

Devotions – August 30 – September 5, 2020
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Sunday, August 30, 2020

Text: John 7:37-39

³⁷On the last and greatest day of the festival, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. ³⁸Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them.” ³⁹By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified.

Water, it’s an essential part of our everyday life. Even a day without it can leave us dehydrated and weak. While on vacation this week, my kids had a great deal of fun playing in the water. I think they found the most enjoyment from being pulled around the lake, behind a boat, on a rather scary looking towable tube, flying off at every turn. It actually looked fun. I contemplated trying it myself but figured I probably wouldn’t be able to walk for days if I even made an attempt. After all the fun was done, one of the kids said, “It sure stings when you fall off that tube and skim across the water, it’s like hitting a brick wall!” It got me thinking about how this wonderful, beautiful, essential, life-giving resource can also be dangerous; it can go from life-giving to life-taking fairly quickly.

When thinking about water and the immeasurable impacts it can have on our lives, I began to think about the church, about us, the Body of Christ, about the immeasurable impacts we can have on the world around us. I thought about how we were blessed with the gift of the Holy Spirit, the life-giving water. Lately, our world seems to be pretty broken, and some days are difficult, very difficult. Some days seem almost impossible, but this is where our relationship with Christ comes in. Where, in our thirst, we turn to him. Our thirst for peace, for health, for love, in all of this we turn to him. Jesus promised us the life-giving water. We have the ability to let this life-giving water be a reflection of Christ’s love in this broken world. Through small acts, by intentionally serving others, by reaching out to the lost, the scared and the broken, we can show the wonderful reflection of Christ to those who desperately need it.

Let us pray: *Lord, today let me be a reflection of your timeless love in a world that needs you now more than ever.*



Monday, August 31, 2020

Text: John 14:27

²⁷ ***Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.***

“My peace I give unto you, it’s a peace that the world cannot give, it’s a peace that the world cannot understand, peace to know, peace to live, my peace I give unto you”. This song, written by Keith Routledge in 1975, echoes John 14:27. It is such a powerful song and I find myself singing it more and more these days. For both comfort and reassurance that Jesus is walking next to me.

Just like most, in the midst of Covid-19, things seemed to be at a standstill for me. I was suddenly home every night and every activity that had busied my life came to an abrupt halt. During this time when there was no place to go and nothing to do, I should have felt more rested than ever and yet, I felt simply exhausted. I don’t think I was alone in feeling this way, the thoughts that weighed heavy on my mind, thoughts about the present, the future, the virus, and all the unknowns, seemed to spiral out of control in my mind... So many heavy thoughts. I picked up the book *Experiencing the Presence of God* by A.W. Tozer. In the very first pages he quoted St. Augustine Hippo saying, *“Thou hast made us for thyself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it finds its rest in thee.”* Restless was the exact word for what I was feeling. It didn’t take much for me to realize that I was definitely not resting in the Lord, actually I was doing the exact opposite. Although I was surely getting enough physical rest, I certainly was not resting in my Lord and Savior. I was spending energy trying to figure out how “I” could fix things, looking for ways that “I” could comfort those around me, the whole time being oblivious to the fact that what “I” really needed, was Him. I needed to shut off the news and disconnect from social media, I needed to find ways to direct my energy, my thoughts, my worries and my fears to Him. We all have our own way of doing this, deepening our relationship with Christ, maybe it’s devotions or quiet time, for me it was song.

Today, as you go about your day, I encourage you to find little ways to deepen your relationship with Christ, maybe by taking out your Bible, or maybe by replacing the Facebook App (insert your most used app) with the Bible App on your front page. For even just moments with Him are the building blocks to a stronger relationship, and ultimately, the peace that the world cannot give.

Let us pray: *Lord, today let me work toward strengthening my relationship with you, that through your word I will feel the peace that comes from knowledge of you.*



Tuesday, September 1, 2020

Text: Philippians 1:6

“God is the one who began this good work in you, and I am certain that he won’t stop before it is complete on the day that Christ Jesus returns.” (CEV)

When I was a little girl one of my favorite places was my grandparents’ house. They lived in the country, rural Northeast Wisconsin, on the old family farm that was no longer operational. Even though the cows were long gone, you could be sure to find barn cats in the hay mow and kittens every spring. The memories of grandpa pushing me on the rope swing that hung amid the few bales of hay are ones I will forever hold dearly. It was the first place I learned to cut grass on a riding lawnmower, and I’ll never forget grandpa being anxious as I cut around his newly planted maple trees. They were tiny seedlings that he guarded with wire cages and mesh. He lovingly tended to them and was expectant about the tall trees they would become. That was about 35 years ago, and as I drive by the old house, I look at those trees, now towering, and I can’t help but think about how grandpa’s hopes and have come full circle!

