

..... Daily Devotions

Devotions – January 5-11, 2020
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Sunday, January 5, 2020

Text: Ephesians 1:3-14

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. ⁷ In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace ⁸ that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and insight ⁹ he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, ¹⁰ as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. ¹¹ In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, ¹² so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory. ¹³ In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; ¹⁴ this is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory.

He chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world! This is the Gospel! This is good news! Some philosophical types worry about losing their freedom when they hear Paul's talk of election. Not me. We know where our freedom takes us, and it is not a pleasant place to be. But God chose me... before any choice I made... before I ever rose... before I ever fell. Our Father chose me and His Son saved me... from myself.

Our Father chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. Not only are we saved from ourselves, we are made holy and blameless before him in love. You and I are clothed in Jesus Christ. We wear the holiness of the Son. What an awesome gift that is, to exchange the rags of my own choices for the holiness of Jesus Christ.

Election, though, is not just for me and you as individuals. The Father comes to gather up all things in His Son Jesus Christ, things in heaven and things on earth. Redemption is for all of creation, not just a person here or there. We were the first to set our hope on Christ. One day we will share that hope with all creation. Then all things will be clothed in the glory and holiness of the Son.

Let us pray: *Father, may we abandon ourselves in trust to you, for you chose us before the world began. Amen.*



Monday, January 6, 2020

Text: Ephesians 3:1-12

3 This is the reason that I Paul am a prisoner for Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles—² for surely you have already heard of the commission of God's grace that was given me for you,³ and how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I wrote above in a few words,⁴ a reading of which will enable you to perceive my understanding of the mystery of Christ.⁵ In former generations this mystery was not made known to humankind, as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit:⁶ that is, the Gentiles have become fellow heirs, members of the same body, and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

⁷ Of this gospel I have become a servant according to the gift of God's grace that was given me by the working of his power.⁸ Although I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given to me to bring to the Gentiles the news of the boundless riches of Christ,⁹ and to make everyone see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things;¹⁰ so that through the church the wisdom of God in its rich variety might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.¹¹ This was in accordance with the eternal purpose that he has carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord,¹² in whom we have access to God in boldness and confidence through faith in him.

Paul was given a grace: to show us the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things, so that through the Church the wisdom of God in its rich variety might now be made known to rulers and authorities... the ones who think they sit in heavenly places. All of creation comes from the wisdom and love and power of our Father. The life that has evolved on this little planet is miraculous and beautiful beyond comprehension. The Church knows the mystery of creation.

It is clear some rulers and authorities do not believe in the mystery of creation. They do not respect people born in other countries. They do not respect the fragility of the ecosystem. They do not respect diverse opinions and they do not respect the truth. The delicate holiness of creation is an offense to our rulers and authorities. But God has revealed to us the mystery of creation in the Scriptures.

God created all things and all things are redeemed in His Son Jesus Christ. Creation isn't something that is to be used and discarded. We and all the earth and all the heavens are being made new in Jesus Christ. What we are now is somehow, mysteriously, a sign of what will come... even if that is unimaginable in the end. The diverse and ever-evolving life of this earth is a sign of a world where life and beauty are overflowing. And this is just the surface of the mystery of creation.

Let us pray: *Father, Creator of the Universe, you have given us creation and promise a new heaven and a new earth. We thank you for the awesome wonder of existence and life-everlasting. Amen.*



Tuesday, January 7, 2020

Text: Ephesians 3:14-21

¹⁴ For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, ¹⁵ from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name. ¹⁶ I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, ¹⁷ and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. ¹⁸ I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, ¹⁹ and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

²⁰ Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, ²¹ to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

Our Father has made us His children by pouring His Spirit into us so that His Son may dwell in our hearts through faith, as we are being rooted and grounded in love. And that love is how we know we are being healed. We don't have a mere belief in historical events, the way the demons do, according to the letter of James, who hear the truth and tremble. The Spirit filled your heart with faith in Jesus Christ. The love that overflows from your heart of faith is the healing power of grace. And now you are being rooted and grounded in love. Your life is rooted in the very life of God, the one who is Living Love.

