

Devotions – October 25-31, 2020
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Sunday, October 25, 2020

Text: Matthew 10:26-31 (NRSV)

²⁶“So have no fear of them; for nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known. ²⁷What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops. ²⁸Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body. ²⁹Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. ³⁰And even the hairs of your head are all counted. ³¹So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows.

Fear – It is all around us. Fear of Covid-19. Fear of civil unrest. Fear of political instability. Fear of economic crisis. Fear of the future.

In this passage from the gospel of Matthew, Jesus is speaking to his disciples about fear. This fear is specific because he is sending his disciples out to change the world. A world that did not want to be changed. The disciples are afraid of the challenge, so he gives them this pep talk. “Have no fear of them,” he says.

We can’t avoid living in the world. Jesus didn’t come to take us out of the world. He came to send us into it. And he tells us it isn’t going to be easy.

The voice of God that speaks to us in the evening hours – “the things I have spoken to you in the dark you must say in the daylight,” Jesus says, “the things you have heard me say privately to you, you must proclaim from the house-tops.” You must speak out. I need you to be my voice in the world. I need you to be a change in the world.

But don’t let this frighten you. Never be afraid of those who can kill the body but are powerless to kill the soul! You are like the sparrows. Not one of them will fall to the ground apart from God knowing about it. Even the hairs on your head are all counted. So do not be afraid; you are just as much of value as the sparrows.

I recently read a commentary by the Rev. Cameron Trimble who mentions talking to a friend who said that it’s hard to know where to start and what to do. Rev. Trimble responded with what another friend calls the “Three Foot Rule.” He says, “I can’t change everything in the world, but I can change what is three feet around me.” Perhaps today it should be a Six Foot Rule?

Her commentary ended with this old story of a little sparrow:

One day there was a knight riding on a forest path, decked out in shining armor and astride a mighty steed. He was all ready to right the wrong, save ladies in distress and slay dragons. Along the way he saw a small sparrow, lying on its back in the middle of the path, with its tiny legs sticking upright. He slowed down and spoke to it: "O sparrow, why are you lying on your back in the middle of the path?"

The sparrow replied: "Good Sir knight, I was told that the heavens would fall today."

The knight gave a good laugh, saying: "And you mean to hold the heavens up with your spindly little legs?" But the sparrow just let out a deep sigh: "One does what one can, Sir knight, one does what one can."

Let us pray: God, you are our refuge and strength, our present help in time of trouble. Where hearts are fearful and constricted, grant courage and hope. Where anxiety is infectious and widening, grant peace and assurance. Where spirits are daunted and weakened, grant possibilities and strengthened dreams. Amen



Monday, October 26, 2020

Text: 2 Corinthians 4:5-12 (Contemporary English Version)

⁵ We are not preaching about ourselves. Our message is that Jesus Christ is Lord. He also sent us to be your servants. ⁶ The Scriptures say, "God commanded light to shine in the dark." Now God is shining in our hearts to let you know that his glory is seen in Jesus Christ. ⁷ We are like clay jars in which this treasure is stored. The real power comes from God and not from us. ⁸ We often suffer, but we are never crushed. Even when we don't know what to do, we never give up. ⁹ In times of trouble, God is with us, and when we are knocked down, we get up again. ¹¹ We who are alive are always being handed over to death for Jesus' sake so that Jesus' life can also be seen in our bodies that are dying. ¹² So death is at work in us, but life is at work in you.

We may be experiencing all kinds of trouble, but we aren't crushed. We may be confused, but we aren't depressed. We are restricted on all sides, but we are never frustrated; we are puzzled, but never in despair. We've been surrounded and battered by troubles to the point we're not sure what to do, but we know that God knows what to do.

Human beings are fragile and breakable like clay jars. We endure many hardships in life. Hardships that can produce cracks especially over time. A vessel is not immune from fractures. Clay jars are subject to scars, breakage, and jagged lines. Yet, we are put back together again with something far more enduring and much stronger than Elmer's glue.

The Apostle Paul uses lists of hardships to illustrate the wise person's inner strength. The wise person knows that real power comes from God and not from us. We are like clay jars in which the treasure of the living Christ is stored. A golden light that shines through the darkness.

