

Devotions – February 16-22, 2020

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Sunday, February 16, 2020

Scripture: John 1:14

“The Word became flesh and lived among us and we have seen his glory, the glory of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth...”

As I spoke with a personal trainer at the YMCA in January, I noticed how jam packed the place was. He smiled and said that every year in January people come to work out religiously for about 3 weeks and then the place gets back to normal. As we sit in the middle of February we can see if we were able to keep our new year’s goals. Maybe we feel a bit like a failure. Studies show that if you want to achieve a goal you need to make it as easy as possible for yourself. So if you are not active at all... don’t plan to run a marathon. Instead, add 10 minutes of walking twice a day and then build on that base. If you set an easy goal you have a 3% likelihood of achieving it. If you write it down your success is more likely and if you tell a friend your success rate increases even more. BUT... if you write it down, tell a friend and invite a friend to do it with you and you check in with one another about your progress your likelihood of success becomes 85%. That’s a huge number.

The Incarnation is about God putting on flesh and taking on gravity and walking with us. It’s no surprise that we are more capable of achieving goals when we enlist our brothers and sisters to walk with us... as God walks with us.

Maybe this year it’s time to set a Spiritual Goal. Make it easy. Do you want to be more generous with your congregation? Set up Simply Giving or another automatic withdrawal from your bank account. This allows you to be intentional and stick with your plan. Do you want to worship more regularly? Ask somebody to sit with you or make plans for brunch afterward so that you are in this together. Start or join a small group where you share your struggles and joys and talk about your faith while praying for one another.

We are never on this journey of life alone because the Word became flesh. Let’s show up in the flesh with and for one another. Let’s live in the gift of the incarnation.

Let us pray: *God in Flesh, you are with us. Remind us of your presence in, with and under everything that we are and everything that we do so that we know that we are never alone. Challenge us to invite others into our personal lives; into our goals and our struggles. Make us see you in the face of others and may they see your face in ours. Amen.*



Monday, February 17, 2020

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 8:5

“...they gave themselves first to the Lord...”

When my grandfather died things were stressful for my mom and her siblings. My grandparents had never talked about a will or death and so no arrangements were made. What would they do with the house? What about the car? Or the special things that had no monetary value but were desired by all because they were priceless? I see this dynamic a lot following the death of a loved one. Families can be divided over money but it's not really the money. Their grief and their desire to hold on to anything they can after losing somebody precious leads them to reach and grab and take.... But the more they get consumed with getting their fair share, the more closed off they become from one another. The irony is that family is the greatest reminder of the one who died.

As a child I used to imagine climbing into the offering plate. Putting my whole self in as an offering to God meant that I would follow him with my whole life. As I've grown in my understanding of the offering plate, I realize that I won't fit in there. BUT, when I give financially, I am climbing into the plate. What I realize is that there is nothing more personal than money/possessions. Offering is an act of worship because it's a way of opening our hand and letting go of something so precious, so valuable, so personal. And when we open our hand, we receive something greater. We receive freedom. Freedom from hoarding, from selfishness, from the power of “mine!” and we become open to the idea that God will care for us. I'm not alone in this life to fend for myself but I am surrounded by God and God's people.

Stewardship Principle: Our giving is done first, as a joyful and faithful response to God's gift of grace in Christ. And, our gifts are joyfully given that the ministries of one's congregation can grow and be vibrant in the proclamation of Christ and God's grace.

As you make commitments with your time and your treasure think about how generous God has been with you. And then respond by giving yourself first to the Lord.

Let us pray: *Jesus, help me to give of myself first to you today and every day. And help me to experience joy and freedom in generosity. Amen.*



Tuesday, February 18, 2020

Scripture: Philippians 1:3-7

“I thank my God every time I remember you, constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now. I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by

the day of Jesus Christ. It is right for me to think this way about all of you, because you hold me in your heart, for all of you share in God's grace with me, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel."

There is a woman in my congregation who prays for me. I know she does because she tells me, but I also know because I feel it. There are some days that I do not know what I am doing. I wonder what God is up to and if I'm in line with his will. I read about how the Church is dying or how Gen Y-ers are leaving the Church and I start to wonder what I'm even doing as a pastor but also as a disciple. What is the point?

