

**Devotions – October 7-13, 2018**

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**Sunday, October 7, 2018**

Text: Luke 6:47-49

*Jesus taught us, saying “<sup>47</sup>I will show you what someone is like who comes to me, hears my words, and acts on them. <sup>48</sup>That one is like a man building a house, who dug deeply and laid the foundation on rock; when a flood arose, the river burst against that house but could not shake it, because it had been well built. <sup>49</sup>But the one who hears and does not act is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. When the river burst against it, immediately it fell, and great was the ruin of that house.”*

We spend countless hours of schooling learning how to write, how to read, and even how to speak. Sentences get diagramed, essays summarized, and presentations given. You probably have some vivid memories of this. I know I do. And when I think about all of that learning (fun and not-so-fun), I’m startled to realize that nowhere in my formal education was I taught to listen.

Now, I’m sure my parents and siblings did their part and I know that teachers told me to listen, but it was never broken down the same way writing, reading, and speaking were. It’s through this perspective that I read Jesus’ parable in Luke. In the story Jesus asks if we understand or if we were just ‘hearing’ the words. Hearing the words is, by itself, important. When my wife asks me something, it’s important that I hear her. Yet she only knows if I listened if there is a response. If she asks me to take the trash out, she knows I listened when she sees me take the trash out.

Most of us have pretty good hearing, but our listening could use some work. Jesus beautifully points out that if we only hear, and do not listen, we risk building something that can easily fall apart. If we only hear, we miss the stories and meaning that people share. We come across as callous, insensitive, and uninterested. If we managed to listen, and if we show that we have through our actions, we build on the relationship.

This is true for our relationships with our friends and our families, as well as with our Lord. How are we listening to them? Do our actions show that we haven’t just ‘heard’ but that we actually understand what they’re saying or asking? Have we just heard God, or have we listened and understood God?

Let us Pray: *Lord, help me to listen. Grant that my ears might be open and that my voice might be silent. That I may hear what you are saying to me and that through my actions, you might see that I understand. Amen.*



## **Monday, October 8, 2018**

Text: Matthew 5:3-10

<sup>3</sup>*“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”* <sup>4</sup>*“Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.”* <sup>5</sup>*“Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.”* <sup>6</sup>*“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.”* <sup>7</sup>*“Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.”* <sup>8</sup>*“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.”* <sup>9</sup>*“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.”* <sup>10</sup>*“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”*

I love that the Bible begins with blessing. In Genesis we, humans, are called good before we ever sin. All the cosmos is blessed by God.

Claiming that original blessing isn’t easy. We live as sinners and saints and it’s often a lot easier to count our sins than the reasons we’re saints.

In the beatitudes, however, we’re told more about blessings. Peacemaking, mercy, pure hearts, hungering for righteousness, and meekness. In scripture, blessings are never earned: they’re given. To receive these blessings is unexpected. Slogging toward justice for people on the margins doesn’t often feel like a blessing. Being poor in spirit feels more like a struggle. Being persecuted sounds miserable. Yet, in the eyes of Jesus, there is blessing in those things. Blessings, I find, are more important when we’re exhausted and worn down. Blessings come after wrestling with something.

It’s easy to think that a blessing means that the struggle ends, that the lottery is won, and happiness reigns. Yet Jesus’ blessings remind us that a blessing isn’t an outcome. A blessing is a naming and calling. A blessing is remembering that when we struggle, when we seek justice and mercy, and when we wrestle with our faith, that there is blessing in that. There is blessing in what we are doing and who we are. It may not look like much, but it’s the encouragement that we need in order to continue.

What blessing do you need today? What work are you doing that feels thankless, tiring, and hard? How are you hearing God’s blessing today?

Let us Pray: *Creator God, you blessed us from the beginning and continue to call us good. Help us see the work that we do as a blessing itself, that we might know that there is fullness, mercy, and a kingdom of heaven here for us – now and yet to come. Amen.*



**Tuesday, October 9, 2018**

Text: John 14:6-7

*Jesus taught us, saying "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. <sup>7</sup>If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him."*

How are you known?

