

Devotions – October 6-12, 2019

By Karen Carter

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Sunday, October 6, 2019

A Wearisome Pharisee

Text: John 15:12

“My command is this: love one another as I have loved you.”

In Emily Bronte’s novel *Wuthering Heights*, a cantankerous man who often quotes Scripture to criticize others is memorably described as “the most wearisome, self-righteous Pharisee that ever ransacked a Bible to rake (apply) the promises to himself and fling the curses to his neighbors.”

It’s a peculiar line, and it may even bring particular people to mind. But aren’t we all a bit like this: prone to condemn the failures of others while excusing our own? In Scripture, some people amazingly did the exact opposite: they were willing to give up God’s promises for them and even be cursed if it would save others. Consider Moses, who said he’d rather be blotted out of God’s book than to see the Israelites unforgiven. Or Paul, who said he’d choose to be “cut off from Christ” if it meant his people would find him.

As self-righteous as we naturally are, Scripture highlights those who love others more than themselves. Ultimately, such love points to Jesus: “Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.” Even before we knew him, Jesus loved us “to the end”, choosing death to give us life.

Now we are invited into the family of God to love and to be loved like this. And, as we pour into others Christ’s unimaginable love, the world will catch glimpses of him.

Let us pray: *Lord, thank you for showing us what it means to love. Help us to love like you do. Amen.*



Monday, October 7, 2019

Twinkle

Text: Philippians 2:15-16

Shine among them like stars in the sky as you hold firmly to the word of life.

“Twinkle, twinkle, little star” is an English lullaby. Its lyrics, originally a poem by Jane Taylor, capture the wonders of God’s creation where stars “hang up above the world so high.” In the rarely-published later stanzas, the star acts as a guide: “As your bright and tiny spark lights the traveler in the dark.”

In Philippians, Paul challenges believers in Philippi (and us) to be blameless and pure as they shine “like stars in the sky,” while offering the good news of the Gospel to all around them. We wonder how we can shine like stars. We often feel inadequate and struggle to think our “light” is bright enough to make a difference. But stars don’t try to be stars. They just are. Light changes our world, and it changes us. God brought light into our world and through Jesus, God brings spiritual light into our lives.

We who have God’s light in us are to shine in such a way that those around us see light and are drawn to its source. As effortlessly as a star hanging in the night sky, our light makes a difference because of what it is: light! When we simply shine, we follow Paul’s directive to “hold firmly to the word of life” in a world in deep darkness, and we draw others to the source of our hope: Jesus.

Let us pray: *Dear God, may your light shine out of the very cracks of our beings as we hold the word of life to others. Amen.*



Tuesday, October 8, 2019

Far More Than Words

Text: Romans 8:23-26

“Hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently. In the same way the Spirit helps us in our weakness.”

The story is told that during a dedication ceremony in which a Bible translated into a local African language was presented, the area chief was given his own copy. In appreciation, he lifted the Bible to the skies and exclaimed, “Now we know that God understands our language.”

No matter our language, our Heavenly Father understands it. But there are times we feel unable to express our deepest longings to him. The apostle Paul encourages us to pray, regardless of how we feel. Paul speaks of our suffering world and our own pain. “The whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth,” and he compares that to the Holy Spirit’s work on our behalf. “The Spirit helps us in our weakness,” he writes. “We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans.”

God's Holy Spirit knows us so intimately that he knows our longings, our heart language, and our unspoken words. He helps us in our communication with God. His Spirit draws us to be transformed into the image of God the Son.

Our Heavenly Father understands our language and speaks to us through his word. When we think our prayers are weak or too short, his Holy Spirit helps us by speaking through us to the Father. He yearns for us to speak with him in prayer.

Let us pray: *Thank you, Lord, for understanding my language and innermost longings. When my prayers are weak or dry, bear me up through Your Spirit. Amen.*



Wednesday, October 9, 2019

Burdens Carried

Text: I Peter 2:22-24

“They called him every name in the book, and he said nothing back. He suffered in silence, content to let God set things right. He used his servant body to carry our sins to the cross, so we could be free of sin, free to live the right way. His wounds became your healing.”
(The Message)

It is not unusual for utility bills to be surprisingly high. Kieran Healy of North Carolina received a water bill that would make your heart stop: the notification said she owed 100 million dollars! Confident that he had not used that much water in the past month, Healy jokingly asked if he could pay the bill in installments.

Owing a 100 million dollar debt would be an enormous burden, but that pales in comparison to the real and immeasurable burden sin causes us to carry. Trying to carry the load of sin and consequences of our own sins ultimately leaves us tired and riddled with guilt and shame. The truth is we are incapable of carrying this load.

