

Devotions – August 19-25, 2018

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Sunday, August 19, 2018

Text: Psalm 107:35-38, 43 (NRSV)

**He turns a desert into pools of water,
a parched land into springs of water.
And there he lets the hungry live,
and they establish a town to live in;
They sow fields, and plant vineyards,
and get a fruitful yield.
By his blessing they multiply greatly,
and he does not let their cattle decrease.**

(v.43)

**Let those who are wise give heed to these things,
and consider the steadfast love of the Lord.**

Since I was a child, I looked forward to time spent at a Farmers Market each summer. Big or small, from Gladstone, MI to St. Paul, MN, they are a splendid display of nature's bounty. This time of year, as we travel across the highways of Wisconsin, the fields of corn and other grains can be seen for miles. The corn was "knee high" well before the 4th of July and other fields are beautiful shades of green. It has been a good year, the farmers say. And for that, we join the Psalmist in praise and thanks to God who provides these and all things for us.

Let us pray: *Thank you, Heavenly Father, for the bounty of this harvest. You provide sun and soil and rain that nourish the plants, workers to tend the fields. May the fruits of the fields strengthen us as we seek to do your will each day. Amen.*



Monday, August 20, 2018

Text: Luke 17:5-6 (MSG)

**The apostles came up and said to the Master, "Give us more faith."
But the Master said, "You don't need *more* faith. There is no 'more' or 'less' in faith. If you have a bare kernel of faith, say the size of a poppy seed, you could say to this sycamore tree, 'Go jump in the lake,' and it would do it.**

A poppy seed is very small. Perhaps the smallest seed we see and eat! Maybe you remember seeing them in lemon muffins or on yeast rolls, but a single poppy seed is too small to pick up with your fingers unless your finger is wet. It shouldn't be too hard to have a faith that size, one would think. But maybe the greater point Jesus makes here is that faith is not to be measured or compared to some arbitrary standard. Rather, our faith needs to be used. No need to test our faith by sending trees into the lake. Our faith is as big as we need to give others the hope we have been given in Christ.

Let us pray: *Lamb of God, my faith looks up to you. Help me share this gift with those near me today. Amen.*



Tuesday, August 21, 2018

Text: Luke 13:18-19 (NRSV)

He (Jesus) said therefore, “What is the kingdom of God like? And to what should I compare it? It is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in the garden; it grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air made nests in its branches.”

I am a city girl, well maybe not now, but I was raised in a big city and had little experience with seeds and such. For many years, hearing this parable gave me a mental picture of a huge tree with lots of branches and bird nests. Cozy homes for many and various creatures; leaves and branches providing protection from heat, wind and rain. In recent years, I've thought more about the seed in this parable. It's pretty small as seeds go, and really gives no clue as to the character of the plant it will produce. After I married a farm boy and started planting backyard gardens, I learned how different seeds can be, from the tiny lettuce seeds to the bigger ones that grow into pumpkins. Each seed promises a surprise and maybe that's a part of this teaching we can consider. The kingdom of God will be a surprise far beyond our expectations, looking at life here on earth as the seed.

Let us pray: *Help me, Jesus, to plant the seeds of your kingdom and wait with anticipation for the surprises in the kingdom to come. Amen.*



Wednesday, August 22, 2018

Text: Jonah 2:4-6 (NRSV)

Then I (Jonah) said, ‘I am driven away from your sight;

**how shall I look again
upon your holy temple?
The waters closed in over me;
the deep surrounded me;
weeds were wrapped around my head
at the roots of the mountains.
I went down to the land
whose bars closed upon me forever;
yet you brought up my life from the Pit,
O Lord my God.**

I gave up trying to grow a garden when we moved into a lush wooded area called home for a group of deer and bold turkeys. But I often feel the urge to get my fingers in the dirt, so I take to pulling weeds. There is no shortage of weeds around our house. They grow in the flower beds, in the decorative rocks and even in the seams of our driveway. Weeds are troublesome; they're a distraction. And wherever they are pulled out, they always grow back.