I don't know much of anything, as we all learn along the way. But Paul's prayer that we comprehend the breadth and length and height and depth of things is not a wasted prayer. He doesn't pray that we attain wisdom or knowledge of business or computers or even of science or theology. He prays that we have the power to comprehend and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge. That is an awe-inspiring prospect. That love is the only wisdom I know of.

God is love and love is the life of God. Now that we are rooted in the wisdom that is the love of Jesus Christ, we share in the life of God. The Eastern Orthodox Christians call this part of our salvation *theosis*, the process of becoming God. We are members of the Body of Christ, God the Son, and we share in His life. What freedom, to be set free from what we made of ourselves and be lifted up into the life of Jesus Christ!

Let us pray: *Jesus, you became human to lift us up into the life of God, Father and Son and Holy Spirit. Hold us close to you so that we can share this life with all our sisters and brothers. Amen.*



Wednesday, January 8, 2020

Text: Ephesians 4:7, 11-16

⁷ But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift.

¹¹ The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, ¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ¹³ until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ. ¹⁴ We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming. ¹⁵ But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, ¹⁶ from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love.

Not one of us is left out. Each of us is chosen and gifted by Jesus Christ. What is your gift? What is your calling? They go hand-in-hand. The Spirit pours out gifts into each of us to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ. It is the Christian, every Christian, who is called to build up the body of Christ, each in her own way, with her own gift, according to her own calling.

Maybe it is not clear what your gift or calling is for you. These things are, I believe, not delivered by visions and dreams. Our gifts and our calling are a part of who we are. My gifts are discovered organically through the accidents of life. Those accidents, of course, are, in fact, grace upon grace, gift upon gift. What have you discovered about yourself through the accidents of life? These are signs of God's gifts and God's calling.

It could be a little clearer though, right? What we are called to seems to carry a lot of weight. It gives us meaning. It adds a layer to life that makes life a joyful adventure. So we want to hear where we are called. Besides reading the signs in our lives, our Father has given us each other. Your deepest, most trusted relationships... God speaks in those most clearly. What those people who care for you see in you, God sees with even more clarity. What those people love in you, God has put in you for you to share with the Body of Christ.

Let us pray: *Spirit, you move in us by love, binding us with friends and family in the image of God, who is Father and Son and Holy Spirit. Speak to us in the people we hold dear. Help us to see through them the gifts you have given us to share with your people. Amen.*



Thursday, January 9, 2020

Text: Acts 9:1-9

***9** Meanwhile Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest ² and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any who belonged to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. ³ Now*

as he was going along and approaching Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. ⁴ He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" ⁵ He asked, "Who are you, Lord?" The reply came, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. ⁶ But get up and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do." ⁷ The men who were traveling with him stood speechless because they heard the voice but saw no one. ⁸ Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing; so they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. ⁹ For three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

Some of us seem to have it figured out from the beginning. And then there are people like me... and you, right? We think we have a pretty good grasp on the way things are and the way they should be. There is a danger of becoming Saul. We fume... some of us about faith, but also about taxes or immigrants or patriotism. When we let our views grow into intolerance, Jesus asks us, "Why do you persecute me?"

I don't know how many times I have been knocked to the ground by the blinding light. It will probably happen again. Saul is not the exception but the rule. Saul reflected on who he was and, as Paul, wrote, "I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate." Our sin drags us down. We can't escape our nature. But Jesus came not for the righteous but sinners.

Most of us become Saul at some point. Let this time, knocked to the ground and blind, let it be the time the scales fall from my eyes. While I am blinded, let me find guides who will lead me to the Church of Jesus Christ. Let me be fed only by the Scriptures and the witness of my sisters and brothers in Christ. Let me see again. Let me bring life and freedom to the world.

Let us pray: *Jesus, open my eyes to see you in my sisters and brothers. Give me the grace to love them beyond what I can imagine. Amen.*



Friday, January 10, 2020

Text: Acts 9:10-19

¹⁰ Now there was a disciple in Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias." He answered, "Here I am, Lord." ¹¹ The Lord said to him, "Get up and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul. At this moment he is praying, ¹² and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight." ¹³ But Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints in Jerusalem; ¹⁴ and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who invoke your name." ¹⁵ But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is an instrument whom I have chosen to bring my name before Gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel; ¹⁶ I myself will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name." ¹⁷ So Ananias went and entered the house. He laid

his hands on Saul and said, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on your way here, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.”¹⁸ And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and his sight was restored. Then he got up and was baptized,¹⁹ and after taking some food, he regained his strength.

