

Devotions – July 29 – August 4, 2018

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Sunday, July 29, 2018

Text: 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24 (NRSV)

²³ May the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound^{and blameless} at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴ The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do this.

I went swinging with God today
in the grey haze of a spring morn,
the air still silent but for the chattering of a handful of gulls.
His fingers stretched through the clouds,
a gentle and tender touch trailing in Superior,
yellow and carefree.
We waltzed upon the shoreline in time with the waves,
and I etched words into wet sand as we communed,
things like “always love” and “beautiful,”
reflections of the kingdom glimpsed in sun-dappled water.
The Spirit kissed my soul, and I breathed serenity.
Together,
like this,
we dwelled for a while.

How well it makes my soul to spend time dwelling in the presence of God while visiting the beauty of Lake Superior. I am never ceased to be amazed by the whispers of God I hear upon the breeze and the sights of God’s majesty and kingdom unfolding in nature around me as I play along Superior’s shores. Peace which passes all understanding pervades, and there I find pure bliss in the company of my God.

Let us pray: God, the busyness of life often occupiess and consumes our whole beings, shifting our focus to anything but you as we plod through one task after another, ticking off our list of things to do, places to go, people to see. Gently remind us of the need for sabbath and peace, for dwelling and being rather than doing. Give us the wisdom to stop and bask in your presence. Grant us rest, quiet hearts and minds, and wholeness steeped solely in you. Amen.

Song for the Day: “It is Well with My Soul”

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AHe_qmo3gX4



Monday, July 30, 2018

Text: Romans 8:14-17

¹⁴ For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. ¹⁵ For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, "Abba! Father!" ¹⁶ it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷ and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

About a month ago, I was invited to participate in a worship service in which I was asked to impart a blessing to each person present. Folks would come forward, and I was to offer them a blessing. As I pondered what sort of blessing this might be, I decided to make it a simple reminder of each one's baptism by dipping my finger into the waters of the baptismal font and tracing a cross upon each forehead. The words of blessing I proclaimed were simply, "You are a beloved child of God."

As those present came forward, one by one, I could feel the Holy Spirit moving about the room. It was truly a holy moment, a sacred experience, to be able to announce to people that they are loved by God, claimed as God's children, and therefore named heirs of God's kingdom. I can think of no greater words or gift to share. These are words we all need to hear. This is a message of love that is meant to be proclaimed.

Let us pray: O God of all, you have named each of us your children, brothers and sisters, with Christ Jesus. Help us to acknowledge each one as one for whom Christ has died and as one in whom Christ also lives and to boldly proclaim your unfailing love to a world in need. Amen.

Song of the Day: "You are Loved" by Hope's Call

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KDPOSgB_U2U



Tuesday, July 31, 2018

Text: Ephesians 2:4-9

⁴ But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us ⁵ even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ^{al}—by grace you have been saved— ⁶ and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷ so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. ⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God— ⁹ not the result of works, so that no one may boast.

One Sunday, during Advent, some years back, as I welcomed one of our regular families to worship, their then three-year-old daughter politely inquired if she might sit with me during church. Her parents were willing to grant permission as long as I was agreeable. Of course, I was.

Throughout the service, the youngster merrily wandered back and forth between my pew and that in which her parents, grandparents, and siblings had settled themselves on the other side of the sanctuary. During this time, the pastor had begun preaching a sermon in which he was attempting to illustrate for the congregation the grace of God. My young friend was making her four or fifth trip back to my pew from that of her family, when pastor posed this question to the congregation: "What does God's grace look like? What is grace?"

Unexpectedly, the child returning to me suddenly threw herself into my arms, wrapping me in her embrace - a most precious gift from my little friend.

And did I mention that the name of this child was . . . "Grace?"

God's grace is God embracing us in every moment of our lives – at our best, at our worst, and every moment in between.

Let us pray: Gracious God, thank you for daily pouring out upon us the gift of your abundant grace that we might know you and your love. Amen.

Song for the Day: "Amazing Grace"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CDdvReNKKuk>



Wednesday, August 1, 2018

Text: Ephesians 3:16-19

¹⁶ I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, ¹⁷ and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. ¹⁸ I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, ¹⁹ and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

In college, our campus ministry was gifted a bread machine, and I can still vividly recall the very first service with a freshly baked loaf from that new machine some twenty years later. The bread was distributed, "The body of Christ given for you," to each of us one by one, one piece ripped off after another. My friend, Jason, seated next to me, promptly leaned over and whispered with a large grin, "My piece of Jesus is bigger than your piece of Jesus."

It quickly became a running joke between us. To this day, whenever I receive the body of Christ during a communion service that utilizes homemade bread, I recall those moments, and it occurs to me that no matter how big or small the piece of bread one receives is, God present within that bread is "big" enough for each of us, big enough, in fact, for the entirety of creation

– and then even bigger still. God’s love and the promises and gifts we receive through Christ’s body and blood are “bigger” than anything we could ever hope to receive and are more than enough to “feed” the world with God’s love. There is nothing that God cannot accomplish through cross of Christ and the immense love God has for all of God’s creation.

Let us pray: Bread of Life, feed us with all that we need for daily life and nourish us that we might become bread for the world. Amen.