We plan for our future, we all do. Some of us start families, some of us make sure our 401K’s are in line, and some of us plant trees. Even though he knew he’d probably never see it, my grandpa planned for those trees to one day grow taller than that old barn. We are hopeful and we trust that God’s plan for our lives is greater than anything we could imagine, and so, we plant trees. We do our part to shape our lives and we lean on the promise that God will walk with us, hand in hand knowing that when plans don’t turn out as we thought, we have his hand helping us up, on to bigger and better thing. None of us know what tomorrow holds but we come to God in hopeful anticipation, anticipation that he is going to take our hopes and our dreams (and our trees) and make them bigger than anything we could imagine.

Let us pray: *Lord today I pray that you bless the work of my hands and my mind. Let my work and my plan please you and when you change my course let us trust that you are bringing me to bigger and better places.*



Wednesday, September 2, 2020

Text: Romans 13:8

“Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law.” (NIV)

I ran across this quote a few years back and I often think of it: *“You cannot comprehend the deepest love God has for you until you realize that he has that same love for the person or people you despise the most”*. (Author Unknown) This thought takes a great deal of reflection, and sometimes, when someone is really wearing on me, it is difficult to wrap my mind around. Who is the one person who seems to push your buttons, the person who is really difficult to deal with?

The person who has hurt you or the one who has disregarded your feelings? The one who simply has different viewpoints than you. Now stop reading for a moment and take a few seconds to reflect upon them, who they are, why they are the way they are.

Remember that just like you, God formed them, He knew them, and He loved them before they were ever born. He may not love their actions or their choices, but He loves them. It might be one of the most difficult things you could ever do, but what if you prayed for them, what if you prayed for them every day? Could it make a difference? Now let's bring it to a different level. Who are the people in the wider world, the news, social media, talk radio who frustrate you? Is it possible that God loves them as much as he loves you?? What if you prayed for these people also?

In Matthew 5:45 Jesus tell us to love our enemy, to pray for them. What would our world look like if we just stopped? Stopped judging, stopped hating, stopped fearing. What if we just stopped and regrouped to show love, to show compassion, to admit that we have no idea what anyone else is facing and just simply love and pray.

Let us pray: Lord, today, as I face the day, let my first instinct be to love. Instead of insults and judgement, let prayer fill my mind, and love fill my heart.



Thursday, September 3, 2020

Text: 2 Peter 1:2

² “I pray that God will be kind to you and will let you live in perfect peace! May you keep learning more and more about God and our Lord Jesus.” (CEV)

We have a little pond that our family loves; it's great for swimming and kayaking, even fishing. It really is a blessing to our family. It is a place where we can go and enjoy a bit of down time. The only problem with our pond is that it is located right next to US Highway 141 and the traffic is crazy! Every year for the past few years I have made great plans to plant a row of trees between our property and the highway, somewhat of a barrier so we would have a little more privacy. And every year I have failed. If you have ever planted trees, you know that they need a lot of water and love to get a good start. In years past, I haven't really had the time to get there every night to give them their much-needed drink. Sometimes a week would go by without watering them and I would return to find them with their needles brown and falling off, baking in the summer sun. But this year was different. Covid came and the world stopped, spring was upon us and I once again planted a row of trees but this year I had the time to really tend to them. With the help of a pump, I was able to develop a watering system that was much easier than carting 5-gallon buckets of water. And thanks to my daughter's softball season being canceled, I was able to place a daily focus on those trees. About an hour every night to water them and ensure they

were getting the nutrients they needed. Three months in and I think I'm able to say that these trees are going to make it! It just took a lot of time and dedication.

Much like my little trees, over the years, I have learned the same thing about my relationship with Christ. Many days I just assume it will come easy, that we're old friends and I shouldn't have to work too hard anymore. And then a few weeks or months pass and I find myself feeling lost, disconnected from our relationship. Just like any relationship, if we quit talking, quit connecting, quit investing, things are going to diminish. We need to make a daily effort to not only maintain but strengthen our relationship with Christ. There are so many ways we can do this, through prayer or scripture, through quiet time or vocal praise. We are all different, but God loves that! He loves that we all speak to him in our own unique God-given way. Whatever your way is, keep talking, keep singing, keep thanking him for the gifts he has provided!

Let us pray: *Lord, thank you for my relationship with you. Let me find time daily to grow in your love, mercy, and grace.*



Friday, September 4, 2020

Text: Matthew 14:18-19

¹⁸“Bring them here to me,” he said. ¹⁹ And he directed the people to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people.

