

December 2-8, 2018
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Sunday, December 2, 2018

Our First Priority

Text: Matthew 22:37-40

“Jesus said to him, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”

I heard this story once that I particularly like. A man was on a walk and he fell into an abandoned dried up well. Two other men came by. He called up to them, “Please help!” and then proceeded to explain his situation. The first man felt so terrible for the man in the well that he jumped right into the well. The second man looked into the well, shook his head, and then went home got a rope and dropped it down. He tied the rope to a tree and called down, “If you would like to get out of your tough situation you can climb up this rope!”

Why is it in the Bible that we continue to see God demand that we love God first and only after that we are called love the neighbor or the world? It is because, left to our own devices, we don’t always know how to love that well. We might feel so much pity for someone that we don’t really help them out of their situation at all but instead spend our time and energy wallowing with them. We might be so overwhelmed by their struggle that we just walk away. Or we can be like the man with the rope who was both separated and loving enough to have compassion and then do something about it. To be the man with the rope we must first be centered in God. God doesn’t demand us to love God first because God is selfish. God asks us to love God first because that is the best way to live for our own souls. So we pray, we go for walks, we take time to take care of ourselves, and then we are able to listen with compassion. Some people will grab the rope we throw, others will not. Either way is ok because we try our best. Remember the people who you try and help have God, too. We are not other people’s savior’s; we are just God’s helper.

Today: *I will keep my priorities in order. God comes first.*



Monday, December 3, 2018

Vision Without Limits

Text: Jeremiah 29:11

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”

Sometimes it is very easy to feel limited. We are no longer children in grade school with endless possibilities before us. We don't have as many people reminding us we 'can be anything.' As we get older it is easy to imagine that paths close up, possibilities decrease. Yet that is never what our God, a God of surprises, intends for us. We are invited each day to reopen our hearts to possibilities. We are invited to look at the problems and struggles before us and find new and creative ways to address them. There are days that you might feel stuck because of a problem that may come up with family, work, or something else. Instead God invites you to imagine the possibilities that can come from this new change in your life.

Today: *I will be open to possibilities.*



Tuesday, December 4, 2018

Listening to the Holy Spirit

Text: John 14:15-17

(Jesus said) “If you love me, keep my commands. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever— the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.”

Sometimes it is hard to listen to our inner voice. Often selfish ambition gets in the way. We might know exactly how we are called to help another but find ourselves more concerned about what we want. Sometimes we can think so much about ourselves that we become isolated and lonely. The only way to escape this is by reaching out to serve another. We know what we are called to do. The Holy Spirit lives in you and constantly directs you towards the Truth you are simply called to listen. We listen by avoiding self-centered thoughts and keeping open hearts.

Today: *I will do something kind for someone else.*



Wednesday, December 5, 2018

No Judgment

Text: Matthew 7:1-2

“Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.”

What continues to amaze me is that the most judgmental people are also the most self-critical. You might hear that lady at church complaining about how the rest can't keep the kitchen clean and then you will see her house is immaculate. She is like Jesus' friend Martha, always harshly judging herself if one thing is out of place so that she can rarely sit down and enjoy company or quiet time. When we open the door to our propensity to judge what we find is that no one is safe. We can't just direct judgment to one person; it spreads out to many people we meet and to ourselves. And so what Jesus calls us to do is throw away the measuring stick.

When you come into relationship with others and something they say or do begins to bother you there is no reason to go down the road towards judgment. What they do does not need to affect you. There are plenty of wonderful things ahead in a day. Likewise, when you don't feel you are measuring up, when you are not getting all your tasks done, not praying enough, not exercising enough, or whatever it is, let it go and move on. There are plenty of things that go on in a day. No reason to get stuck behind the measuring stick and miss out on all the opportunities yet to come.

Today: *I will throw away the measuring stick. I will not judge.*



Thursday, December 6, 2018

Love

Text: Timothy 1:7

“For God has not given us the spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.”

Deep love is one of the most beautiful and difficult things we will ever experience as human beings. A new romantic love or the love for a child is wonderful, all consuming, it swallows us whole and gives us reason to breath. However, in this broken world where things go wrong it can also fill us with fear. What if my child gets injured or sick? What if my partner leaves me? There is a difference between love based on fear and God-love. Love based on fear can become possessive and manipulative; I will not let my child ever go out, I will never give my spouse alone time. Love based on God goes deeper, lasts longer, and allows us to trust the individual we love. We let our child make mistakes so they can learn, even if it's hard. We love our spouse but also don't mind if they have different hobbies or interests than us. This is the way that God loves us; God allows us our free will to roam and to mess up, but God is always waiting for us to wash our scrapes and give us a hug when we come home.

Today: *I will balance love and freedom for those around me.*



Friday, December 7, 2018

Hard Days

Text: Romans 8:38-39

“For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

I have a friend who struggles with depression. She tries each day to overcome. Besides taking medication she also reads meditations in the morning, has prayers three times a day, exercises and does all those other things that help us to lead more spiritually stable lives. And though it does help her she mentioned a while ago that there are days she just doesn't want to get out of bed. What she has learned as she has become more spiritually aware is that she doesn't always have to feel excellent. Some days just may not feel as good as others and that is ok. To work a spiritual program, in other words to devote each day to following where the Holy Spirit leads, does not mean every day will be filled with overwhelming joy. It is ok to have bad days. That is part of being human and in the end if neither death nor life, angels nor demons, the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation can separate us from God's love, then a bad day most certainly will not separate us. We get up go on our way and know that it is only for a little while. Brighter days come again.

Today: *I will do life, no matter how I feel. I will remember that God loves me and that is enough.*



Saturday, December 8, 2018

Every Part of Us

Text: I Corinthians 12:12-13

“For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.”

Paul the apostle had an ego, Jonah was a scaredy cat, Jacob was deceitful, Peter could be cowardly and awkward. No one in the Bible God chooses is perfect. Actually many of them have significant flaws. However, God has this incredible ability to take our flaws, the ones we especially dislike, and turn them into gifts for ourselves and the world. Sometimes we are called to recognize our weaknesses, to look directly at them. This can be intimidating. Perhaps we have

pretended for years that we don't have this specific flaw. That we are not deceitful, anxious, tricky, or aggressive. However, when we hand these flaws over to God we notice two things: one, they are not that big of a deal. We have built them up in our minds. Two, God can use them. Suddenly you are not disorganized but creative, not anxious but prepared, not aggressive, but passionate. You are what you are. God made you that way and God loves all parts of you. There are other flaws we have that came from difficulty at some point. Perhaps you are deceitful because you had to be as a child to survive, perhaps you have trouble expressing emotion because you were shunned in the past. Sometimes we are called to let go of these broken parts of ourselves, but we cannot do that if we are being hard on ourselves. Only when we learn to look at ourselves honestly and without judgment can we make the changes in ourselves that we long for. God wants us to have a safe space to grow. Often that begins with being kinder on ourselves.

Today: *I will be honest with myself.*