Songs for the Day: “Big Enough” by the Clark Family
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x4XJ1QzO_js



Thursday, August 2, 2018

Text: Matthew 15:13-16

¹³ Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” ¹⁴ And they said, “Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” ¹⁵ He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” ¹⁶ Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”

When my youngest brother, Matthew, was about three or four years old, he once spent an entire church service in stillness and silence rather than engaging in his typical modus operandi of Cheerios, Hot Wheels, and various other busy bag activities. It appeared as though he might be pondering some deep theological truth or puzzling over a particular reading from scripture or a comment made during the sermon. At the conclusion of the service, as the pastor was greeting the worshipers at the door, Matthew promptly tugged the pastor’s alb and queried most seriously, “Is Jesus up there on that cross made out of plastic or wood?”

At the front of our Missouri Synod Lutheran Church, upon the back of the altar, hung a large crucifix. Matthew, a curious child who was always asking questions and exploring how things were made and how they worked, had been thinking about this all throughout worship. I don’t recall the pastor’s answer to his question, but I am certain the pastor was caught off guard by the completely unexpected inquiry and fumbled for words that would satisfy this child’s curiosity.

The incident, for me, begs the questions: What, indeed, is Jesus made of? Or, better yet, who is this Jesus?” Who is this one in whom we claim to believe, and why is it so important? How do we best articulate the answers to these questions of faith and identity? If asked, who will we say that Jesus is?

Let us pray: Jesus, Messiah, our Lord and King, continue to reveal yourself to us through the cross and resurrection, that we might know you even as you already know each of us. Amen.

Song for the Day: You are Holy (Price of Peace)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QsYyuK1w3q0>



Friday, August 3, 2018

Text: John 14:1-7

¹ “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. ² In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? ³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. ⁴ And you know the way to the place where I am going.” ⁵ Thomas said to him, “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?” ⁶ Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. ⁷ If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.”

A family joke between my mom and I is that I don’t often notice when there are changes to the décor of our home. Months can pass before I take note of a new picture or piece of furniture. I can even recall a morning where I awoke, came down the hall and entered our living and said, “Something is different today? What is different in this room?” My mom laughed for a long time. The reason: she had rearranged all the furnishings in the room. The appearance of the room was obviously quite different than it had been the night before.

When I have felt that God wants me to experience change in my life, I have often prayed that God would make the signs of change bluntly obvious. Otherwise, I’m afraid I might miss them as easily as I have missed so many changes to the family home. I pray, “God, please just hit me over the head with a great big board or send a flashing neon sign, because I might not get this if you don’t.”

Sure enough, one morning, dissatisfied and disheartened with my then employment situation and after much prayer and discernment, I attended a mandatory employee training session. I had been feeling pretty awful and had even reached the point that I dreaded going to work each day, but on this occasion, from the moment of my arrival, I knew something was going to be different.

The first “sign” that God was at work was a large projection screen at the front of the meeting space that displayed a beautiful sunrise and the words, “This is my Father’s world.” It was obvious to me that God was up to something. The second “sign” appeared shortly thereafter when the speaker of the day posed the question, “How many of you here today would give up everything you currently have – your job, your home, your friends – pack up your family, and move across the country to follow the dream God has given you?” Without missing a beat, something deep inside me said, “I would!” Later, as we were singing the very hymn whose title had been on that projection screen, the sun broke through the clouds and gloom that had been raining down outside and spilled into the meeting space, illuminating it brightly – a third “sign.”

While I didn't know precisely what the future held, I knew, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that God was granting me permission to leave my current situation behind for a new dream that God would give me along with the reminder that God is the creator and sustainer of all that is. There was nothing I needed to dread any longer. I walked out of the meeting filled with hope and relief and balled like a baby. God had made certain I hadn't missed a single thing.

Let us pray: God, daily open the eyes of our hearts that we might see you, experience your love and mercy, and discern your will for our lives. Amen.

Song for the Day: This is My Father's World <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wzY5ZBf3VLQ>



Saturday, August 4, 2018

Text: Proverbs 3:5-6

*⁵Trust in the LORD with all your heart,
and do not rely on your own insight.*

*⁶In all your ways acknowledge him,
and he will make straight your paths.*

The decision and discernment to attend seminary and pursue ordained ministry did not come easily and was not made without a good deal of trepidation. I was about to step into unknown territory and wasn't certain if I would be able to navigate the waters of graduate-level course work having been out of school for twenty-some years.

The Sunday I was to depart to begin my first semester and spend a week on the seminary campus, I was helping to distribute communion, as I often have in my current congregational setting. On this particular day, a special offering of music was shared as the congregation came forward and gathered at the rail for the meal. It was a song I'd never heard before, and yet its lyrics immediately caught my attention. The Holy Spirit washed over and through me, and I was swept away from the world around me to a sacred space created by God in which I was asked to simply place my trust in God and allow God to take care of the rest. So gripped was I by the experience, that I had to be nudged by the pastor, to whom it appeared I'd been daydreaming, to return to the present and task at hand. I confess a reluctance to having had to do so for I had longed to linger in that moment with God. The message of trust was exactly what I needed to hear in that moment, and I thank God for speaking it to my heart through the language of music.

Let us pray: God, help me to ever trust in you. Amen.

Song for the Day: "Trust in You" by Lauren Daigle (note: this is the song mentioned above) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n_aVFVveJNs