It's a little strange to think that we might know someone well through someone else. We often say we know someone through our friends or acquaintances, but for stronger relationships we expect them to be direct. I don't assume to know my in-laws because I know my wife, instead I get to know them through time and conversation. That seems to be normal for most of my relationships.

Yet in these verses we are told that we know the Father through the Son. What does that mean? If you know me, do you know my father, too? If you know Andrew do you also know Milton (my dad)?

If you had to name someone who knows you, who are they? Can you imagine people getting to know you through that person?

This is what we're told about our relationship with Jesus. In order to know God the Father, we must know the Son. In seeing the Son, we get to see the Father. We know God through Jesus. Not just because of what he tells us about God, but more importantly how he lives. We witness who God is through the ministry of his Son – through the loving, healing, and teaching. We know God because we assume that who Jesus is has a direct relationship to who God, his Father, is.

What could I say about your parents if I knew you? To know your parents, must I know you? This is the beauty of knowing Jesus. In getting to know him through scripture, we get to know God.

Let us Pray: *Father God, thank you for the gift of your Son. Through him I know you and love you. Help me continue to draw closer to him and to you, that I might know you better each day. Amen.*



**Wednesday, October 10, 2018**

Text: Luke 7:18-23

*<sup>18</sup>The disciples of John reported all these things to him. So John summoned two of his disciples <sup>19</sup>and sent them to the Lord to ask, "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?" <sup>20</sup>When the men had come to him, they said, "John the Baptist has sent us to*

*you to ask, 'Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?'" <sup>21</sup>Jesus had just then cured many people of diseases, plagues, and evil spirits, and had given sight to many who were blind. <sup>22</sup>And he answered them, "Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have good news brought to them. <sup>23</sup>And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me."*

If you've ever traveled to a large airport, you've probably seen the chauffeurs and drivers holding signs by the exit. They have people's names written on them, identifying who they are looking for.

I've only had the privilege of someone holding a sign like that once, and when I came up to them their first question was, "Are you Mr. Plocher?"

"Are you the one who is to come?"

Jesus has shown all of these signs and the disciples don't quite get it. They still have to ask. "Are you the one?"

Then Jesus tells them to share with John everything he's done. He doesn't say, "yes, I'm the one." He doesn't say, "Are you blind? Haven't you seen what I've done?" No, he just says, to tell John what he's done and that blessed is anyone who takes no offense.

I wonder how well I do at that sometimes. In our society we like credentials and titles, certificates and diplomas. We want proof, on paper, that someone is qualified. We find it harder to just look at what someone has done.

Now, I want my doctors and counselors, plumbers and electricians, to be trained. I value standards of professionalism and abilities. Yet I think I take too much stock in title. A doctor is only as good at their bedside manner and knowledge, a plumber is only as good as their problem-solving ability and technical know-how. This is what Jesus says. He's asking if we see what he's done and, maybe slyly, if we're okay with that.

Can I see my Lord in what he does rather than need him to tell me? If I need to wait for Jesus to tell me who he is, will I ever see him in all of the people around me? What about Jesus makes me uncomfortable enough to ask for a 'certificate' saying who he is?

Sometimes actions speak louder than words, and my job is to remember to listen. I'm glad Jesus reminds me of that.

Let us Pray: *God of Glory, sometimes I want easy proof rather than having to watch for you. Help me see you in the healing and good news, that I might know you and take no offense. Amen.*



## **Thursday, October 11, 2018**

Text: Luke 3:21-22

*<sup>21</sup>Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, <sup>22</sup>and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”*

It's pretty easy to read Luke's passage and leave ourselves out of the story. I hear the voice of God telling Jesus that he's beloved and that God is pleased with him and think, “Duh. Of course he is.”

The harder part of these verses is to think about what that means to our baptisms. In baptism we are claimed as God's beloved, too. It's a sign and seal of grace in and on our lives. I love that! It's something I need to be reminded of all the time.

Yet remembering our baptism also means remembering that God is pleased with us. Baptism is not just because we're broken and sinful, but because God sees that we are beautiful and beloved. It's one thing to remember that we're a beloved child of God, or child of our parents, but it's different to also hear God's pleasure with us. Baptism isn't just to remind us that we die to sin, but also that our choice to believe, to repent, to seek God, is pleasing to God. We please God.