And then I remember Helen. I remember that she is praying for me. I remember that God has heard prayers from grandmas and grandpas for thousands of years and that God will continue to hear our prayers. I have no idea what the Church will look like for my grandchildren and maybe it will be very different. But I do know that God will always be listening.

May you be comforted knowing that your prayers are heard. And may we thank God every time we remember our partners in ministry; our brothers and sisters in Christ around the world who share the gospel in hopes of bringing light into a dark world. We are in this together and God in flesh leads the way.

Let us pray: *Light in the Darkness, we give you thanks for the Church and this global community in which we share in ministry together. Keep us praying for one another in gratitude and in hope. May we never forget to put our hope in you. Amen.*



Wednesday, February 19, 2020

Scripture: Matthew 2:16

"When Herod saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, he was infuriated, and he sent and killed all the children in and around Bethlehem who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had learned from the wise men."

Not a very uplifting Scripture selection is it? Yet it's a good reminder of the world that Jesus was born into and the world that we are born into. This helps us identify that when scripture says, "The light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it" (John 1:5), it's important that we identify what "darkness" is. A king with the power to slaughter babies is a reality of this world's darkness. The Christmas season was not that long ago, and I can't help but see that Jesus was born into a dangerous world. God entered humanity as a vulnerable and helpless baby with only a pregnant teenager and her fiancé to protect him.

Last year, over Spring Break, I had the opportunity to travel down to the US/Mexico border with the Samaritans of Tucson. This organization brings water to trails where they believe people are

walking and people are dying. Aware of what was legal and illegal when it comes to helping migrants one thing is clear: It is NEVER illegal to provide humanitarian aid. This week in the desert, seeing evidence of humans including empty water jugs, discarded driver's licenses, clothing, even pesos left behind in gratitude for the food and water... was a powerful reminder that there are people who are fleeing their countries. Maybe they live where there is a corrupt "king" killing children or recruiting them for their militias or gangs. Maybe they live where there is no food and so they flee or they die. Whatever the motivation, the road is long and hard and there is no welcome when they arrive.

King Herod was a great builder but he was also a very insecure tyrant of a king. It was said it was better to be a pig in his court than a member of his family. He had heirs killed and even upon his deathbed he asked that all the nobles also be killed to make sure that there was great weeping upon his death. *(That request was not carried out.)*

God enters a world that is full of corrupt and power-hungry leaders. A world that puts value on some human life but not others. A world that caters to the rich and de-humanizes the poor. And yet, God becomes human. God takes on all the risks of humanity to live among us and bring salvation to all of the world. Here is the thing... Jesus survives his infancy but 30 some years later he is executed on a cross. God isn't sheltered from the pain and grief of life but instead is exposed to all the gory and painful realities of this world. And it was all worth it. Because in doing so, God won the greatest battle. God conquered death forever. As you walk through this life, keep your eyes open to God's presence among those the world doesn't favor, but God does. Keep your heart open to Jesus' presence in with and under all that you experience. And listen to the Holy Spirit who lives in you and draws you closer to God and God's beloved people.

Let us pray: *Thank you, God, for putting on flesh and living among us. Remind us that the world's values are not yours and soften our hearts to have love for the poor and the refugee--as you do. Amen.*



Thursday, February 20, 2020

Scripture: Psalm 119: 1-2

“Happy are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the land. Happy are those who keep his decrees, who seek him with their whole heart...”

Everybody wants to be “happy” and it makes me want to barf. Signs read, “Do what makes you happy” and “Don’t worry, be happy” and “Follow your happy”. I have no idea what these signs are talking about. If “happy” is equated with pleasure, we are sure to become gluttons of some kind. If “happy” is equated with a feeling, we are likely to be unsatisfied no matter how much we accomplish.

The Psalmist writes that happiness comes from being with God...those who seek him with their whole heart. In baptism we are made children of God and there is no tearing us away from that promise. We are forever connected to the maker and owner of the world and we are inheritors of all that God is and all that God can give. It's a powerful promise.

May you seek an intimacy with God and God's creation (*including the humans*) through worship and community. That is how we live with purpose and where we live out our calling. Loving God is always about worship and loving our neighbor as ourselves is about service and community.

