

Devotions – April 14-20, 2019

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Sunday, April 14, 2019

Goodness and Mercy

Scripture Reading: Psalm 23

1 The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.

2 He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters;

3 he restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name's sake.

4 Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff— they comfort me

5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long.

Psalm 23:6, “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever,” is a marvelous promise and one of those Bible verses that can easily be misunderstood.

There were times as a younger person that I wondered about goodness and mercy in my life. Bad things happened to me, around me, in the world and I wondered, where is the goodness and mercy that is supposed to be following me? Why are all these bad things happening? Where is God? Why isn't God doing something about all this stuff? The erroneous thinking that goodness and mercy means that God will give me what I want, including allowing my plans to prevail, lead to anger and disappointment when things don't work out our way.

As I matured, however, I realized that goodness and mercy have indeed followed me throughout every second of my life. The goodness is God always seeking me, no matter how much I tried to run away. The goodness is the mercy of God extending grace to me when I do not deserve it. The goodness is God giving me peace, comfort and strength to survive the barrage of illness, insult, injury, grief and loss, to name a few, and the goodness is the mercy of God forgiving me, renewing me, and making me a new person.

None of us deserve any goodness or mercy, but by the grace of God, we are extended these wonderful gifts each day and we can hold fast to God's promise that we will dwell with God in goodness and mercy for all eternity. Amen



Monday, April 15, 2019

The Narrow Path

Scripture Reading: Matthew 7:13-14

“Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the road is easy that leads to destruction, and there are many who take it. For the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it.”

In early March my husband and I took friends of ours out to the Eben Ice Cave, which is southwest of Munising in the UP. The 1+ mile path across a long field and through the woods to reach the Ice Cave is well used by several hundred people visiting each week.

With the near record amounts of snowfall this year, we guessed that we were walking on top of 4 to 5 feet of snow. As we walked across the long field, we would easily break through the surface and sink more than knee deep in snow. This hurt and it was difficult to get out of the hole as our boots would get stuck at the bottom. Once we reached the woods, the path narrowed to about six inches or less, just enough to put one foot in front of the other. If we stepped off that extremely narrow path, we would once again sink into the deep snow. As we continued our walk, it was obvious that just about everyone walking out there stepped off the narrow path as there were deep holes on either side all along the way. It was a difficult walk to say the least.

As I was walking on this narrow path, today’s Bible passage keep buzzing through my mind and I thought how easy it is to step off that narrow path in our walk with God. We come up with little excuses to do things we know are not the best for our spiritual walk, we fail to do things we are led to do and sometimes deliberately commit sin. These are just a couple common examples of how we easily step off the narrow path. Sometimes we get right back on the path and ask for forgiveness and sometimes, we get farther and farther off the narrow path and truly get stuck in our sinful ways where it becomes more and more difficult to get back.

Thankfully, God never gives up on us and is there constantly reaching out to us with an extended hand of goodness and mercy to get us back on the narrow path that leads to eternity. Amen



Tuesday, April 16, 2019

Adopted

Scripture Reading: Ephesians 1:3-6

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places,

4 just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love.

5 He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will,

6 to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.

My son and his wife adopted a beautiful little girl they named Claire. We waited three years in anticipation for my son and his wife to be selected by a birth mom to become adoptive parents. During those years, we grandparents wondered what it would be like to love another person's baby; we wondered what that child would be like. Of course, we hoped for a perfectly formed healthy baby, although my son and his wife were open to adopting a child with a disability. When Claire came along, she was instantly accepted as our own and we immediately fell in love with her just as we had all our other grandkids, she is ours! What a wonderful precious gift and blessing Claire is to all of us.

We are adopted into God's family and just as we fall in love with our children, our heavenly Father loves us beyond what our human experience of love can ever imagine. We can hold onto the truth that God has made each of us unique, precious and wonderful. God loved us before we were even born; God loved us when Jesus died on the cross for us; God loves us today; God's goodness and mercy is with us every second of every day; God will love us through eternity as we dwell with God in heaven for all eternity. We are God's! Amen.



Wednesday, April 17, 2019

Let Us Rejoice and Be Glad

Scripture Reading: Psalm 118:24

“This is the day that the Lord has made let us rejoice and be glad in it!”

God wants us to rejoice and to enjoy life right now. Some say they don't want to live a do-good life or go to church, walk a Christian walk, however you want to put it, because what fun is that? We are children of God, the creator of the entire universe and we are heirs to eternal life. If we can get excited about that fact in the morning when we rise, then we can look forward to the adventures and surprises that God has for us in each new day. We become free to live

confidently and rejoice in our lives regardless of what a day may bring our way, good or bad. I know full well that we Christians are not immune to the whims of evil persons, sicknesses, natural disasters or other wiles this world may throw at us. But, as God's children and beneficiaries of eternal life we have hope in an eternal future because this world and all its woes is not our true home. We can rejoice in this day with our singing, our prayers, and our fellowship with one another. We can rejoice because we are God's children and hold fast to all God's promises; especially the promise of eternal life in the house of the Lord forever.



