

**Devotions – September 6-12, 2020**  
**By Pastor Terry Frankenstein**  
**Bethany Lutheran Church, Escanaba, MI**

The devotions for this week are based on the Revised Common Lectionary Daily Readings. Here is what the ELCA website tells us about these readings:

“The daily readings provide a psalm and two Scripture readings for each day between Sundays. The foundational premise of this set of daily readings is their relationship to the Sunday lectionary. The readings are chosen so that the days leading up to Sunday (Thursday through Saturday) prepare for the Sunday readings. The days flowing out from Sunday (Monday through Wednesday) reflect upon the Sunday readings. No additional readings are assigned for Sundays and festivals. From the body of daily readings for each week, selections may be made for the local context. The complete Daily Lectionary is available in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, pages 1121–1153.” [https://www.elca.org/Our-Work/Congregations-and-Synods/Worship/Lectionary?\\_ga=2.13215287.1069176590.1568287402-403494801.1547918328](https://www.elca.org/Our-Work/Congregations-and-Synods/Worship/Lectionary?_ga=2.13215287.1069176590.1568287402-403494801.1547918328)

One reading has been selected from each of the three possible daily readings for this week.



**Sunday, September 6, 2020**

Text: Matthew 18:15-20, NRSV

**“If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one. But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If the member refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax-collector. Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Again, truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.”**

Reflection: At first glance, this passage appears to be a prescription for casting out a congregational member who is guilty of some wrongdoing. If we look at the passages just before and following the Matthew text, though, we see that these verses fall between the parable of finding one lost sheep and the parable of the unforgiving servant, parables sharing a sense of graciousness: “It is not the will of the Father that one be lost” and “Forgive your brother or sister

from your heart.” The little ones of which Matthew so often speaks are our sisters and brothers, our siblings in Christ. The steps to be taken when there are problems within the church are not steps to be taken in haste, but carefully, gently, and respectfully.

Let us pray: *Heavenly Father, as we, the church, seek to do your will, it is only natural that we should find ourselves, occasionally, at odds with one another. Give us the grace that we need in order to care for each other as siblings in Christ, little ones to be lifted up and understood. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.*



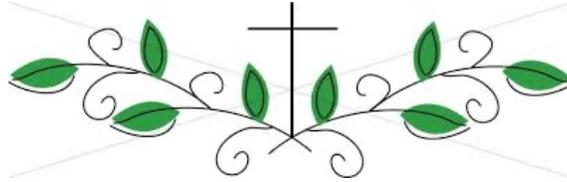
**Monday, September 7, 2020**

Text: Psalm 119, 65-72, NRSV

**You have dealt well with your servant,  
O LORD, according to your word.  
Teach me good judgement and knowledge,  
for I believe in your commandments.  
Before I was humbled I went astray,  
but now I keep your word.  
You are good and do good;  
teach me your statutes.  
The arrogant smear me with lies,  
but with my whole heart I keep your precepts.  
Their hearts are fat and gross,  
but I delight in your law.  
It is good for me that I was humbled,  
so that I might learn your statutes.  
The law of your mouth is better to me  
than thousands of gold and silver pieces.**

Reflection: The psalmist is in the process of moving toward a life of humility and obedience and is asking God for help in acquiring good judgment and knowledge. The psalmist understands that humility and respect underlie a willing nature, an openness to hear what God wishes of each of us, and for each of us.

Let us pray: *Living God, help us be your humble servants so that we hear your desires for the world with an open heart and then act with love. Amen.*



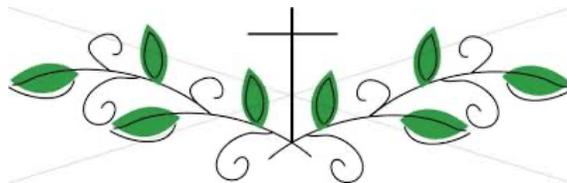
**Tuesday, September 8, 2020**

Text: Romans 13:1-7, NRSV

**Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists authority resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgement. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Do you wish to have no fear of the authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive its approval; for it is God's servant for your good. But if you do what is wrong, you should be afraid, for the authority does not bear the sword in vain! It is the servant of God to execute wrath on the wrongdoer. Therefore one must be subject, not only because of wrath but also because of conscience. For the same reason you also pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, busy with this very thing. Pay to all what is due to them—taxes to whom taxes are due, revenue to whom revenue is due, respect to whom respect is due, honour to whom honour is due.**

Reflection: Our human condition necessitates civil order and civil laws that help us live without chaos and disorder and move us toward a good and decent society. Given the current state of discord and disunity within our nation, media coverage points to a need for more conversation about our obligations in this regard. Opportunities exist for us to explore God's desire for order and good based in love for our fellow human beings. What is the meaning of this passage for our time and place?

