or those we have been praying for live and die in faith and peace. When we put our requests before God, we acknowledge our dependence, we come in humility, and remember a phrase we say in worship, *"For thine is the kingdom, the glory, and the power forever. Amen."*



Thursday, March 22, 2018

God: Susan?

Susan: Yes?

God: Where have you been?

Susan: Avoiding talking to you.

God: Ouch! That hurts. Why?

Susan: Because I want to do what I want to do when I want to do it.

God: Oh. You want to rebel, reject me, and be your own God?

Susan: Ouch! You are the truth, aren't you?

God: Yes; the Way, the Truth, and the Life. (John 14:6)

Susan: You have expectations, like telling the rich young ruler to sell everything he has---not that I'm saying I have followed all your rules.

God: I know. Go on.

Susan: I like rebelling...not feeling guilty or ashamed at not living up to what you want.

God: How is that going for you?

Susan: Honestly, not so great. I feel restless, uncomfortable, terribly insecure...and isolated from myself, others, and you. I am weak and exhausted.

God: So that's what you get on your own?

Susan: Yeah.

God: Is that what you really want for yourself?

Susan: No...BUT I also don't like the soul searching, embarrassment, and the humility that comes with honestly examining my thoughts, words, and actions.

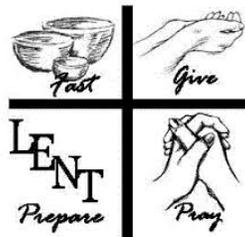
God: What I desire for you is a full, abundant, and eternal life. But you prefer to live in isolation from yourself, Me, and others?

Susan: Hmm...when you put it that way.

God: You can choose to continue in that way...

Susan: (sits in silence).

Let us pray: *O God, help us to take up our crosses of rebellion, isolation, self-destruction, and arrogance to follow you. Thank you for showing us our need for you, the life you offer us, and the freedom to choose You.*



Friday, March 23, 2018

Text: John 15:1-5:

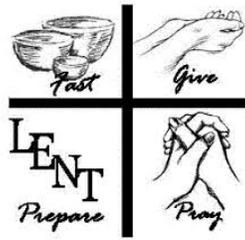
“I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower. He removes every branch that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit, he prunes to make it bear more fruit. You have already been cleansed by the word I spoken to you. Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me, you can do nothing.”

Jesus uses many images to tell us who we are—the light of the world, the salt of the earth, the sheep of his pasture, etc. Here the image is not quite so appealing. Here we are twigs, sticks, branches.

We see many of them while walking in the forest, some still part of the host plant, some lying on the ground, pruned by nature. Just as pruning is part of the process of nature, Jesus tells us that it is also part of our relationship with him and with God. Pruning is what brings fruitfulness to the branches, but only if the branches are connected to the vine. Picture a pruned vineyard: a trunk as big as your arm, three wires spreading from it supporting five or so short vines with no foliage. Then imagine that same vineyard just before harvest: lush fruit suspended from branches with dense leaves. This is reminiscent of Jesus with his arms spread out on the cross like the branches on the vine.

Just as Jesus could not go to the cross, the fruit of his life, without his intimate, abiding connection with his Father, neither can we bear fruit in our lives absent our intimacy with God in prayer. For it is God who is the gardener, giving life to the vine, the branches, to Jesus, and to us.

Let us pray: *Thank you God for pruning us to make us fruitful, for giving us Jesus to bind us together, and for being the power that creates an abundant harvest in our lives.*



Saturday, March 24, 2018

Text : Mark 1:35

“In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed.”

Living this far north in God’s world, we can relate to not-so-early morning darkness. In that darkness, we have the blessing of praying to the Light of the World.

There are so many places to pray. What a smorgasbord God sets before us! We can pray alone in a special setting we create for that purpose. We can pray at mealtimes, while waiting in a line at the coffee shop, stopped at a traffic light, walking from our car to our destination, in church before, during, and after the service. In short, any and every place!

There are so many types of prayers we can utter. The Psalms offer many examples. Thanksgiving and praise pour forth in 136: “O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his steadfast love endures forever,” with the second half of that verse said repeatedly throughout the Psalm. Psalm 22’s complaint or lament, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” comes before Psalm 23’s statement of complete trust, “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.” Psalm 51 is a prayer for mercy and pardon beginning “Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions.” It includes words we often sing in worship, “Create in me a clean heart, O God...”

There are prayers of request for ourselves, others, our nation, and our world, called prayers of intercession, asking for God’s saving power to conform us and our world to conform to God’s desire for us: to live together in peace and love.

And of course, there is the prayer Jesus taught us in Matthew 6:9-13. Said slowly and deliberately with pauses between the parts, we can experience God’s presence with us. And this is what God is after, from Adam and Eve, through Exodus, Kings, Psalms, major and minor prophets, and God’s reaching out to us by becoming one with us in the Incarnation.

Let us pray: *Thank you, God, for the many ways you search us out, desire us, love us. You are too awesome for words. May we be responsive to your call to “Be still and know that you are God.” Psalm 46:10.*

