

Devotions – December 8-14, 2019
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Sunday, December 8, 2019

Text: Isaiah 11:6-7

“The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.”

This week’s reflections will focus on “Relationships in the Light of God’s Love” and how our relationships impact our lives and our lives of faith.

Today, the above passage in Isaiah talks about various animals getting along with one another. Animals that you wouldn’t think could be compatible with each other and somehow able to be with one another. Yet, there seems to be some sort of relationship being built among them.

Perhaps, we can make an analogy... the different animals are the various nations and peoples of the world. Leopards and Goats... Wolves and Lambs... Calves and Lions... etc. all finding ways to be in relationship with one another. In Isaiah’s day, in Jesus’ day, and in our own day, there seems to be little or no way to get along with each other. It would appear we are drifting further apart rather than growing closer and building relationships. We tend to put distance between ourselves and our neighbor. We tend to fear those different from us, or those whom we have differing perspectives of. We even find this within our own families.

God is illustrating in these verses that seemingly opposites can live side by side. The Leopard will lie with Goats... Wolves will rest with Lambs... Calves and Lions will eat with each other... Cows and Bears will share with each other.

Isaiah is describing God’s preferred future to the world. That individual enmity and fear will be restored to harmony and peaceful coexistence. It is God’s desire to restore the close relationship God had with humanity at creation. To see once again the peaceful harmony of the creation in perfect relationship.

This Advent season... let’s spend more time in rejoicing and repairing our relationships with family and neighbor and open our hearts and minds to God’s out pouring of love to all.

Prayer: *Lord, I ask that you open my heart to seeing my neighbor through your eyes. Help me to begin to explore ways of welcoming and building relationships with my neighbor. Amen.*



Monday, December 9, 2019

Text: Psalm 72:1-7

***Give the king your justice, O God,
and your righteousness to a king’s son.***

- ² *May he judge your people with righteousness,
and your poor with justice.*
- ³ *May the mountains yield prosperity for the people,
and the hills, in righteousness.*
- ⁴ *May he defend the cause of the poor of the people,
give deliverance to the needy,
and crush the oppressor.*
- ⁵ *May he live while the sun endures,
and as long as the moon, throughout all generations.*
- ⁶ *May he be like rain that falls on the mown grass,
like showers that water the earth.*
- ⁷ *In his days may righteousness flourish
and peace abound, until the moon is no more.*

Continuing our theme of “Building Relationships,” the Psalmist states in Verse 7 to let the king be fair with everyone and let there be peace. We don’t often experience fairness throughout our lives. Broken relationships often divide and appear to favor the other. But peace and fairness often need each other in a relationship for fairness and peace to succeed. Relationships just don’t happen... you need to work at them if they are to be valued. Only when that work takes place, do we see peace and fairness.

When I’m in the midst of an angry argument with my spouse and the tone worsens, our relationship becomes tenuous, and blame gets slathered all over the place, I have no peace or fairness. It becomes all about winning for the both of us.

The Psalmist proclaims that God is fair, honest, and peaceful and declares we should be as well. That our love for one another needs to supplant the negative emotions we all feel at times and look at our relationships through the lens of God’s love. Perhaps then... we will begin to see the likeness of God within each other.

Prayer: *Lord, help us to be fair with each other today. To seek peace with ourselves and with others. Amen.*



Tuesday, December 10, 2019

Text: Romans 15:5

May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another, in accordance with Christ Jesus,”

Today... let’s look at our relationships we have with our families.

I come from a large family. I have six siblings of which I am the oldest. While I generally have a good relationship with all my siblings, I am closest with one of my sisters, and of course my mother. We all seem to get along and accommodate one another for the most part. Yes... we all have our differing views on life, but overall, I like and love my siblings.

However, my relationship with my father has been strained over the years. I can still hear in my ears, “You’ll never amount to anything” when I was younger. Our relationship over the last 15 – 20 years has improved as we’ve both aged, but it is not what I would call extensive. And... when you couple this with the Christmas time of the year, well, many emotions flow. The expectations that things will be better are often dashed and with it hope as well.

Over the years we’ve both made efforts to mend the brokenness and forgive past grievances, and slowly and patiently, God has mended our relationship. While it’s not perfect, or what I would like it to be, we have peace between each other, and that brings me hope. As Paul states, “God makes us patient and cheerful, and that helps us live at peace.”

God desires us to live at peace within our families. To be in relationship with our families helps us to live in harmony in all relationships. When we have the peace of God in our families... God smiles.

Prayer: God of love and grace, settle our hearts and give us patience to live fully with our families. Give us patience this Advent season to love and be at peace with our families. Amen.



Wednesday, December 11, 2019

Text: Isaiah 35:1-2, 4a

“The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad, the desert shall rejoice and blossom; like the crocus it shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice with joy and singing. The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it, the majesty of Carmel and Sharon. They shall see the glory of the Lord, the majesty of our God...Say to those who are of a fearful heart, “Be strong, do not fear!”

For the next three reflections, our focus will be on our relationship with ourselves. We generally don’t like to spotlight ourselves too much, especially when it comes to our faith. Yes... I know in our head that God loves me and that seems to suffice our need for religious affirmation.

However, we also tend to not treat ourselves all that well when it comes to our religious selves. We often hide from God when we have done things, we’re not so proud of. We might even believe God is angry with us.