Baptism. What an awesome gift it is. We are washed clean and hold the promise of new life every day of our lives. For Brother Saul, his baptism was a momentous change in his life. In a matter of days, Saul was changed from a man breathing threats against Christians to a baptized brother of Ananias. Can you imagine the lightness of Saul’s heart as the water washed over him? No wonder he became the Apostle of faith and grace.

Each of us, every sister and brother in Christ, is baptized into the body of Christ. Jesus told Ananias: “...[Saul] is an instrument whom I have chosen to bring my name before Gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel...” What is true for Saul is true for you and me. We are instruments chosen for the work of God in the world. Christians are not the only fruits. We are the first fruits. We are called to go out and plant seeds for the coming harvest. We are the instruments God uses to prepare the world for the new creation.

Can you plant the seeds of faith? You are baptized because you were chosen from the foundation of the world. You have nothing to do. The Father will move you by your heart through the faith planted in you by the Spirit of Jesus Christ. Abandon yourself to the faith the Spirit has given you. There is nothing else to do. You are an instrument in the hand of God.

Let us pray: *Jesus, move us by your Spirit. Make us gifts for your people. Amen.*



Saturday, January 11, 2020

Text: Acts 9:19-31

For several days he was with the disciples in Damascus,²⁰ and immediately he began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, “He is the Son of God.”²¹ All who heard him were amazed and said, “Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem among those who invoked this name? And has he not come here for the purpose of bringing them bound before the chief priests?”²² Saul became increasingly more powerful and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Messiah.

²³ After some time had passed, the Jews plotted to kill him,²⁴ but their plot became known to Saul. They were watching the gates day and night so that they might kill him;²⁵ but his disciples took him by night and let him down through an opening in the wall, lowering him in a basket.

²⁶ When he had come to Jerusalem, he attempted to join the disciples; and they were all afraid of him, for they did not believe that he was a disciple.²⁷ But Barnabas took him, brought him

to the apostles, and described for them how on the road he had seen the Lord, who had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had spoken boldly in the name of Jesus. ²⁸ So he went in and out among them in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord. ²⁹ He spoke and argued with the Hellenists; but they were attempting to kill him. ³⁰ When the believers learned of it, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus.

³¹ Meanwhile the church throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and was built up. Living in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it increased in numbers.

We are a holy remnant. Or, that is where we seem to be headed. That does not worry me. In the early days of the Church, people in Damascus plotted to kill Paul. And in Jerusalem, Paul had to be sent to Tarsus for his own protection. And still the Church found peace and was built up. No one, these days, wants our heads. People just want to ignore the Church. Hockey and football, trips to camp and breakfast with friends win out over worship and Bible study and communal prayer.

How do we find someone to speak boldly in the name of the Lord? How can we call together the faithful remnant from which a holy people will grow? Barnabas trusted Saul and brought him to the Apostles. Barnabas was touched by the power of Saul's gospel. The word enters our hearts through hearing. Someone needs to speak the Gospel. Who do you know who speaks the Gospel? Who do you know who shows the world "He is the Son of God"?

What about you? You were baptized into Jesus Christ, so you have the Gospel written in your heart. Carrying the Gospel can be intimidating. No one wants to force their faith on others. But, then, that is not where to start. We are a holy remnant. Our mission today is to each other, to our Christian sisters and brothers who have lost touch with the Church. You don't have to knock on doors and convert people. Start with a word of prayer for a friend who lost her mother. Or give a copy of your favorite spiritual author to a sister who hasn't seen a church since confirmation. Or let your neighbor know about the next healing service you are having at your church. Trust someone to carry the Gospel. Trust yourself to carry the Gospel.

Let us pray: *Father, gives us courage and peace within so that we can carry the Gospel of your Son Jesus Christ. Amen.*

