

**Devotions – June 9-15, 2019**

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**Sunday, June 9, 2019**

Text: Hebrews 13:2

*Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing so some have entertained angels without knowing it.*

Most of us are concerned about the future of our church. We notice dwindling numbers, declining finances, and the absence of young people. We look for ways to attract people, making sure we have a sign on the main street, an updated Facebook or Twitter presence, and even bumper stickers like the one we recently saw saying, “The Episcopal Church Welcomes You.”

We tend to think welcoming means a friendly greeting at the door, making sure newcomers can follow the liturgy, and issuing an invitation to coffee hour. The problem is very few strangers come to check us out these days. So, what to do?

The ELCA and the Episcopal Church, including NGLS, are partners in Faithful Innovations Learning Communities. The purposes are:

- to help us become close to God, each other, and our neighbors by dwelling in God’s Word,
- noticing God at work in our lives and neighborhoods,
- experimenting in engaging with strangers outside our walls, experimenting in new ways of ministry, and
- intentionally reflecting on our experiences.

Put another way, our task is to open the eyes of our hearts to God’s desire to care for those in our community. We are to notice people in particular as Jesus noticed people in particular like Zacchaeus in the tree, the cripple beside the pool, the blind man on the Sabbath whom Jesus healed. We are to become engaged with those particular people, experimenting in ways of reaching out as Jesus did, through reading, praying together, and consulting Acts 16:6-15 for guidance in discerning how we can welcome the strangers in our midst and tend to them as Jesus did.

If you want our church to grow in wisdom and grace, perhaps Faithful Innovations is for you. Contact you pastor or the Synod office to learn more.

Let us pray: *Dear God, thank you for giving us your beautiful world, the particular people we encounter each day, your Word to guide us into the ministry of the future, and leaders willing to experiment in expanding our vision of our calling to “feed your sheep.” Amen.*



**Monday, June 10, 2019**

Text: Matthew 25:34-36, 40

**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; 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, 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. 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.’**

As a follow-up to yesterday’s devotion about the Faithful Innovation Leadership Communities, we met an amazing Canadian couple while attending church near Brownsville, Texas at the U.S.-Mexican border.

Penny was born in England; Bob in Germany. They volunteer weekly to serve a meal to asylum seekers at the border and were distressed and saddened by running out of food. Penny and Bob described the dire need of women and children for clothes, diapers, wipes, hygiene products, shelter, and of course, food. Their compassion was touching; their admiration for those who had walked carrying little ones a thousand or more miles was touching. Perhaps their sensitivity came from their own migration from the countries of their birth to a new land.

Whatever their motivation, it was their faith that emboldened them to act. I thought of Jesus and all the walking he did in his ministry. He lived without a permanent home, travelling on foot from place to place, a migrating itinerant preacher with no means of support. He and his disciples moved about, relying upon the compassion and charity of others for basic needs: food, clothes, new sandals, shelter, just like those tended to by Penny and Bob.

Being moved by what they did, I wondered what I could do to help. I was afraid of being too touched by what I might see if I volunteered to go with them. I was able to buy some infant clothes and diapers which they desperately need. And I am praying that God will give me and our nation the courage to feed the hungry, give water to the thirsty, clothes to those in need, and a place of safety, welcoming even those whom I fear.

Let us pray: *Jesus, let your spirit flow through us that we may be courageous, bold, and true followers of what you ask us to do. Help us trust you, for we know we can depend on you, as you have never failed us. Amen*



**Tuesday, June 11, 2019**

Text: Romans 15:5-7

**May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another, in accordance with Christ Jesus, so that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.**

Being a follower of Jesus isn't easy. It is a challenge to be Christ in the world so that in seeing us, others see the glory of God.

Tony Campolo tells about being unable to sleep after a flight through several time zones. So he gets up at 3 a.m. and goes to the nearest open establishment--a bar. Overhearing a conversation between two prostitutes who had just finished their nights' work, he listens as Agnes says that tomorrow is her birthday. Her companion sarcastically replies, "So, what da' ya' want, someone ta throw a pardy for you?" Agnes answers, "I've never had a party."

Tony quietly asks the bartender about having a party for Agnes the next morning. The bartender likes the idea as well as the regulars who, the next morning decorate the bar. Tony brings a cake. As Agnes enters, everyone shouts, "Happy Birthday, Agnes." Being deeply touched, Agnes cries.

When someone suggests cutting the cake, Agnes asks if she can just take it home to admire a while because she's never had one before. She then accepts Tony's offer to pray; she accepts and he prays.

The bartender, realizing that Tony Campolo is a preacher, asks him what church he belongs to. Tony's reply is, "The kind of church that throws birthday parties for whores at 3 a.m." Right away the bartender says, "There ain't no church like that because if there was, I'd join it."

*Let us pray: Awesome God, we turn to you in the mission you have given us: to tell the Good News in unbelievable ways that surprise us and others as your love moves through us into new encounters with the least, the lost, and the broken. Amen.*



**Wednesday, June 12, 2019**

Text: Ephesians 5:1-2

**Therefore, be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.**

When our intensely red-haired granddaughter was 2½ and about that tall, I squatted close to the ground to talk to her face to face. After a few minutes, she did the same thing, bending her knees so that she, too, was close to the ground! She imitated what I had done.

Children learn by watching us, doing what we do. As Christians, we learn to be followers of Jesus by imitating him. Parts of chapters 4 and 5 of Ephesians encourage us to model ourselves after Christ by listing specific ways to talk and act.

We are to speak the truth with our neighbor, be angry but not sin, work so we can give to those in need, say only words of encouragement and support to one another, be kind and tenderhearted, and forgiving. We are to use time wisely, address one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, and to pray at all times.

