

Devotions – September 30 – October 6, 2018

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Sunday, September 30, 2018

Text: Mark 8:27-38

²⁷Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that I am?” ²⁸And they answered him, “John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.” ²⁹He asked them, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter answered him, “You are the Messiah.” ³⁰And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him.

³¹Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. ³²He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. ³³But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, “Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.”

³⁴He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ³⁵For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. ³⁶For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? ³⁷Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? ³⁸Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.”

Jesus is the Messiah, the Christ! That is Peter’s declaration, and guess what, he’s right! So why not just tell everyone?? Jesus orders his disciples not to repeat what Peter just declared, and that seems strange. Isn’t simply telling everyone that this Jesus is the Messiah, the one who’ll save us, enough? Yes, and no. Yes, declaring that one’s faith is in Christ Crucified is, by God’s grace, what gives us the promised hope of resurrected new life. No one can take that away, nor can you ‘earn’ more in some way. However, as Jesus teaches us, following, truly following him, includes an invitation to do more than just proclaim something. The invitation is to lose what WE think is life-giving, in order to be his presence in the world, as people freed from the power of sin and death, loved, forgiven, and grounded in the hope of the proclamation, “You are the Messiah”.

Let us pray: *O God, we give you thanks for your Son who came to us and for the invitation that comes to us through him. Grant us strength and wisdom to follow where you call so that we may be for the world, the presence of Christ. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.*



Monday, October 1, 2018

Text: Psalm 73

¹Truly God is good to the upright, to those who are pure in heart. ²But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled; my steps had nearly slipped. ³For I was envious of the arrogant; I saw the prosperity of the wicked. ⁴For they have no pain; their bodies are sound and sleek. ⁵They are not in trouble as others are; they are not plagued like other people. ⁶Therefore pride is their necklace; violence covers them like a garment. ⁷Their eyes swell out with fatness; their hearts overflow with follies. ⁸They scoff and speak with malice; loftily they threaten oppression. ⁹They set their mouths against heaven, and their tongues range over the earth. ¹⁰Therefore the people turn and praise them, and find no fault in them. ¹¹And they say, "How can God know? Is there knowledge in the Most High?" ¹²Such are the wicked; always at ease, they increase in riches. ¹³All in vain I have kept my heart clean and washed my hands in innocence. ¹⁴For all day long I have been plagued, and am punished every morning. ¹⁵If I had said, "I will talk on in this way," I would have been untrue to the circle of your children. ¹⁶But when I thought how to understand this, it seemed to me a wearisome task, ¹⁷until I went into the sanctuary of God; then I perceived their end. ¹⁸Truly you set them in slippery places; you make them fall to ruin. ¹⁹How they are destroyed in a moment, swept away utterly by terrors! ²⁰They are like a dream when one awakes; on awaking you despise their phantoms. ²¹When my soul was embittered, when I was pricked in heart, ²²I was stupid and ignorant; I was like a brute beast toward you. ²³Nevertheless I am continually with you; you hold my right hand. ²⁴You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will receive me with honor. ²⁵Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire other than you. ²⁶My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. ²⁷Indeed, those who are far from you will perish; you put an end to those who are false to you. ²⁸But for me it is good to be near God; I have made the Lord GOD my refuge, to tell of all your works.

The psalmist begins with a 'woe is me' kind of lament. The grass seems greener on the other side. We can all relate to this. Even on the playground as toddlers, THAT swing seems better than THIS swing. Then as we grow up we ask, why does she not have to work to get the newest phone, but I do, or how does he always get an 'A' but never studies like I have to?? The list of relatable examples could go on forever. We all, now and then, want what others have, and think that it came to them so much easier than it would for us. We think that their stuff, and their accomplishments, and their life is better than what we have. And there is nothing inherently wrong with desiring certain things, as long as we remember what the psalmist reminds us. True life and refuge lie with God, not with stuff. It may not actually be easier for the other side, but that doesn't matter either way. What truly matters is to remain grounded in what God gives to each one of us: life and love, abundant and unending.

Let us pray: Gracious Lord, we thank you for the many blessings in our lives. Bring peace to our hearts and minds whenever they are troubled by feelings of not having enough. Remind us always that true life and wholeness resides in you. In your Son's name we pray. Amen.



Tuesday, October 2, 2018

Text: *Jonah 3:1-10*

¹The word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time, saying, ²Get up, go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim to it the message that I tell you. ³So Jonah set out and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly large city, a three days' walk across. ⁴Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's walk. And he cried out, "Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" ⁵And the people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast, and everyone, great and small, put on sackcloth.

⁶When the news reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. ⁷Then he had a proclamation made in Nineveh: "By the decree of the king and his nobles: No human being or animal, no herd or flock, shall taste anything. They shall not feed, nor shall they drink water. ⁸Human beings and animals shall be covered with sackcloth, and they shall cry mightily to God. All shall turn from their evil ways and from the violence that is in their hands. ⁹Who knows? God may relent and change his mind; he may turn from his fierce anger, so that we do not perish."

¹⁰When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed his mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them; and he did not do it.