Over the years when I’ve done something that threatened my relationship with God, the remorse and shame I placed on myself was often dilapidating. How could I have done what I had done? How in the world is God going to love me? Why would God love me? These questions and others have infiltrated my mind and have caused depression and anxiety in my life. It can be challenging for us to believe God still might love us after committing such acts.

We might feel like we’re living in a dry, dusty, deserted place, yet, God says, “Barren lands will celebrate, and flowers will blossom. Cheer Up... Don’t be Afraid” God is present and loves you, nonetheless. God desires to have a relationship with you. Yes... we might deserve correction and need that from time to time, but God is not going to leave us behind.

We might think or believe loving ourselves is selfish and immature, but God sees it differently. God sees the inherent goodness in each of us and says, “It’s Good!”

Prayer: *God, you know us all too well. Though we frequently beat ourselves up far worse than anyone else, deep down we do understand you love us no matter what we may do. Lord be patient with me today, Love me, so that I may love myself. Amen.*



Thursday, December 12, 2019

Text: James 5:7-10

“Be patient, therefore, beloved, until the coming of the Lord. The farmer waits for the precious crop from the earth, being patient with it until it receives the early and the late rains. You also must be patient. Strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near. Beloved, do not grumble against one another, so that you may not be judged. See, the Judge is standing at the doors! As an example of suffering and patience, beloved, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.”

As we continue to reflect on our relationship with ourselves, James reminds us to be patient with ourselves. James encourages us to think of ourselves as farmers who patiently wait for spring to arrive so the farmer can plant their crops.

Even if you’re not a farmer per se... we can appreciate the impatience they feel as they are eager to plant. I get the same feelings as I wait to get in my garden or the itch to do yardwork. But I can’t imagine the faith a farmer needs to be a farmer. Think about it... you’re dependent upon the weather for your livelihood, really your life. If you are fortunate to get to plant at the right time in the spring, having ample sunlight, growing rains in the summer in just the right amount, then harvest devoid of snow or rain, you might... and I say, “might” have a great harvest. As a farmer... so many things have to go right... if not... well... it can be difficult.

James tells us not to grumble, but trust in the Lord. Easy for him to say... Right! To trust in God is to be in relationship with God. When we are in relationship with God, God provides our need. Our lives may reflect anxiety and challenge, but when we trust in God’s provision, God is present. So, we need to relax... God has our life protected. Jesus says, “Trust Me... Don’t be afraid.”

Prayer: *God, continue to walk with me as I learn to trust in your grace for my life. Help me to be patient with me. Amen.*



Friday, December 13, 2019

Text: Micah 4:10

“Writhe and groan, O daughter Zion, like a woman in labor; for now you shall go forth from the city and camp in the open country; you shall go to Babylon. There you shall be rescued, there the Lord will redeem you from the hands of your enemies.”

To close out this extended reflection on our relationship with ourselves I must ask a question; Where is our hope? Over the past couple of days, we've seen hope in God's creation of humanity as good. We have seen hope in our trust of God's grace. But... is this enough?

God says through Micah, "I will redeem you." It would appear for us to have a legitimate relationship with ourselves, we need not only to be rescued, but to receive an all-out redemption of our lives. A redemption that sets us free from the struggles of life is what we would prefer.

If we are persons of faith, we believe and experience redemption in Christ. The Apostle Paul describes this as Christ sacrificing his life on a cross to rescue and free us... or as an act of redemption (Ephesians 1:7).

To be redeemed means we ourselves come before God no matter where we find ourselves, what we've done, or who've we've become. God will love us nonetheless because of Jesus Christ on the cross. Of course, we believe this, but do we really? Do we really believe God loves us that much? I hope so! The cross presents us with the everlasting mark of redemption in our relationship with God. That God loved us so much that God sent God's Son to make that love known. When we commit to a relationship with God, God smiles and opens wide God embrace of love and grace to us.

Prayer: *We give thanks, Lord God, for the relationship we have with you. Cover me with your undeserved grace and walk with me on this journey of faith. Amen.*



Saturday December 14, 2019

Text: Matthew 1:20-23

“But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, ‘Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.’ All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: ‘Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel,’ which means, ‘God is with us.’”

We conclude our reflection today on “Building Relationships in the Light of God’s Love.”

In the prolog of John’s gospel, John writes, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... the Word became flesh and lived among us” (John 1:1, 14a). Matthew says it like this: “A virgin will give birth and he will be called Emmanuel,” meaning “God with us Matthew 1:23).

Relationships are started by and with God in an effort to be shared and lived out with all things. A relationship with God is cradled in love and grace. This relationship is meant to be lived out and shared in a physical way. When I share God’s love with you, you are able to share the same relationship of love with others. Amena Brown in her poetry titled *The Spoken Word* shares this relationship like this: “The Word became human, and moved into the neighborhood.” Our human relationship with God is meant to be real and raw, authentic and intimate, to bring hope to our lives. We discover this relationship with God through Jesus... Immanuel... God with us. Jesus is the flesh and blood we cling to as God’s love for us and our neighbor. It is the hope we seek as we journey through life.

This Advent season prepares us to renew our relationship with God as our God seeks to have a relationship with us. To walk with us where we walk. To be in the places we dwell. To journey in the ways we engage and intersect in our community. I encourage you to begin the journey of discovery, maybe for the first time, to a deeper relationship with God. The one who is with us always.

Prayer: *In deep and unshaking belief that you are always with us, God, open our hearts to love you back as you love us more than we could imagine. We give thanks for our relationship with you and commit to deepening that relationship in the coming year. May we learn to love you as deeply as you love us. Amen.*