Jonah had trouble with weeds too. In this familiar Old Testament story, Jonah prays to God from the belly of the fish, where he feels surrounded by the waters deep, weeds wrapped around his head. When all around him seemed hopeless, God rescued him and delivered him back on dry land.

Weeds in my yard are one thing, but weeds in my life are a problem. Fears, distractions, troubles-these are the weeds that overwhelm me at times and I feel helpless like Jonah. But God brings me back, delivers me from the concerns of the moment, so that I can find rest from my struggles and purpose in Him.

Let us pray: My God and rescuer, thank you for delivering me from the weeds and deep waters of life. Set me once again on dry land, following the path we walk together. Amen.



Thursday, August 23, 2018

Text: John 15:1-5 (NRSV)
(Jesus teaching his disciples)

“I am the vine, and my Father is the vinegrower. He removes every branch in me 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 that I have 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.”

Recently I had an opportunity to wander through a vineyard. The vines were sturdy, the branches were lush with leaves and abundant grapes, though weeks away from harvest. There are so few vineyards in this area that it's hard to imagine how commonplace they were at the time Jesus lived. In this very familiar text from John, Jesus uses a vineyard to illustrate our relationship to him and his relationship to God. My time in the vineyard helped me understand how close these relationships really are. Branches of the vine are not trimmed from a distance like trees. They are selected by hand to be trimmed with hand clippers. Quite an intimate process. And the trimmed off branches are left on the ground. Unable to receive nourishment from the vine, they are no longer able to do what they were created to do - produce fruit. Like the branches and the vine, we cannot bear fruit without being connected to Jesus.

Let us pray: *Caretaker of all creation, keep us close to you so that we may bear good fruit. Amen.*



Friday, August 24, 2018

Text: Luke 12:25-27 (NRSV)
(Jesus teaching his disciples)

“... And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? If then you are not able to do so small a thing as that, why do you worry about the rest? Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these.”

Driving country roads in August is always rewarding if you enjoy visions of wildflowers. One of my favorites is what Mom used to call “ditch” lilies. Now I try to grow them in the yard because they seem to me a stately flower- tall, sturdy, with a blossom like a crown. These are the flowers that bring to mind Jesus’ words on worry. It would seem the disciples following Jesus may have had worries as they traveled with him. Not just for themselves, but maybe concerns for family members they left at home. Like the disciples, we also need to be reminded that time spent worrying is time wasted; it produces nothing. Time is better spent when we can trust and follow, without the distraction of worry.

Let us pray: *Lord, thank you for the beautiful lilies and wildflowers in the fields. Let them prompt me out of useless worry into trust and actions that follow your word. Amen.*



Saturday, August 25, 2018

Text: 1 Peter 1:22-25 (NRSV)

Now that you have purified your souls by your obedience to the truth so that you have genuine mutual love, love one another deeply from the heart. You have been born anew, not of perishable but of imperishable seed, through the living and enduring word of God.

For

**“ All flesh is like grass
and all its glory like the flower of grass.**

**The grass withers,
and the flower falls,**

but the word of the Lord endures forever.”

That word is the good news that was announced to you.

August in the Upper Peninsula is the best time to experience plants and garden crops, letting nature remind us of the blessings God has created for us. Many sections of scripture use illustrations in nature to teach about God's love for us and all creation. And yet we are reminded in this passage, of what truly is lasting and important. Is it our health, wealth, our work, the things we produce or even nature in all its glory? No, it is the word of the Lord that endures forever. It is the good news we have heard and can now share with those around us. This word of God's love will remain when all else passes away.

Let us pray: *Thank you most powerful God, for all the beauty and bounty of this “garden” you have created for us. Let us not take it for granted nor make it a focus of worship for it will not last. Your love for us is the good news that will last forever. Amen.*