Let us pray: *Gracious God, these are such difficult times for our country. Opinions vary widely as to the role, responsibilities, and performance of governing authorities. Help us to have reasonable conversations rooted in our love and care for one another, conversations that help move us forward. Amen.*



**Wednesday, September 9, 2020**

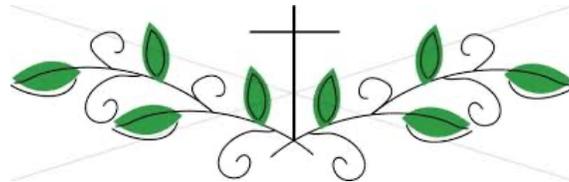
Text: Matthew 21:18-22, NRSV

**In the morning, when he returned to the city, he was hungry. And seeing a fig tree by the side of the road, he went to it and found nothing at all on it but leaves. Then he said to it, “May no fruit ever come from you again!” And the fig tree withered at once. When the disciples saw it, they were amazed, saying, “How did the fig tree wither at once?” Jesus answered them, “Truly I tell you, if you have faith and do not doubt, not only will you do what has been done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, ‘Be lifted up and thrown into the sea’, it will be done. Whatever you ask for in prayer with faith, you will receive.”**

Reflection: Jesus is hungry as he is walking back to Jerusalem, and he approaches a fig tree that appears to be the perfect picture of healthiness. Yet, the tree bears no fruit. Jesus curses the fig tree which immediately withers, and the disciples are awed at his power and question how this could happen. His response is surprising as he states that all who have faith and do not doubt have similar power available to them.

As we look around us and begin viewing that which has “no fruit” in the systems of our lives, where do our thoughts turn? Which of our human-made structures and constructions only appear to be healthy? When we stay connected to God in faith and prayer, we are better able to discern those systems which are of God, those with a focus on love, healing, and reconciliation.

Let us pray: *Remind us, O Lord, that there is much of this world which looks healthy but bears no fruit. Help us seek out and give of ourselves that which brings hope and restoration to the world. Amen.*



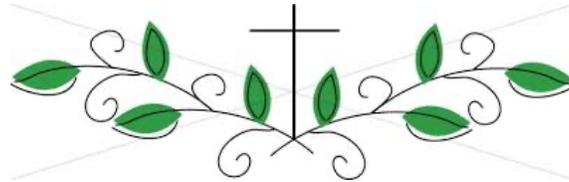
**Thursday, September 10, 2020**

Text: Psalm 103:8-13 NRSV

**The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. He will not always accuse, nor will he keep his anger forever. He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities. For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far he removes our transgressions from us. As a father has compassion for his children, so the Lord has compassion for those who fear him.**

Reflection: God cares for us and shows us compassion and steadfast love in spite of our questionable words and conduct. God does not pay back our misdeeds with resentment or anger but has an infinite willingness to forgive. Though we are undeserving, God's love for us is that of a parent's, great and wide.

Let us pray: *Help us, Lord, to remember that though we are human, with countless faults and lapses in behavior, you are steadfast in your love for us. Strengthen us to believe that because we are loved by you, we are freed to turn from our inevitable failings, toward you. Amen.*



**Friday, September 11, 2020**

Text: Genesis 41:53-42:17, NRSV

**The seven years of plenty that prevailed in the land of Egypt came to an end; and the seven years of famine began to come, just as Joseph had said. There was famine in every country, but throughout the land of Egypt there was bread. When all the land of Egypt was famished, the people cried to Pharaoh for bread. Pharaoh said to all the Egyptians, “Go to Joseph; what he says to you, do.” And since the famine had spread over all the land, Joseph opened all the storehouses, and sold to the Egyptians, for the famine was severe in the land of Egypt. Moreover, all the world came to Joseph in Egypt to buy grain, because the famine became severe throughout the world.**