I'm like one of those
Japanese bowls
That were made long ago
I have some cracks in me
They have been filled with gold

That's what they used back then
When they had a bowl to mend
It did not hide the cracks
It made them shine instead

So now every old scar shows
from every time I broke
And anyone's eyes can see
I'm not what I used to be



But in a collector's mind
All of these jagged lines
Make me more beautiful
And worth a higher price

I'm like one of those
Japanese bowls
I was made long ago
I have some cracks you can see
See how they shine of gold.

-Peter Mayer

Let us pray:

Lord, we are your vessels.

Fill us up.

We are empty, in need of your presence.

Accept our gratitude for filling us with yourself.

May our hearts overflow with your love and grace,

spilling over onto all with whom we come in contact with this day. Amen



Tuesday, October 27, 2020

Text: Isaiah 40:25-31 (Contemporary English Version)

²⁵ The holy God asks, “Who compares with me? Is anyone my equal?”

²⁶ Look at the evening sky! Who created the stars? Who gave them each a name?

Who leads them like an army? The LORD is so powerful that none of the stars are ever missing.

²⁷ You people of Israel, say, “God pays no attention to us! He doesn’t care if we are treated unjustly.” But how can you say that? ²⁸ Don’t you know? Haven’t you heard? The LORD is the eternal God, Creator of the earth. God never gets weary or tired; God’s wisdom cannot be measured. ²⁹ The LORD gives strength to those who are weary. ³⁰ Even young people get tired, then stumble and fall. ³¹ But those who trust the LORD will find new strength. They will be strong like eagles soaring upward on wings; they will walk and run without getting tired.

Hildegard of Bingen was a Benedictine Nun of the 11th century. She was a prolific writer, musician, composer, theologian, playwright, teacher, herbalist, and healer. But one of the most amazing things she was known for was her visions she received from God. She said she received them by the “voice of the Living Light,” which spoke to her of the mystery which animates creation: “I am the breeze that nurtures all things green. I encourage blossoms to flourish with ripening fruits. I adorn all the earth. I am the rain coming from the dew that causes the grass to laugh with the joy of life.”

It is one thing to appreciate creation for its beauty and wonder and yet another thing to appreciate the spirit of God living within it. We read the creation story as if God acted that one time long ago and has now been sleeping like Rip Van Winkle for billions of years. We know that we carry the DNA of our parents, our grandparents, great grandparents, and far beyond. Is it too difficult to imagine God’s DNA still present in all of creation? That the essence of God is infused within all beings? That God is very much awake, alive and active through creation?

To see creation in this way not only gives us comfort in God’s surrounding presence, but also touches upon the eternal life force of God which continually enlivens and rejuvenates. “I am the breeze that nurtures all things green,” God whispers to Hildegard. “I am the one who never gets weary or tired; giving strength to those who are weary,” God says through Isaiah.

A beam of sunlight, the fragrance of a flower, or the graceful movement of a swan are all participants in the holy chorus of creation, according to Hildegard. She would say, “To be out of sync with the beauty and function of nature is to deny the divine force which enlivens body and soul.”

Have we not heard? The LORD is the eternal God, Creator of the earth. Who can compare to the holy one who created the stars?

When you look up to the night sky, remember, the same God who created those, created you...infused with Living Light. Those who trust the LORD will find new strength. They will be strong like eagles soaring upward on wings; they will walk and run without getting tired.

Let us pray from the words of Hildegard: *“O Holy Wisdom, soaring Power, encompass us with wings unfurled, and carry us, encircling all, above, below, and through the world.” Amen*



Wednesday, October 28, 2020

Text: Philippians 2:1-8 (Common English Version)

Therefore, if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort in love, any sharing in the Spirit, any sympathy, ² complete my joy by thinking the same way, having the same love, being united, and agreeing with each other. ³ Don't do anything for selfish purposes, but with humility think of others as better than yourselves. ⁴ Instead of each person watching out for their own good, watch out for what is better for others. ⁵ Adopt the attitude that was in Christ Jesus: ⁶ Though he was in the form of God, he did not consider being equal with God something to exploit. ⁷ But he emptied himself by taking the form of a servant and by becoming like human beings. When he found himself in the form of a human, ⁸ he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Located in Garden, Michigan is a small rustic campground on Lake Michigan. When my husband and I went there this summer it was quite crowded compared to summers in the past. Our site was in between a couple on one side and a host of families on the other. The beach area was always quite crowded, so we decided to paddle our kayaks across the bay to find a remote spot for ourselves. It was extremely pleasant... until... one of the families camping next to us showed up by taking the trail that leads to the end of the peninsula. It is a hidden trail and not frequently used by campers, so I was quite surprised to see people- people we were trying to get away from. Also, to my surprise, this family decided to occupy our same space. It was a small strip of sand and to be honest I was quite perturbed by the situation. My thoughts – Why couldn't they go somewhere else? They had a nice little set up at the campground occupying several yards of beach that the kids had their toys, floaties, chairs, and sun umbrellas. They had their spot. This was ours. We were here first. Did they not have respect for another person's space? My husband's comment: "They have a right to be here just as much as we do." I don't want to admit it, but he was right.