We were never meant to. As Peter reminded believers, only Jesus, the sinless Son of God, could (and did) carry the heavy burden of sin and its weighty consequences. In His death on the cross, Jesus took our wrongdoings and feelings on Himself and offered His forgiveness. Because He carried our burdens, we don't have to suffer the punishment we truly deserve.

Instead of living in fear, guilt, or shame, the empty way of life handed down to us, we can live a new life of love and freedom.

Let us pray: *Lord, sometimes my guilt and shame can feel so heavy. Help me to release my past and its pain to you and know your peace; You have carried it already and set me free. Amen.*



Thursday, October 10, 2019

Terrible and Beautiful Things

Text: Psalm 57:8

“Awake, my soul! Awake, harp and lyre. I will awaken the dawn.”

Fear has often left me frozen. We know all the reasons to be afraid – all that has hurt us in the past, all that could easily do so again: I just can’t do it; I’m not smart enough or brave enough to handle being hurt by that again.

I am fascinated by how author Frederik Buechner describes God’s grace: “...like a gentle voice that says, ‘here is the world. Terrible and beautiful things will happen. Don’t be afraid; I am with you.’”

Terrible things will happen. In our world, hurting people hurt other people. Like the Psalmist David, we carry around our own stories of when evil surrounded us...when like “ravenous beasts” others wounded us. And so we grieve; we freeze; we cry out.

But, because God is with us, beautiful things can (and do) happen. As we run to him with our hurts and fears, we find ourselves carried by a love far greater than anyone’s power to harm us, a love so deep it fills the skies. Even when disaster rages around us, his love is a solid refuge where our hearts find healing and safety. One day we will find ourselves awakening to renewed courage, ready to greet the new day with a song of his faithfulness.

Let us pray: *Dear Jesus, thank you for holding us and healing us with your endless love. Help us to find in your love the courage to follow you and share his love with those around us. Amen.*



Friday, October 11, 2019

Bring on Your Boats!

Text: Proverbs 3:27

“Never walk away from someone who deserves help; your hand is God’s hand for that person.” (The Message)

Hurricane Harvey brought catastrophic flooding to eastern Texas in 2017. The onslaught of rain stranded thousands of people in their homes, unable to escape the floodwaters. In what was dubbed the “Texas Navy,” countless private citizens brought boats from other parts of the state and the nation to help evacuate stranded people.

The actions of these valiant, generous men and women call to mind the encouragement from Proverbs 3:27, which instructs us to help others whenever we are able. They had the power to act on behalf of those in great need by bringing their boats. And so they did. Their actions demonstrated a willingness to use whatever resources at their disposal to help others.

We may not always feel adequate for the task at hand; often we may feel paralyzed by thinking we don’t have the skills, experience, resources, or time to help others. In such instances, we tend to sideline ourselves, discounting what we do have that can help someone else. The Texas Navy could not stop the floodwaters; nor could they legislate government aid. But they used what they had within their power – their boats - to come alongside the deep needs of their fellow man. May we all bring our “boats” – whatever they may be – to take the people in our paths to higher ground.

Let us pray: *Lord, all I have is yours. Help me to always use what you have given me to help others. Amen.*



Saturday, October 12, 2019

Treasure in a Pumpkin

Text: II Corinthians 4:7

“We have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.”

As a young mother, I tried to document my son’s first four years of life. Each month I took photographs of him to show how he had changed and grown. In one of my very favorite pictures, he was gleefully sitting in the belly of a huge hollowed-out pumpkin I’d purchased from a local farmer. There he sat: the joy of my heart, contained in an over-grown squash. The pumpkin itself would wither and decay with a few weeks, but my son continued to grow and to thrive.

The way Paul describes knowing the truth of who Jesus is reminds me of that photo. He likens the knowledge of Jesus in our heart stored in a clay pot. Remembering what Jesus did for us gives us courage and strength to persevere through struggles, in spite of being “hard-pressed on every side.” Because of God’s power in our lives, when we are “struck down, but not destroyed,” we reveal the power of Jesus in our lives.

Like the pumpkin that withered, we may feel at times the wear and tear of our trials. But the joy of Jesus in us can continue to grow in spite of challenges. Our knowledge of him--his powerful work in our lives--is that treasure stored in our frail clay bodies. We can thrive in the face of hardships because of his power at work within us.

Let us pray: *Father, thank you for putting your Word in my heart and life, no matter what comes. Help others see you in my life and come to know you, too.*

