

Devotions – November 17-23, 2019

By Donna Ahlberg

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Sunday November 17, 2019

Text: Luke 21:28

“Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”

Jesus is nearing his time of trial. He is preparing his disciples for an impending and distressing future when he will no longer be here. Though his human life will cease, Jesus will live on as the ruler of this world, as the manifestation of the kingdom of God. His comments to the disciples in Luke 21 offer signs and observations about what to expect upon his return, and how to prepare for the inevitable and wondrous reclamation of all that is his.

Last month, I went to bed one night with a slight dizziness. By Sunday morning, I experienced full blown vertigo [“full blown” because I can’t imagine it being any worse; though perhaps it could be]. As I tried to sit up in bed, I fell backward onto the mattress. Once on my feet, I had to hold the walls and countertops to avoid spilling onto the floor. For the next 24 hours, there I lay holding a helpless fetal position, head flat on the bed. For to lift my head, even for a sip of water, caused reflexive heaving and nauseating spinning. I couldn’t stand up and raise my head.

Yet Jesus exhorts his disciples to do just that – stand up and raise your head because your redemption is drawing near. Faith recognizes just how hard this can be when spinning fearfully out of control. But, be patient. This too shall pass. Just as vertigo mysteriously came, it mysteriously went, leaving me to wonder why it happened at all. Perhaps I had to experience something so dreadful in order to embrace life and experience how wonderful redemption is.

Let Us Pray: *Redemptive Lord and Savior, we pray today for healing for all those who experience vertigo, and for God’s peace to all those whose lives are spinning out of control. Amen.*



Monday November 18, 2019

Text: Ephesians 4:26

“Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger”

In Paul's letter to the Ephesians, this verse appears in a section called Rules for the New Life, referring to the new life offered to those who believe in Jesus Christ. It is interesting that one of the rules is "be angry." We don't often get any encouragement for our anger, and often are discouraged for even feeling it. In my childhood, perhaps in yours, adults often admonished us kids, "Don't be angry." But this sends the wrong message about anger, because anger can be a beacon that signals the need for justice and change.

For anger itself isn't really the problem, though expressing it can be if it separates us from the love of God. When anger, a feeling, escalates into violence, a behavior, we have cut ourselves off from healthy expression. Healthy anger should be an expression of indignant God righteousness, never our own self-righteousness.

So, let's be angry! The many injustices in our world deserve our anger and cries for justice. Though change seems to travel as slowly as poured molasses. Taste your anger and recognize its desire, as a harbinger for positive change in bringing the kingdom of God to earth as it is in heaven. Then work for it! Do something to be part of the solution. To do nothing is to let the sun go down on it.

Let Us Pray: *Teach us, Lord, to recognize our anger as a beacon for changing the injustices of the world; open us up to treat people with mercy and compassion as we strive for justice. Amen.*



Tuesday November 19, 2019

Text: Psalm 141:2

"Let my prayer be counted as incense before you, and the lifting up of my hands as an evening sacrifice."

These words are so beautifully expressed in the words and music of Marty Haugen in the Holden Evening Prayer – "Let my prayer rise up like incense before you; the lifting up of my hands as an offering to you." I cannot read the words without hearing the music. A gesture so simple as the lifting up of hands as a calling out to God.

I hold in my mind the image of a praying woman, a dear friend of mine, whom I watched in church during the prayers of the people one Sunday. Standing in a pew, arms arisen skyward, palms up, feet rooted firmly to the floor; how similar to a deciduous tree that has lost her leaves, swaying in a late autumn wind. Branches like arms extend upward and outward, a skeletal frame reaching up to the sky. Do trees also exist as vessels of prayer?

God is both within us and around us; between us and beyond. Amongst trees as surely as people. If we are to discover God, it is through our intentionality. God is always here.

Let Us Pray: *Lord, we give thanks for the trees that give us oxygen and incense, for the sweet music that arises in prayer from the lifting up of our hearts. Amen.*



Wednesday November 20, 2019

Text: Matthew 24:5

“For many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am the Messiah!’ and they will lead many astray.”

In these times of fake news and conflicting motives, how do we know what to believe anymore? Politicians have us clamoring for their attention. The news media no longer simply relays facts but delivers us opinion – *how to think about those facts*. It’s confusing to know who is right and who is not. We can be led astray for nefarious reasons or merely in want of a vote. It is easy to be led astray, and many people will be, even Jesus has said so.

In the world, we will encounter many different opinions. In matters of faith, how do we know who to believe? In a recent Bible study gathering, we read from 1 John 4 on discerning the spirits. “By this you know the Spirit of God: for every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God.” The writer of 1 John has made it a pretty simple litmus test. Jesus Christ is the Messiah. He is the testing of the waters of faith.

Let Us Pray: *Gracious God, help us in our troubled world and in times of trial to discern truth from error. Amen.*



Thursday November 21, 2019

Text: Psalm 46:10

“Be still, and know that I am God!”

I went to a conference earlier this year on contemplative prayer. Led by a Franciscan priest, 2200 people sat quietly with eyes closed. In a room as expansive as an airport hangar, there was utter silence. After collectively taking a few deep breaths, Father Richard recited these words from Psalm 46: Be still and know that I am God. Be still and know that I am. Be still and know. Be still. Be. The contemplative secret is to learn how to live in the now. Try it now with the words of the psalm, and jot down your own thoughts:

Be still and know that I am God – Music would not exist without the silence between the notes. God is here in the silence within me.

Be still and know that I am – Deep within our being, God is moving at a cellular level. Far above us, God is moving the cosmos. As we breathe in and out, a pulsing rhythm connects us to all that is here.

Be still and know – We act like our knowledge is full and complete; but our knowing is always incomplete. Teach us to be still.

Be still – Sit quietly and breathe; “‘For my thoughts are not your thoughts neither are your ways my ways,’ declares the Lord.”

Be – It is in the moment that we feel the love of God in all that we see, hear, touch and taste.

Let Us Pray: *Lord, help us to be still and know that you are God. Amen.*



Friday November 22, 2019

Text: 1 Peter 1:3-4

“By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that is imperishable ...”

The hope of the resurrection is a waiting to receive an inheritance which cannot be taken away from us. Unlike anything else in this world! As we struggle in times of trial, Peter implores us to stay true to the faith with which we have been called, for there is a glorious outcome ahead. The hope of the resurrection is both the destination and the journey.

Let Us Pray: *Gracious God, thank you for the precious inheritance that awaits us in your arisen son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*



Saturday November 23, 2019

Text: Luke 18:17

“Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.”

Little children are unabashedly open to making eye contact with total strangers, then smiling, or waving and saying “Hi!” as they pass by us in the grocery stores of life. In these small gestures, we have the opportunity to receive the kingdom of God - just like the wee ones do - as they acknowledge our common humanity. They see our human being-ness, our connection with one another. In the spaces between us, there is only love. And those little cart riders know it to be true.

Let Us Pray: *Lord God, you made your kingdom out of love. Let us be as little children, open and honest, gaining in wisdom as the years pass us by. Amen.*