**When Jacob learned that there was grain in Egypt, he said to his sons, “Why do you keep looking at one another? I have heard,” he said, “that there is grain in Egypt; go down and buy grain for us there, that we may live and not die.” So ten of Joseph's brothers went down to buy grain in Egypt. But Jacob did not send Joseph's brother Benjamin with his brothers, for he feared that harm might come to him. Thus the sons of Israel were among the other people who came to buy grain, for the famine had reached the land of Canaan. Now Joseph was governor over the land; it was he who sold to all the people of the land. And Joseph's brothers came and bowed themselves before him with their faces to the ground.**

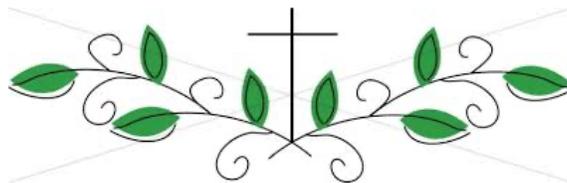
**When Joseph saw his brothers, he recognized them, but he treated them like strangers and spoke harshly to them. “Where do you come from?” he said. They said, “From the land of Canaan, to buy food.” Although Joseph had recognized his brothers, they did not recognize him. Joseph also remembered the dreams that he had dreamed about them. He said to them, “You are spies; you have come to see the nakedness of the land!” They said to him, “No, my lord; your servants have come to buy food. We are all sons of one man; we are**

honest men; your servants have never been spies.” But he said to them, “No, you have come to see the nakedness of the land!” They said, “We, your servants, are twelve brothers, the sons of a certain man in the land of Canaan; the youngest, however, is now with our father, and one is no more.” But Joseph said to them, “It is just as I have said to you; you are spies! Here is how you shall be tested: as Pharaoh lives, you shall not leave this place unless your youngest brother comes here! Let one of you go and bring your brother, while the rest of you remain in prison, in order that your words may be tested, whether there is truth in you; or else, as Pharaoh lives, surely you are spies.” And he put them all together in prison for three days.

Reflection: Joseph’s conflict with his brothers (all sons of Jacob by two mothers) had begun years earlier, when at the age of seventeen, Joseph had shared with them his dream of greatness. The dream-sharing, together with the jealousy that existed because of Joseph’s most-favored son status (remember the robe of many colors?) resulted in the brothers selling him off to passing traders. Twenty years later in this Genesis text, the brothers have come to Joseph, now governor of Egypt, seeking grain during a famine. Joseph recognizes them and accuses them of being spies. He sends back to Canaan one of the brothers, ordering him to return with his youngest brother Benjamin, and imprisons the nine remaining.

While the text ends short of the brothers’ reconciliation (chapters filled with intrigue), we find that Joseph has at least opened up the possibility of reuniting with the ones who had betrayed him. Joseph could have chosen a path of revenge, but instead opened his heart to allow God’s gift of forgiveness to enter in.

Let us pray: *We give you thanks, dear Lord, that even when our hearts harden, you work to soften them and allow reconciliation where none was believed to be possible. Amen.*



**Saturday, September 12, 2020**

Text: Matthew 6:7-15, NRSV

**“When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.**

**“Pray then in this way: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not bring us to the time**

**of trial, but rescue us from the evil one. For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.**

Reflection: Sometimes we wonder if our prayers are “good enough”, don’t we? We question whether we are meeting unspoken expectations to choose the right words, terms, phrases, and expressions. In this passage from Matthew, Jesus is reminding us that it is enough in prayer to be simple and brief because God knows what we need. We are invited into free conversation with God, our parent, into intimate conversation with a parent who loves us.

Forgiveness is one of the most difficult things we can do when we have been hurt, yet God asks us to forgive others. When we are uncertain whether we should open the door to reconciliation, we remember that we are invited to draw near to God and pray simply to the parent who wants to advise us.

Let us pray: *Merciful God, you have given us the Lord’s Prayer that we might remember all that you desire and all that you provide for us. Help us feel comfortable speaking to you simply and freely. Amen.*