In writing to the Ephesians and to us, Paul recognizes that there are ways we should behave, and yet there are times we fail to imitate or model ourselves after Jesus. Rather, we dis-grace ourselves and God by what we say and do. Yet God loves us so much that Jesus absorbed all of our dis-graces, our sins, our mistakes into himself. In him, we are fully forgiven, united in love with our risen Lord, completely restored to live as beloved children of God no matter how greatly we grieve God--or the color, thinness or lack of hair!

Let us pray: *Thank you, God for sending Jesus to call us unto yourself so you may live in us, and we may live in you and with others in truth, encouragement, tenderness, forgiveness, and love. Amen.*



**Thursday, June 13, 2019**

Text: Matthew 7:1-2

**Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get.**

Each church year we squirm our way through Lent's period of self-examination toward the even more uncomfortable celebration of Christ's gift of new life to us. Peter Finley Dunne said that a goal of preaching is to "...comfort the afflicted and to afflict the comfortable." If we take the sermons we hear based upon God's Word from Easter through Pentecost to Christ the King (the end of the church year)...if we take all that seriously, the comforting and the afflicting becomes evident.

In listening to our leaders and the readings, we will, at times, be challenged to look at ourselves more closely and to hear ways we could be better Christians. Who among us thanks someone for criticizing us? Not me! We, like Adam, blame others: "The woman you gave me tempted me!" We push away opportunities to grow in the wisdom and grace our spiritual leaders and companions offer us.

And why should we change? Because we did not create ourselves, God did. And God created us with a need for something greater than ourselves. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:1). Because Jesus advised us to take the beam out of our own

eyes before examining the mote (the speck of dust) in another's eye (Matthew 7:3). Because when we look first at our own beams, we begin to see how we are like others. "Let those without sin cast the first stone" (John 8:7). We begin to have compassion for others and love them.

Let us pray: *Gracious Lord, help us accept as gifts the people we criticize and the people who criticize us, the seasons of the church year, our worship and spiritual leaders and most of all, the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Open our hearts; lead us into a new, fuller and more Christ-like life and ministry. Amen.*



**Friday, June 14, 2019**

Text: Psalm 121

**I lift up my eyes to the hills –  
From where will my help come?  
My help comes from the LORD,  
Who made heaven and earth.  
He will not let your foot be moved;  
He who keeps you will not slumber.  
He who keeps Israel  
Will neither slumber nor sleep.  
The LORD is your keeper;  
The LORD is your shade at your right hand.  
The sun shall not strike you by day,  
Nor the moon by night.  
The LORD will keep you from all evil;  
He will keep your life.  
The LORD will keep your going out and your coming in  
From this time on and forevermore.**

Around the Northern Great Lakes Synod, a keeper is a fish big enough to stay in the boat or ... Quarterback Aaron Rodgers faking a handoff and running with the ball. In contrast, this psalm tells us we are big enough in God's eyes to never be thrown back or faked and run from. God is always there for us.

There are many other kinds of keepers aside from fish and football plays. There are lighthouse keepers who maintain a continuous light to guide sailors; beekeepers watch a hive; zookeepers see that animals are safe. Inn and hotel keepers provide hospitality and protected shelter. Password keepers protect from security breaches.

God does all these things and more. First comes a question: Where does our help come from? Then the answer appears--from the Lord who made heaven and earth. It is God upon whom we can rely with confidence, the One who created us and all that is.

The rest of the psalm reminds us that just as lighthouse keepers provided guidance to sailors, God is there to guide us. Like beekeepers, God watches over us constantly, never sleeping. Like zookeepers, God will not let “the sun strike us by day nor the moon by night.” We are safe in God’s presence. Like inn or hotel keepers, God keeps us secure while we sleep. Like a password keeper, God protects us from harm.

*Let us pray: Ever Faithful One, we praise you for your constant vigil, your protection, your carefulness and assurance of keeping our lives. Amen.*



**Saturday, June 15, 2019**

Text: Psalm 139:1-10

**O Lord, you have searched me and known me;  
You know when I sit down and when I rise up;  
You discern my thoughts from far away.  
You search out my path and my lying down,  
and are acquainted with all my ways.  
Even before a word is on my tongue,  
O Lord, you know it completely.  
You hem me in, behind and before  
and lay your hand upon me.  
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;  
it is so high I cannot attain it.**

**Where can I go from your spirit?  
Or where can I flee from your presence?  
If I ascend to heaven, you are there;  
If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.  
If I rise on the wings of dawn, if I settle on  
the far side of the sea,  
even there your hand will guide me,  
your right hand will hold me fast.**

Here the psalmist tells us of God’s eternal, ubiquitous presence. There is no geographical escape from God. No wall we build keeps God away. Even sitting in the back of the worship space doesn’t take us away from God’s presence. God knows us from the moment of our conception to our last breath. “It was you who formed my inmost parts” (verse 13). “I come to the end--I am still with you” (verse 18). What an amazing God who knows our every thought and feeling and is with us all of our days. “Even before a word is on my tongue, O Lord, you know it completely” (verse 4b).

When we are loving, indifferent, compassionate, judgmental, peaceful, antagonistic, argumentative, kindly, joyful, sorrowful, alone or with others, at work or play, God is there. God never abandons us no matter where we are or how we are. God's eternal, ubiquitous presence never lets us go. We are always in good company.

Let us pray: *Eternal God, thank you for being with us each day of our lives, when we awake, through the day, when we retire at night, and while we rest, then to rise and meet you again. How great you are, and how grateful we are for your constant presence. Amen.*

