

Devotions – March 10-16, 2019

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Sunday, March 10, 2019

Text: Isaiah 40:28-31

28 Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth Does not become weary or tired. His understanding is inscrutable.

29 He gives strength to the weary, And to him who lacks might He increases power.

30 Though youths grow weary and tired, And vigorous young men stumble badly,

31 Yet those who wait for the LORD Will gain new strength; They will mount up with wings like eagles, They will run and not get tired, They will walk and not become weary.

As I served congregations, I envied those who were able to leave our UP's frigid temperatures for a few months of sunshine and seventy-degree weather. When those thoughts flashed across my mind, I quickly shook my head in hopes of erasing such thoughts as retirement was still years away. Then, like a thief in the night, retirement happened with the impact of a Mack truck. One day I was working, the next I was retired. All of a sudden, I realized, now I can escape the deep freeze and enjoy and fly away to someplace warm!

Isaiah reminds us that God does not become weary or tired, and that he gives strength to the weary. God did that for me in providing a beautiful sanctuary where Jane and I could rest and be renewed. Through the help of two very dear friends, God guided us to this beautiful valley nestled within the Superstition Mountains. Here we found rest and renewal with the help of many good friends in two very different worshipping communities. *(I tell you more about that in the week to come.)*

Let us pray: *Heavenly Father, you know our physical and spiritual fatigue. Give us sanctuary where we can go and find renewal in you through your Word. Amen.*



Monday, March 11, 2019

Text: 2 Kings 2:2

“2 Elijah said to Elisha, “Stay here; the LORD has sent me to Bethel.” But Elisha said, “As surely as the LORD lives and as you live, I will not leave you.” So they went down to Bethel.”

Do you have a lot of friends? Sure, we all do. But, are they casual friends, workplace friends, friends in various social groups? We see them, talk with them, joke with them but that's about the extent of the friendship.

Proverbs 18:24 we read, “*A man of too many friends comes to ruin, But there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.*” Friend as it is used here is a strong word meaning ‘one who loves.’ I am blessed to have several very close friends. But, among them, is one who was exceptional; His name was Tom. Tom had the unique ability to find humor in any situation. I could not be down or bummed-out around Tom because he always made me laugh. In the words of Elisha, “‘As surely as the LORD lives and as you live, I will not leave you.’” So they went down to Bethel.” Tom, his wife, Cindy, Jane and I would have so much fun together just sitting around talking. I lost my brother, Tom, to liver cancer. Although he’s gone, he is still with me. Whenever I think of him, a smile breaks into a laugh.

C.S. Lewis says “Friendship is the instrument by which God reveals to each of us the beauties of others.”

Do you have an amazing friend in whom God has revealed to you how amazing they are? If you do, thank God for your friend each day.

Let us Pray: *Father in heaven, our friends are our stays in life. You have revealed to us the beauties of our greatest friend, Jesus. May we always know him and love him as our greatest friend. Amen.*



Tuesday, March 12, 2019

Text: Psalm 46:10

“Be still and know that I am God.”

I love that text . . . it speaks volumes, doesn’t it? On the Sunday following 9/11, I preached on that text and during the sermon, I sang two verses of a hymn that centers on that text. Be still! Is there ever anytime in your day where you can simply “Be Still?” Even in retirement, there’s hardly a chance to “Be Still.” I have a big vegetable garden behind our house which serves as my sanctuary from the hustle, bustle and clamor of everyday life. I can sit out there and feel the presence of God. It’s wonderful! There in my sanctuary I can burn off a lot of tension and frustration by pulling weeds. Now, before you laugh, try it! What I do is grab hold of a weed, and as I pull it from the ground, I think of something that frustrated or irritated me. In that moment, that weed becomes whatever it was that caused me consternation. In yanking that weed from the ground, I feel better. And the nice thing is, that in a few days, that weed will be right back there ready for me to vent on it once again. God says to us “Be still and know that I am God.”

Out here in my Superstition Mountain sanctuary, I can feel God’s presence by walking in the desert among the various cacti, shrubs, and stately saguaro cacti. I wish I could convey to you the indescribable beauty of the desert. It is something that everyone must experience for themselves. In the stillness of the Sonoran desert, I can hear God’s voice say, “Be still and know that I am God.” Do you have a place of sanctuary where you can hear the stillness of God? I encourage you to find one . . . God is waiting for you.

Let us Pray: *Heavenly Father, our lives are filled with busyness, noise, and commotion. Help us to find sanctuary where we can “Be still” and know that you are God. Amen.*



Wednesday, March 13, 2019

Text: Isaiah 26:4

“Trust in the LORD forever, For in GOD the LORD, we have an everlasting Rock.”

One of my favorite things to do while walking out here is to look down. As a card carrying “gimp”, I literally need to watch my step. I found I can find some very interesting rocks while looking down. I have found some beautiful rose and milky white quartz, some schist (a coarse-grained metamorphic rock that consists of layers of different minerals and can be split into thin irregular plates), basalt just to name a few. So far I haven’t found a gold nugget, but I’m hopeful.