Thursday, April 18, 2019

Ancient Words

Scripture Reading: Psalm 19

1 The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.

2 Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge.

3 There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard;

4 yet their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In the heavens he has set a tent for the sun,

5 which comes out like a bridegroom from his wedding canopy, and like a strong man runs its course with joy.

6 Its rising is from the end of the heavens, and its circuit to the end of them; and nothing is hid from its heat.

7 The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the decrees of the Lord are sure, making wise the simple;

8 the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is clear, enlightening the eyes;

9 the fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever; the ordinances of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.

10 More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey, and drippings of the honeycomb.

11 Moreover by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.

12 But who can detect their errors? Clear me from hidden faults.

13 Keep back your servant also from the insolent; do not let them have dominion over me. Then I shall be blameless, and innocent of great transgression.

14 Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.

Words define us – words are spoken to us (or left unsaid) by others in our world. We then repeat those words in silent talk to ourselves, adding to or subtracting from them. Eventually we formulate an image of who we are, accepting and believing the words to be true.

Words are powerful. The little adage we learned as a child, “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can never harm me,” is so wrong. Words can hurt worse than the sharpest stick, they can tear us down, and they can make us cry. Words also can build us up, make us proud, make us happy, make us calm, excite us or make us laugh.

There are some good and wonderful words that we often avoid or neglect because we are busy, some may believe they are irrelevant to us, that they hold very little value that would justify spending much time with them. Yet, the words to which I am referring are the most important words we need to hear. God’s words tell us that we are loved, cherished, precious and beautiful. God’s word tells us that His grace is sufficient to meet all our needs. Taking these few minutes to reflect on God’s words everyday helps us think about the Ancient Words of the Bible that God has preserved for us, which show who God is, teaching us and leading us to eternal life.



Friday, April 19, 2019

Lost Treasures of God

Scripture Reading: Matthew 25:31-46

31 "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory.

32 All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats,

33 and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left.

34 Then the king will say to those at his right hand, "Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world;

35 for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me,

36 I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.'

37 Then the righteous will answer him, "Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink?

38 And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing?

39 And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?'

40 And the king will answer them, "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.'

*41 Then he will say to those at his left hand, "You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels;
42 for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink,
43 I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.'
44 Then they also will answer, "Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?'
45 Then he will answer them, "Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.'
46 And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."*

As a Home Economics teacher, I taught my students about World Hunger and now serve on the Synod's World Hunger Committee. It is a concern to this writer. One of the things I learned through my study is that 25,000 children die EVERY day throughout the world (over 9 million yearly) due to hunger-related causes (that is 225 million in my years of teaching). These were God's perfect creations, just gone; not because there isn't enough food to feed everyone (there is more than enough food to go around), but because we cannot get it to them for a multitude of reasons.

Recently, I was thinking about these lost children. What if one of them was the one God sent us to cure cancer or to effect a lasting peace in their region of the world; what if another was meant to be a great Christian leader that would lead many to Christ; what if one was going to be an important research scientist, or Nobel peace prize winner, another like Mother Theresa, etc. Gone.

God has given us a responsibility to care for the less fortunate, all of whom are God's beloved children. May we think of these precious lives not as less fortunate, but important resources and gifts from God that are a part of our responsibility.



Saturday, April 20, 2019

Alpha and Omega.

Scripture Reading: Genesis 1 and Revelation 21

Recently, I was quilting with a group of women and we had a wonderful, lively and respectful conversation about creationism versus evolution theories and end-time events. There are so many differing views and controversial gaps between the world of science and the Bible; and my goodness, what about the dinosaurs! I am sure that all Christians ponder these questions from time to time. If we say we believe in evolution, many will say we dismiss God's creation and if we say we believe in the six 24-hour-day creation, many will say we ignore the modern facts of science. It oftentimes seems like we Christians are stuck between these two paradigms.

When we step away from the "how" and "when" and look instead to the "who" and "why" questions of creation, perhaps a more common ground can be found in our faith. Genesis 1:1 tells us "who": "In the beginning **God** created the heaven and the earth." When we focus on God our creator, the how and when become unimportant. Throughout the entire Bible there are multitudes of examples that lead us to the "why," such as Isaiah 43:6b-7: "Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the end of the earth, everyone who is called by my name, whom *I created for my glory*, whom I formed and made." We were created for God's glory, which is fully shown and perfected in Christ Jesus.

At one time, all the mysteries in Revelations seemed frightening to me, but when I read Chapter 21, all fear is erased. God wins, God will wipe away all our tears, and we will live in a new order with God forever. How or when that happens is not a worry for Christians because we trust in God's promises of the redeeming power of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. And, we will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Amen

