

Devotions – October 11-17, 2020
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Our meditations for this week are based on a faith journal we kept October 11-17, 2012 while living and teaching in Xinyang, China in the Henan Province. We were using *Every Morning New*, a daily meditation guide written by Herb and Corinne Chilstrom, which was most appropriate as every morning was a truly NEW experience!

Sunday, October 11, 2020

Text: Psalm 90:17

“Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us, and prosper the work of our hands.”

We are in Xinyang, China, ready to begin a semester of teaching at Xinyang Technical University under the auspices of China Service Ventures. We don't know any Mandarin and most of our English Language students have never seen a foreigner, so we are totally out of our “comfort zone”. This passage is very meaningful to us as we recognize that we represent Lutherans who are committed to working and sharing Christ's love in this place without overtly speaking about it. We ask God to use us to communicate without words, to prosper our work and to make us shining lights of your love in our communities wherever we are in the world.

Prayer: *Dear God, as we encounter situations out of the comfort zones of our lives, lead us to trust that you will prosper the work of our hands and lives in all we do. Amen.* MLB



Monday, October 12

Text: Psalm 91:11

“For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways.”

This was the inscription on the bracelet my friend, Jan Collins, gave to me just before we left for China. I wear the bracelet every day as a reminder of my friend and of this promise of God. As Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 8, Titus was energized and enthusiastic about the mission tasks ahead of him, so we, too, are excited and enthusiastic (although apprehensive) about the tasks we face. We count on the love and protection of our heavenly Father to guard and guide us through this semester. We need to heed the admonition of Paul to Titus to, “Be ready for every good work”, knowing that each day we have the opportunity to influence the lives of those around us, and in doing so we make our own lives stronger.

Prayer: *Dear God, thank you for the gifts of friendship, energy, enthusiasm, and excitement that enable us to serve your people. Keep us ever mindful of your promises to be with us and guard us in all our ways. Amen. MLB*



Tuesday, October 13, 2020

Text: Matthew 13:23

“But as for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty and in another thirty.”

American missionaries found fertile soil in China in the 1800’s and by 1907 there was a Lutheran church here in the Henan Province in an area called Rooster Mountain. We are here today with a descendant of the Martinson’s, missionaries who were part of that worshipping community here. All missionaries were expelled in 1949 during the Cultural Revolution, but even though the missionaries left, the church did not. The seeds flourished and the “fruit” of their planting is ongoing today as Christians are here - teaching in schools and colleges, and working in social programs for the disadvantaged and worshipping in both the state sponsored churches and the home churches.

During a recent class session, we were surprised to receive a thank you letter from one of our students, which read, “As I look at you, I always think of my grandparents because of your ages. I want you to know that I, too, am a Christian. I often go to church and love it very much. I want to give you a big hug, but that is impossible. Jesus loves you and so do I”.

Prayer: *Dear God, though we cannot speak of you in our work, your love shines through. Thank you for missionaries who have planted seeds here that still bear fruit, and for giving us this opportunity to represent you to these young people. Amen. DMB*



Wednesday, October 14, 2020

Text: Mark 10:17, 22

“Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions.”

Here we are, living without nearly all of our “stuff” and we are experiencing one of the most enriching times of our life. Today we are asking ourselves, “What does this tell us about what is

REALLY important?” “Are we like this rich young man?” “What do we count as more valuable than our relationship with God?” We know that when we go back home, we will get our things out of the storage unit and set up housekeeping again with a full complement of all we need for a comfortable life, and yet - is it really what we NEED? Help us God, to free ourselves from the burden of our stuff.

Prayer: *Dear God, you have provided so richly for our lives. Free us from anything that hinders our relationship with you - including all the things we think we need. Amen. MLB*



Thursday, October 15, 2020

Text: Mark 9:49-50

“For everyone will be salted with fire. Salt is good; but if salt has lost its’ saltiness, how can you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another “

We think we are “seasoned” (prepared) for the tasks we are undertaking - but new ones are constantly being assigned! We are educated, trained, spent many years in our professions - and are “seasoned” teachers. But we are still anxious - have we lost our “saltiness”? Do we still have it? This passage reminds us that there is more to the job than being experienced or prepared professionally; we need God’s help to be confident in ourselves and to love and respect our students as worthy of our efforts AND to be at peace with one another in this country which has often been viewed as an adversary.

Prayer: *Dear God, help us to love and respect all we encounter, and to be at peace within ourselves and with those we serve. May we be salt in the lives of others. Amen. MLB*



Friday, October 16, 2020

Text: Luke 9:48

“Whoever welcomes this child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me; for the least among all of you is the greatest.”

“Whoever welcomes this child in my name” is being played out for us through one of the ministries of China Service Ventures for handicapped, orphaned and poor rural children; and those who were “left behind” by parents who moved to the city for work. As we get to know

some of these children, we learn of their many needs - especially for appropriate clothing. We wrote about this need to family and friends and the response was amazing. We received contributions enough to purchase jackets, shirts, pants and shoes for several of the children without them knowing the source. Seeing the pride with which they wore them was truly a blessing to us and a reminder that they are “the greatest” in the eyes of God. These children were welcomed and served by people they will never know personally, who are making a difference in their lives (and ours, too).

Prayer: *Dear Lord, open our eyes to see and welcome all with whom we come in contact. Thank you for Christians who respond to the needs of those they have never met. Help us to live in relationship with all in whom you breathed the breath of life. Amen. DMB*



Saturday, October 17, 2020

Text: Romans 2:1, 10

“Therefore you have no excuse, whoever you are, when you judge others; for in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, are doing the very same thing.....for God shows no partiality.”

We have to admit, we had some pre-conceived notions of what things would be like here in China - especially concerning religious practices and the treatment of Christians. We had some angst about our reception here. We judged! But we have been treated with gracious hospitality and keen interest. Today we were told that faculty members have learned from us that retirees can still be contributing members of society. Wow! That may be the most important thing we teach this semester. Bishop Chilstrom, in *Every Morning New*, writes today that Paul recognizes that there is no place on earth where God’s presence is unknown. We have found that to be true here, too. While walking to our bus this morning, we met a guy carrying a Bible on his way to church. When he saw us, he waved and shouted, “Hallelujah”, recognizing us as Christians. It was a joyful surprise!! The word, “Hallelujah” is pronounced the same in Mandarin and English. We communicated! Each time we encountered him after that, we received the same greeting with a big smile.

Prayer: *Dear God, forgive us for our pre-conceived notions about your people and help us to see people with your eyes. We give you thanks that there is no place on earth where you do not reign. Amen. MLB*

