

Devotions – March 31 – April 6, 2019

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Introduction:

As I prepared the daily devotions, I was moved to look at relationships, how we interact with each other in society, how we cherish those closest to us and how we relate to our God. Finally, how God relates to us. The devotions became more like meditations, to think through stumbling blocks that keep us isolated. There are tough questions, but this is Lent, a time for reflection even if we are uncomfortable doing so.

Sunday, March 31, 2019

Text: Leviticus 19:18

...love your neighbors as yourself...

Walls

It seems that we can't help but think about walls. They are in the news. Walls are not good or bad in themselves but it's the value and emotions that we associate with them. Walls can hold up a roof that shelters us from the rays of the sun, rain or snow. Walls protect us from those who would harm us or steal from us. Walls can be a barrier to those inside as well as those outside. I wonder how the people of Jericho felt as the Israelites walked around the city blowing their horns. Did they feel bottled up or did they feel safe and secure before the walls came tumbling down? Throughout history we have read about walls, the barring of gates, taking up the drawbridge, locking our doors. And then the walls are breached. Are we any safer with walls around us keeping us from understanding those who might think differently from us, look differently, or have different values? Do walls protect us from our own fears? How can we do what Jesus tells us, to love our enemies and to treat our neighbors as we expect to be treated if we isolate ourselves? Even modern history tells us when then President Reagan said, "Take down these walls." Can we trust God?

Lord help us to hear and live your command. Help us to open the doors of our hearts to understanding of others. Help us to be good neighbors.



Monday, April 1, 2019

Text: 1 John 3:1

How great is the love the Father has lavished on us that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!

It Takes a Village

Born in the 40's and having grown up in the 50's and 60's, I remember different song lyrics and singing groups that young people today cannot relate to. One such group was the Village People, all wearing different attire. One would dress as a construction worker, another a doctor and yet another as a Native American chief and so forth. I also remember lyrics that start, "We are family..." Much more recently former Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton said that it takes a village to raise a child. Our world is based on relationships; how we care for one another, helping each other, teaching, learning and loving. It takes every person's input to bring about an adult out of the child.

Let us pray that we recognize that we are all God's children, one family the human kind with all its failures but still loved and forgiven. Help us to see that we are indeed one family, one village.



Tuesday, April 2, 2019

Text: Luke 11:4a

Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us.

In what seems to be an endless stream of shootings, there is one that stands out for me and I hope for many Christians. That one is the shooting that occurred in South Carolina. As a group gathered in prayer and Bible study, a young man, stranger to them, came in. He was welcomed to join them in prayer and study. What he did was to bring out a gun and begin killing them. What is remarkable, although maybe it should not be, is the survivors prayed for him and forgave him.

As followers of Christ, are we not called to do similarly? I would guess that readers of this have not experienced that level of trauma, but we have experienced hurt in many different ways. Some of us may have been excluded from events or gatherings, ridiculed, made fun of, or called names. Some of us may have experienced physical violence in addition to emotional pain. How do we respond? Do we forgive as Jesus has shown our sins are forgiven?

Seriously, pray the Lord's prayer and ask the Lord to help us to forgive just as we have been forgiven. We ask God's help in restoring all broken relationships.



Wednesday, April 3, 2019

Text: Exodus 20:12

Honor your father and your mother, so you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you.

Have you seen the commercial where the woman comes home from work and grocery shopping and trips over her father's cane? The ensuing yelling makes her daughter cry and father cringe. Have you seen the one where a woman sees the bruises on her friend's face, knowing that her son beat her or the same one where a daughter finds her father's refrigerator empty? These are commercials that reflect portions of real life. Many elderly sit in nursing homes abandoned by their family. Worse yet are those living alone who cannot take care of their one basic need and die unloved. Extreme cases but they happen every day. Sometimes abuse or neglect happen early when a parent tries to correct a teen's behavior and the teen rebels, issuing words of profanity and walks out, or a youngster starts yelling in a store and won't stop and listen. How do you teach children to honor their father and mother? Have they even heard of the Ten Commandments? Parents, have you earned respect, treating children with kindness, listening to them and providing for the physical and emotional needs?

We pray that our children will learn to love and show respect from our own example of how we treat others. Lord help us to be that example.



Thursday, April 4, 2019

Text: 1 Corinthians 13:4-8a

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs, Love does not delight in evil but rejoices in truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.

Many times, these verses have been cited at weddings as they describe love as it should be for all. How I wish it were true for all marriages. In the United States, 55-60 percent of marriages fail. My own marriage and the love I have for my wife has grown stronger, more resilient over the years including, and maybe especially, over the bad, really tough times. Is it the commitment that holds it together? Maybe in the beginning, but now it is more than that. We truly care for each other; it is like two actually becoming one. God is to be first in our lives; who is in second place? Would you give up your life for that person? Do people know what love is?

Some say that divorce is too easy. Divorce is never easy; it is like killing someone. It is the ending of a relationship - no winners, just hurt.

Today we pray for all who are bereft because of a relationship ending. We pray that they will find peace of heart. We also pray for those who have experienced lasting love, that God continue to bless them and their oneness.

Lent



Friday, April 5, 2019

Text: Exodus 20:3

You shall have no other gods before me.

Dear Lord God, you are the true one and Holy One. You are our help and salvation. We praise you and worship you.

We are asked by God that God be first in our lives and hearts. Do we do so, or do we let other people or things become walls separating us from God? In February we read Luke's version of the beatitudes and woes. Woe to you who are rich. Many of us in this country can be considered rich. We are comfortable, we are able to work and play, have food on our table, clothes on our body and a roof over our heads, and yet we strive for more. It is the American way. It can also be risky behavior. As we continue to accumulate there is the risk of pushing God farther and farther away. Things become more important. If things become the center of your life, they can build a wall between you and God.

It is not things alone. Ever watch "American Idol?" The name says it all. Whom do we put on that pedestal? Some might want to be just like that sports hero, singer, actor, teacher, billionaire and even in some case the drug lord. Jesus asks us to be like him. Even activities can get in the way of our relationship with God. Activities, even healthy ones, sometimes keep us from putting God first above all things, if they become the center of our life.

Let us pray that God will always be first in our lives. Help us, Lord, to prioritize all things. Help us to live lives that emulate the example that your Son has given us. Help us to see those walls we have built that keep us from having a right relationship with you. Help us to remove those obstacles that keep us from having you first in our life.

Lent



Saturday, April 6, 2019

Text: Matthew 28:20b

"And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

"What a friend we have in Jesus..." The Bible tells us so. The message is clear. He is steadfast and will be with us always. This month we started with a devotion about us being wonderfully made. We are God's creation, we are His children. An artist can look upon his painting, a potter his bowl or vase, their own creation and want to preserve them for all time. God has saved us so many times, leading His people out of bondage in Egypt to offering up His Son for us on the

cross. He wants to be in relationship with us. He loves us, His creation. He takes up our burdens, forgives our sins and gives us eternal life. What more could you ask from a steadfast friend?

Dear God, we thank you for your presence in our lives. You have made a covenant with us. We know that you love us, and we ask that you help us to understand the depth of your love so that we may do likewise.