A bag of chips or a scoop of ice cream may offer a fleeting feeling of happiness. A new purse or shoes may offer some instant gratification. A promotion at work or a certificate of achievement may reward our ego... BUT TRUE HAPPINESS and GREAT JOY, is given to us through our relationship with Jesus Christ and a life lived following him.

Let us pray: *Thank you, God, for calling us your children and for sitting with us through our celebrations and our failures. Draw us close to you in all things where we may see your love for us is infinite and may that bring us joy and true happiness. Amen.*



Friday, February 21, 2020

Scripture: Ecclesiastes 4:9-11

“Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up the other; but woe to one who is alone and falls and does not have another to help. Again, if two lie together they keep warm; but how can one keep warm alone?”

When I was in 6th grade we moved to a new town and a new school in October. So I was the new kid. The first day, Coryn asked me, “I’ll play with you today.” I sort of thought that was a weird question but at the say time I was so grateful to have somebody to be with since I didn’t know anybody. I went home feeling really good about this new school. My second day of school Coryn’s best friend, Rachel, was back from being sick and so Coryn didn’t ask me to play with her. Nobody did.

We live in a culture that tells us that we are to be independent and achieve things on our own. But we were created by a God who values community. We are baptized into the body of Christ. It’s not for our personal salvation as much as it is about belonging to one another. “Two are better than one...” In Scripture we often read the word “you” to be singular but it’s more often than not a plural you (like y’all). We are to live together, to look out for each other and to care about one another. It’s a gift from God.

I once heard somebody say that the un-holy trinity was: Me, Myself & I. It's so true. When we are focused on the un-holy trinity, we lose sight of the world around us and the community we are part of. It's pretty isolating to be the new kid in 6th grade. It's also pretty isolating to walk into a church facility and try to figure out why people do what they do and where to fit in. As the Body of Christ, we belong to one another. I am reminded of an old Girl Scouts song lyric, "Make new friends but keep the old. One is silver and the other is gold." Be sure to be open to the new person that God has brought into your congregation, your workplace, your life. Because two are better than one.

Let us pray: *God, I give you thanks for walking along side of us and for giving us a community to walk with. Lord, help us to include and invite others to walk in community and to know you more. Give us patience and time so that you can grow us, shape us and empower us as disciples of Christ. Amen.*



Saturday, February 22, 2020

Scripture: Deuteronomy 11:20-21a

"You shall put these words of mine in your heart and soul, and you shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and fix them as an emblem on your forehead. Teach them to your children, talking about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. Write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates so that your days and the days of your children may be multiplied..."

There are studies out right now talking about the benefits of grandparents living close to their grandchildren. I believe the documentation states that grandparents live longer and that the benefits to children are numerous. This doesn't surprise me at all. Spending time across the generations is as ancient and healthy as eating one ingredient foods (raspberries, nuts...). It just makes sense.

There was a time when it was believed that children need to be separated to spend time with their peers while adults need time with adults. Sure, there is truth in that. But here is the thing: the Church is the last community where you will find newborn babies and 100 year old's. There is no other place/community that welcomes you for your entire life from the cradle to the grave. These studies are just reminding us of how God designed community to be: ALL AGES. A widower, after burying his wife, was marking the days: Sunday was for worship, Monday was a men's coffee group, Tuesday was garbage day... etc. Then one Sunday morning a three-year old crawled up into his pew. The parents were a little nervous because Sarah sat right next to John and by the sermon-time she had fallen asleep in his lap. The parents were embarrassed until they saw one tear rolling down his cheek and a smile he couldn't hide. The friendship grew over time and John and Sarah looked forward to seeing each other in worship. When she was married, John sat in the row with her other grandparents.

The story, as John tells it, highlights that after his wife died, he no longer received hugs or any kind of human touch beyond a handshake. He didn't even notice he needed it until Sarah started to hold his hand and jump up into his arms. He felt more human, more alive, and loved. And little Sarah... she just wanted somebody to smile at her and care for her. And Sarah's parents... well, they welcomed all the help they could get.

God designed a community for all ages because God knows that we need to hear laughter of children and warmth of those who have some experience with life. May you appreciate all generations and the gifts God has given them and may you seek out relationships with people of all ages in your faith community.

Let us pray: *God, you are the same today, tomorrow and forever. Remind us that you are the God of all generations and help us to connect with your precious ones of all ages. Amen.*