Once, while jeeping with friends, we happened upon a narrow stream bordered by huge boulders. As we clamored down the embankment, we noticed some drawings on the stone. Upon closer examination, the drawings turned out to be etchings from an ancient tribe of southeastern Arizona Indians called the Hohokam. The etchings are believed to be well over one thousand years old. What amazed me is that they seem completely untouched by people. No one has marred them, no one has put graffiti on them, no one has tried to cut them away. They are, as they have always been.

As I stood gazing on our remarkable discovery, the text from Isaiah popped into my head. As permanent as these boulder etchings seem to be, they cannot contend with the permanence of our everlasting Rock. Isaiah says, “Trust in the LORD forever, For in GOD the LORD, we have an everlasting Rock.” God is always with us, and will always be with us through time. There is nothing that can deface, mar or erase that fact. I trust in our Rock!

Let us Pray: *Father God, you are and will always be God. Remind us in times of trouble that you will never leave us. Amen.*



Thursday, March 14, 2019

Text: Leviticus 26:4

“...then I will give your rains in their season, and the land shall yield its increase, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit.”

Arizona is a great place for me to indulge in one of my favorite pastimes, photography. I spend a lot of time hoping to shoot a memorable sunrise or sunset; I am always on the look out to capture just the right photo of plants and blossoms. Spring in the Sonoran desert is a prime location to indulge in such a pastime. If enough rain has fallen during the rainy season, September through

February, then one can expect an abundance of wildflower blossoms and cactus blossoms. Last year I enjoyed what I thought to be a phenomenal year because they enjoyed a better than average rainy season. I came home with a treasure trove of shots. I hoped for the same this year. Living where we live in da UP, we take rain for granted. I can remember on more than one occasion complaining about the fact that rain had just washed out my plans. Have you done that?

The people in Arizona do not have that luxury. The scripture text noted above was recalled to me by a pastor in the Queen Valley. It concerns the covenant blessing for obedience. God promised that if His people kept the covenant then he would give rains in their season, so that the land would bring forth bounty. Obedience here is the key.

The pastor I spoke to posed a rhetorical question. He offered, perhaps because it has not rained, we have not been obedient. Hmm, good question. Don't we expect that God will provide the rains we need to nurture crops and fill cisterns and I can do whatever I want? Thought provoking isn't it that God should expect obedience from His people!

Let us Pray: *Gracious God, you shower down upon us goodness and light. Help us to remember that we owe our obedience to you. Amen.*



Friday, March 15, 2019

Text: Matthew 5:6

“Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.”

One of the things that Jane and I like to do in Arizona is sample various cuisines. It's a good thing that we like Mexican food because there is a Mexican restaurant just about everywhere you turn. Our favorite is located in Superior (a small copper mining town that got its name from copper mines from the UP of Michigan!), AZ and is called Los Hermanos. They have an amazing menu and the prices are very affordable. When not enjoying Mexican food, we often go to the Golden China in Apache Junction. They have genuine Chinese cuisine and the prices too are very affordable. But, my favorite place to eat is at home. In a word, Jane's various cuisines are Fabulous! Whenever I get hungry, Jane's cooking fits the bill.

That said, there is another kind of hunger that this world cannot satisfy. It is the hunger of the soul for goodness, fairness, and justice. I wonder sometimes what's happened to the goodness that people once had. In Matthew 6, Jesus says “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied.” When I was a boy, I can remember people not thinking twice to help other people. My grandparents impressed that upon me by the way they would reach out to help others. Grandma said, “If you believe in God, it's something you do!” Hmm, I wonder, is it something that we do today?

Let us Pray: *Lord Jesus, as we hunger and thirst for righteousness, help us to be more like you. Help us to think of others more than we think of ourselves. Amen.*



Saturday, March 16, 2019

Text: Psalm 65:8

**⁸ They who dwell in the ends *of the earth* stand in awe of Your signs;
You make the dawn and the sunset shout for joy.”**

As I shared with you earlier in the week, I am an amateur photographer. I love taking all kinds of photos, but my favorite are sunsets. I don't really know what it is that draws me to this type of photography. Perhaps it's because you have to get out in the middle of nowhere, away from power lines, telephone poles, houses, and tall buildings. Perhaps too it's because I'm alone in the desert with no one to talk to, no one to distract me, no one to divert my attention from the light show that God is creating. Not long ago, while waiting for the right moment, I was surprised by an owl that swooped in to sit on top of a large saguaro cactus. We looked at each other and then sat and enjoyed the show.

The verse from Psalm 65 above says it all so perfectly: “⁸ They who dwell in the ends *of the earth* stand in awe of Your signs; You make the dawn and the sunset shout for joy.” Standing alone in the desert face to face with the magnificent art work of God, it's difficult to believe that there is any war, terrorism, hunger, or disease that can overshadow God's awesome work. Next time you're presented with an awesome sunset, go out alone to a lonely place and take it in. Let God awe you with his handiwork.

Let us Pray: *Creator God, you have created a magnificent world filled with people made in your image to care for it. Help us to remember whose we are and why we have been created. Amen.*