In the world we live in, it's pretty easy to be down on ourselves. I know I'm my own worst critic. Yet in baptism we aren't failures. Yes, we're often hot messes of humanity, but that isn't what God sees. God sees that we want to be new in God. That's good news that I need to hear. We're accepted. We bring pleasure to God. We're beloved.

Yes, we're sinners, but we're also saints. I know, at least for me, that's often the harder part to accept.

Let us Pray: *God of my baptism, help me hear your words to me. Help me know that I am accepted by you, that I am your beloved, and that you find pleasure in who I am. Amen.*



## **Friday, October 12, 2018**

Text: Luke 17:7-10

*<sup>7</sup>“Who among you would say to your slave who has just come in from plowing or tending sheep in the field, ‘Come here at once and take your place at the table?’ <sup>8</sup>Would you not rather say to him, ‘Prepare supper for me, put on your apron and serve me while I eat and drink; later you may eat and drink?’ <sup>9</sup>Do you thank the slave for doing what was commanded?<sup>10</sup> So you also, when you have done all that you were ordered to do, say, ‘We are worthless slaves; we have done only what we ought to have done!’”*

Faith doesn't have to be heroic.

All too often it seems like faith has to be larger than life and that our actions need to match. I know I get caught up in dreaming of super heroics. Instead of seeing God in the ordinary, I look for the extraordinary. Yet, God is present in the ordinary. Faithfulness is lived out in our work, like the servants plowing the fields. Faithfulness is how we do our work, care for those in need, protect the vulnerable, reach out to the lonely, befriend the friendless, keep the world going, and contribute to the common good. It's what we do every day.

When we head out the door, whether to work or to errands, we can look for opportunities to partner with God. We can, as Mother Theresa once said, "Do small things with great love." We don't have to be heroic because the ordinary, when gathered together, becomes extraordinary. Look for God in the ordinary. Where do you see yourself partnering with God? How is your faithfulness to the ordinary touching the lives of others?

Let us Pray: *God of our labors, help me see you in the ordinary. Give me the eyes to see the faithfulness of my work and the courage to just do it, that in all that I do I might see your extraordinary love and grace. Amen.*



**Saturday, October 13, 2018**

Text: Matthew 18:1-4

***At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"<sup>2</sup> He called a child, whom he put among them,<sup>3</sup> and said, "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.<sup>4</sup> Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.***

Aging isn't easy. We spend energy and time wanting to be seen as older, only later in life we find ourselves wishing to be younger. I know that the white in my hair seems to expand by the day.

Jesus reminds us that being humble like a child is the way into the kingdom of heaven. I like to imagine this as though it were "The Curious Case of Benjamin Button" and we grow backwards, getting younger rather than older, but I also wonder if that misses the point. Growing younger, and humbler, means letting go of all the baggage that we've acquired. I know I have plenty. I know too many rights and wrongs, structures and rules, and certainties. What I'm not always good at is playing and enjoying the mystery life.

Have you seen a little kid play soccer? My 4-year-old nephew loves soccer, and when we play he makes up new rules about every 60 seconds. Why? Because the 'real' rules haven't weighed him down yet. He still sees the fun in mixing everything up because he doesn't know any better. He still has mystery and wonder. For him an ugly duckling can become a swan, an unwanted stepsister can become a princess, a frog can become a prince.

Having the humility to welcome mystery isn't easy. Being like a child is difficult after working so hard to become a competent and put-together adult. Yet I think that's what Jesus is asking us to do. Jesus wants us to know that greatness doesn't come in the way we think it does, but that it comes in in our ability to experience wonder and mystery.

So where did you experience wonder today? When did you play? What opportunities did you take (or miss) where you could have let your imagination wander? What new perspective did you look through today?

Let us Pray: *God of mystery, I try hard to be so grown-up. Help me remember to wonder, to dream, and to play. Give me the grace to be able to set aside my baggage and to be present with you. Amen.*