Oh Jonah! Stubborn is one word to describe you. Incredibly blessed is another. One lesson that we all can learn from Jonah is that God is persistent, loving, patient, persistent, forgiving, persistent, and willing to use even the most unwilling of participants to do the work of God in the world. Yet we all can relate to Jonah and his reluctance to do what God called him to do. We may not always travel in the opposite direction, get thrown off a ship, rest inside a giant fish, and be spit back out again on dry land, but we all can be stubborn and resistant to God's call. We may even think like the Apostle Paul that we are unworthy of God's call. But as Jonah demonstrates for us, no one, even when they run as far away as he did, is outside of God's love and call to do the work of God. And thank God for that!

Let us pray: *Merciful Father, you are patient with us even when we may not deserve it. Remain steadfast in your call to us, guide us with gentle encouragement, and when necessary, kick us in the pants so that we do the loving work you have called us toward in your name. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.*



Wednesday, October 3, 2018

Text: *Job 42:1-6*

¹Then Job answered the LORD: ²"I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted. ³'Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?' Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know. ⁴Hear, and I will

...speak; I will question you, and you declare to me.' ⁵I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you; ⁶therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes."

Sometimes, more often than we'd like to admit, we think that we have everything under control. We believe that we have planned things just right, said the right things, done the correct actions, and prepared for anything that may come. But then the reality of our sinful and broken world comes rushing back in, and we realize that only one thing is truly secure, the steadfast love of God. Job lost everything. Everyone told Job that he should turn away from God. Job started to question whether that might be a good idea. And then, through some gentle reminders, Job remembered that he wasn't God and he could not control the world around him. In that confession, Job was reminded that it is only through God that true life comes, and from whom all blessings flow.

Let us pray: *Holy God, even when it seems like life is all good, remind us that it is by the work of the Spirit that your blessings come. Keep us humble and guide us ever to follow you. In your Son's name we pray. Amen.*



Thursday, October 4, 2018

Text: Exodus 23:1-9

¹You shall not spread a false report. You shall not join hands with the wicked to act as a malicious witness. ²You shall not follow a majority in wrongdoing; when you bear witness in a lawsuit, you shall not side with the majority so as to pervert justice; ³nor shall you be partial to the poor in a lawsuit.

⁴When you come upon your enemy's ox or donkey going astray, you shall bring it back.

⁵When you see the donkey of one who hates you lying under its burden and you would hold back from setting it free, you must help to set it free. ⁶You shall not pervert the justice due to your poor in their lawsuits. ⁷Keep far from a false charge, and do not kill the innocent and those in the right, for I will not acquit the guilty. ⁸You shall take no bribe, for a bribe blinds the officials, and subverts the cause of those who are in the right. ⁹You shall not oppress a resident alien; you know the heart of an alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt.

It's satisfying to pick and choose which of the laws we want to follow, and which ones we ignore. Truth be told, these laws written here are for the people of Israel and not for followers of Christ. Except, that Jesus came not to destroy the law, but to fulfill it. As Luther said, the whole of scripture points to Christ. Therefore, especially in these times of volatile rhetoric, heed to these words from the Torah, and know that Christ is present in them ALL.

Let us pray: *God Justice, you call us to do justice and be just with and for our neighbor and all your beloved. Guide us toward treating everyone with respect and dignity and forgive us when we fall short. In your Son's name we pray. Amen.*



Friday, October 5, 2018

Romans 8:31-39

³¹What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? ³²He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? ³³Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. ³⁴Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. ³⁵Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ³⁶As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered."

³⁷No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Perhaps nowhere else in scripture is the gospel message so clearly laid out as it is here. Paul does not mince words or leave it ambiguous here. There is nothing, no matter what you have done, or what you think is working against you in the world, that can keep you or separate you from “the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord”. Nothing. It cannot be done. God’s love is for YOU and nothing can keep God’s love from YOU. Now we may sometimes think that we’ve found the one way, but we haven’t. It doesn’t exist. God’s love is freely and generously given to all people. You may choose to not believe it is there, but that doesn’t mean that it isn’t given for YOU, or that something stands between you and God’s love.

Let us pray: *Good and gracious God, we thank you for your boundless love for us. At times we doubt that it is truly for us, and for those times, we pray that you would reassure and empower us to tell others the gospel truth. For nothing can ever separate us from your love, and we give thanks to you for that. In your name we pray. Amen.*



Saturday, October 6, 2018

Text: *Mark 12:41-44*

⁴¹[Jesus] sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the crowd putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. ⁴²A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny. ⁴³Then he called his disciples and said to them, "Truly I tell you, this

poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. ⁴⁴For all of them have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on."

Following Christ means sacrificing. That doesn't always mean sacrificing money, but nonetheless, following Christ does involve a sacrifice. The widow in our story gives all that she had. She gives as an act of faith. She gives because she is free to do so. The others give because they have to, or maybe want to, but mostly as a 'have to'. The widow is a 'get to', as all followers of Christ are called to be. The example in the story involves money but truly it could be about anything including our time and talents. Society says that we have obligations that we 'have to do', like paying taxes. Yet as followers of Christ, we know that what we give in his name is a joyous 'get to' response to our faith. May we always strive to follow the widow and the privilege of following God's call to love and serve.

Let us pray: *Faithful Lord, you call us to do your will and serve the world in your name. Grant us wisdom and strength to do with an attitude of we 'get to', rather than feeling obligated to 'have to'. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.*