Of the seven miracles of Christ, the one I love the most is when Jesus feeds the 5000. There is so much about this story that shows the simple, amazing love of Christ. Jesus was tired, He just wanted some alone time. Oh, how I can relate to this. When the days get long and we are pulled in every direction, some days, all we desire is quiet. A time-out, time to reflect, to pray, and maybe just a little bit of time to count our blessings amid the chaos. In the story of the 5000, this is what Jesus wanted too, but Matthew tells us that He showed compassion, and even though He needed some down time, He showed up. He fed those who were following, those who needed Him in that moment.

Then comes the second part of this story, the part where Jesus shows us how important we are to his ministry. Jesus didn't complete this miracle on His own. He looked to his disciples to carry out the task, to complete the miracle. Jesus had the capability to do anything, He could have made the food appear to the people, but Jesus chose to use those who were closest to Him, “He gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then He gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people.”

Maybe, in this miracle, Jesus was setting an example for us to follow. Quite possibly He was trying to show us that we are a necessary, vital part of how He works in the world. We are the

modern-day disciples of Christ, and He has gifted us with the task of taking His miracles into the world. We do this every day, in the big things and the little things. Helping a neighbor, opening a door, smiling at those we meet. We may not be able to feed 5000, but we can show compassion and grace to those around us, shining the light of Jesus in our corner of the world.

Let us pray: *Lord, today let me be your partner, let me shine your light, let me help those when I can. And when the day is done, let me rest in you.*



Saturday, September 5, 2020

Text: Philippians 3:14-16 (MSG)

12-14 I'm not saying that I have this all together, that I have it made. But I am well on my way, reaching out for Christ, who has so wondrously reached out for me. Friends, don't get me wrong: By no means do I count myself an expert in all of this, but I've got my eye on the goal, where God is beckoning us onward—to Jesus. I'm off and running, and I'm not turning back.

15-16 So let's keep focused on that goal, those of us who want everything God has for us. If any of you have something else in mind, something less than total commitment, God will clear your blurred vision—you'll see it yet! Now that we're on the right track, let's stay on it.

Last week I had a doctor's appointment to talk with my doctor about all the fun things, you know, like cholesterol and triglycerides. I lean toward the high side when it comes to overall cholesterol, so we had a long discussion about ways to help lower the levels. She said something that made my mind wander for a few seconds. She said (I will paraphrase because I'm not sure of her exact words), "As doctors we can give you all the tools and even prescribe medications to help you, but ultimately, it's your choice to use these tools and take medications. We can't MAKE you do anything". To me this was a simple yet profound statement that can certainly be applied to my faith.

I think many times I get caught up in the idea that if I just pray hard enough, things should happen, that God will do all the work. He is God after all. I tend to be the kind of person who doesn't like to step out of my comfort zone. I like to stay in my cozy little bubble. Although the older I get the easier it is for me to leap into the world of the unknown, there are many times I miss opportunities to serve because of a lack of confidence, confidence in the tools God has given me. And though I am talking now about serving God, these tools are also there to serve my children and my husband, my family and my friends. Just as a physician gives us tools to be healthy, so does God give us the tools He knows we need to be successful individuals in this world. The tools we need to live out the plan He has for our lives, but we need to have the

confidence and ambition to use these tools to get us to where He wants us to be. Simply asking God for a better job or well-behaved children will do us no good if we do not act and perform in such a way that will make things happen. I learned this lesson many years ago with my first child. I couldn't only pray that he would be a well-behaved child. I also needed to show him and guide him, to teach him and discipline him. I am reminded every night when I lay down in prayer, thanking God for my wonderful blessings and asking him to help them grow into faithful people, I also need act. I have a comprehensive role in the way my children will turn out, who they will become. I cannot change the plan God has laid for them, but I can do my best to help play an active role in His plan because I know that I am part of that plan.

Although there is miraculous power in prayer, we need to act to get what and where God wants us to be. Philippians tells us to stay focused on the goal God has set for us. And although God's plans may not always be clear to us, we press forward, doing everything in our power to advance our life even when we have a bit of clouded vision. This determination shows others the power God has in our lives, even when things get rough. Knowing God has a plan helps us to get up and get going, to use the tools we have available to reach the goals that God has set for us. Even at times of loss, when we have no clue what we're supposed to be doing, if we get up and do all we can to serve others and our God, surely the path will lead us to a place of great comfort, His comfort!

Let us pray: *Lord, today, help me to act. Help me to use the gifts you have given me, the provision you have provided to serve those around me. Help me to be confident in the gifts you have given me.*

