

Devotions – August 16-22, 2020
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Prayers for a Centered-Self During Times of Uncertainty

Sunday, August 16, 2020

Text: John 3:16- 18

“This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.”

I had a conversation recently that I must admit didn't feel that new. A woman from the community was talking to me about another person who had been quite cruel to her. Mostly it revolved around gossip and spreading false rumors. She leaned in then and whispered, “And wouldn't you believe it this woman.... this woman is a Christian.”

You've experienced this too I'd imagine. Someone who professes the Christian faith acting in ways far from what Jesus would expect of us. You may have even been this person once or twice. I know I certainly have. That's what sinner and saint is all about after all. However, an excellent way to cut down on this hypocrisy we are all prone to is to keep ourselves in a space of “action and truth”. We do this by holding prayer close, reading devotionals just like you are right now, practicing breathing exercises, reading the Bible with others, or going for a walk in the woods. We strive to continue to feed our spiritual path. So often our hypocrisy or our hurting of others comes when we are hurting ourselves and feeling distant from God. To keep spiritually healthy allows us to be open to the world and if we are open, we will see the brothers and sisters around us who are hurting and be able to take action.

Just for today: I will remember that God loves me no matter what I do. I will rest in this supportive love so that I can refrain from quick judgment and be open to life's experiences.



Monday, August 17, 2020

Text: Luke: 12:1-3

“Meanwhile, when the crowd gathered by the thousands, so that they trampled on one another, he began to speak first to his disciples, “Beware of the yeast of the Pharisees, that is, their hypocrisy. Nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will

not become known. Therefore whatever you have said in the dark will be heard in the light, and what you have whispered behind closed doors will be proclaimed from the housetops.”

One of the things about Jesus’ words that will always enthrall me is that they have so many levels. They shine the light of truth on our individual experiences, our community, and the world. Likewise, we are not an island and so the things that happen in our community, and the world affect us. If our community or the world are going through a time of great change, we will feel the tension, anxiety, and other things that come with change seep into us. We can look at this scripture many ways today. We can think about it concerning the broader society. Justice is happening right now. Hard truths are being brought into the light. However, we can also think about this scripture in our personal lives. In the midst of this upheaval we find ourselves in a time of uncomfortable and important self-examination. We all whisper things behind closed doors, we all have been cruel, or carried harmful biases at least a few times but it is important to remember that the legacy of a person is not in individual actions, some of which will be good and some will be bad, but in what type of yeast you are seeking to have rise. What do you want in the world for yourself, your loved ones, your community? Chances are when you reflect on this it is something largely good. And so we recognize the stuff that lays hidden in darkness, the hypocrisy, the bias, the ineptitude, and in recognizing it, it is brought to the light. We are made aware of it. We don’t wallow in guilt after that; we simply observe and then continue to focus on the goodness that we bring to the world and yearn for.

Prayer of the day: God help me to see myself clearly and the world around me. I ask for your forgiveness and I give you thanks for all the good I bring into all aspects of life.



Tuesday, August 18, 2020

Text: John 1:5

“The light shines in the darkness and the darkness cannot overcome it.”

These are some of the bravest words I believe to exist in the Bible. They ring true through the centuries as a battle cry for the people of God; those intent on creating a world of justice and healing. However, sometimes during uncertainty that Holy Spirit light might feel like it is faltering or obscured. You might find yourself responding with aggression when you don’t want to, not knowing what to say when you feel you ought to speak up, noticing yet again that the world is most certainly not black and white and asking yourself how you speak to justice and love in such a complicated space. All of these things might happen. You might question yourself or be concerned about how people you love and once respected are responding in these strange times.

When we feel that everything is changing enormously fast our hearts and minds become reactionary. When we are reactionary we as a society often become divisive and then we lose

the biblical goal of oneness, that Holy Spirit light laid deep in our hearts becomes obscured by the darkness of resentment, fear, frustration, second guessing, anxiety.

It is important for you to know that you are not going to do everything perfectly right now and that is ok. There are conversations you will regret, reactionary moments that will surprise you, but you are part of the world and therefore influenced by the bigger energy of this time. So forgive yourself as he has forgiven you and remember the light shines in the darkness; no matter what the darkness cannot overcome it.

Prayer of the day: Help me to forgive others and myself as you have forgiven me.



Wednesday, August 19, 2020

Text: Mathew 6:10
“Your will be done”

Sometimes I get mixed up and live life on a win/lose basis. I watch the news, talk to my neighbors, pray - but only for what I want, and when things are going the way I believe the world ought to go, I come to the conclusion that myself and everybody else are winning. Meanwhile when the world makes a detour, when people disagree with me, I believe we are losing. We all do this in one form or another when in reality life is not a zero sum game at all. The goal instead is to learn to accept our reality, the things we can control and the things we can't, and trust God for the rest.

Prayer of the day: God help me to feel your presence today. Help me to take rest in your love.



Thursday, August 20, 2020

Text: John 11:35
“And Jesus wept”

Grief is a funny thing. When we lose a loved one it is often fairly cut and dried. We go to the ceremony or funeral, we cry for them. As time moves on, we think about them fondly. However, there is another type of grief we often overlook and it is the grief that comes from change. Moving to a new town, taking on a new job, watching the nation changing. During Covid you might find grief as you notice all the little things you would typically be doing through the summer: the loss of tradition. Both good and bad changes can be a cause of

grief. Too often we ignore this feeling. “Oh well,” we think, or we try and find the silver lining immediately.

Today in John we read that Jesus weeps when he sees that Lazarus is dead. However, as we well know Lazarus is resurrected. The ending of this story may well be glorious but before Jesus calls out for Lazarus to rise from the dead, he first weeps. It is ok to sit with grief for a while. You don’t have to trivialize the supposedly small stuff that is getting you down during this time of huge transition in our world. It is ok to feel sad for a while. We don’t need to run away from grief, but we don’t need to become stuck in it either. We recognize the source of our pain; we allow God’s love to come and inhabit that space and trust in God’s healing. Then we move forward with renewed joy for this life.

Prayer of the day: God help me to believe that I am ok just as I am and just as I feel.



Friday, August 21, 2020

Text: 1 Peter 4:8-10

“Above all, maintain constant love for one another, for love covers a multitude of sins. Be hospitable to one another without complaining. Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received.”

I was on vacation a few weeks ago back in my hometown and visiting a dear friend. We drove through the Northern Minnesota red pine forest in her rusted-out pickup with the sled dogs in the back and I noticed I was measuring my words. It had been so long since I had been with someone who knew me so well. It had been so long since I had been with someone I didn’t have to worry about offending because she would get over it or at least point it out. As the wind whipped through the windows of the creaking pickup she asked, “Why are you talking so weird?”

It is easy to isolate during this time in the world and as important as prayer is, it is also important to reach out to those you know well, the ones you can be completely and unapologetically honest with whether those be your family members or friends. God gives us these people as gifts. Like God they accept us just as we are and offer us grace especially during tense times.

Prayer of the day: God thank you for those who are dear to me.



Saturday, August 22, 2020

Text: Revelation 21:1

“And I saw a new heaven and a new earth”

Transformation is a growing process. It is uncomfortable. It causes a lot of emotions and challenges. Not all are good. But transformation also offers a lot of hope for something better, for the Kingdom on earth to be recognized. Like Luther during the storm, like David when he had to hide from Saul, like Peter during the denial, you will have growing pains now. The whole world is having them. But if Jesus teaches us anything it is to hold on to hope, to trust in a brighter future, and to find God’s great love in the moment. Thy Kingdom come and have peace.

Prayer of the day: God be with us. Your will be done.