Besides the fact that I do like my privacy, I started to think about the comfortability of personal space, especially during this pandemic. Apart from maintaining proper distancing for the health and well-being of us all, I began to think of the psychological/emotional effects of social distancing. Are we in danger of becoming more self-centered? Protective of our individual rights? Becoming more and more desensitized to others? We all know how challenging it has been to maintain a sense of community and keep it as a valued priority. Perhaps, now, more than ever, we can read Philippians 2 with mindfulness. To not do anything for selfish purposes, but with humility think of others as better than ourselves. Instead of each person watching out for their own good, watch out for what is better for others. Adopting the attitude that was in Christ Jesus: humility; having the same love, being united, and agreeing with each other for the benefit of the whole.

A parable for our time:

It was a bitterly cold winter and many animals were dying. The porcupines, realizing the situation, decided to group together to keep each other warm. This was a great way to protect themselves from cold and keep each of them warm, but the quills of each one wounded their closest companions.

After a while, they decided to distance themselves, but they too began to die due to cold. So they had to make a choice: either accept the quills of their companions or risk freezing to death. Wisely, they decided to go back to being together. They learned to live with the little wounds caused by the close relationship with their companions in order to receive the warmth of their togetherness. This way they were able to survive.

Let us pray: Gracious God, may your life-giving spirit move every human heart; that the barriers dividing us may crumble, suspicions disappear, and hatreds cease; and that with our divisions healed, we might live in justice and peace. Amen



Thursday, October 29, 2020

Text: Isaiah 43:16-21

**Thus says the LORD, who makes a way in the sea, a path in the mighty waters,
17 who brings out chariot and horse, army and warrior; they lie down, they cannot rise,
they are extinguished, quenched like a wick: 18 Do not remember the former things,
or consider the things of old. 19 I am about to do a new thing;
now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?
I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.
20 The wild animals will honor me, the jackals and the ostriches;
for I give water in the wilderness, rivers in the desert,
to give drink to my chosen people, 21 the people whom I formed for myself
so that they might declare my praise.**

One of my favorite sayings is – “The only thing constant in life is change.” I did not know where the saying came from, so I looked it up. It comes from the philosopher Heraclitus of Ephesus (c. 500 BCE). I often revert to this saying when something happens in my life that requires a change I may or may not have anticipated. Some changes are gradual transitions, as when fall turns to winter. Others happen abruptly, separating time into “before” and “after” like “Everything changed after the birth of our first child.” Sometimes we choose to undergo some changes after carefully considering our options, while others are forced upon us.

Often, we are adverse to change in whatever form it presents itself. When confronted with it we tend to compare it to a previous time of similar circumstance. For example, the change that took place after the birth of a first child is anticipated to be the same for the second child. “Oh boy, here we go again- late nights without any sleep, lots of crying and no time for ourselves.” But, it just so happens, the second child sleeps through the night, smiles all the time, and entertains her/himself. This change is not like the one before.

The above passage from Isaiah begins by defining the old exodus, when God led the Hebrew people through the Red Sea. Then it calls upon Israel to forget it, because God is “about to do a new thing”. Now Israel’s salvation lies not behind them but ahead of them. The old exodus was a dry way through the sea; the new one will be a wet way in the desert. The old involved snuffing out Pharaoh’s armies like a candle wick is quenched; the new

one will quench the people's thirst for freedom. "The former things" apparently refers to the first exodus; elsewhere, more negatively, it seems to refer to the time of judgment in First Isaiah, which is now being undone.

Change will happen, but it doesn't necessarily translate negatively. It can be one of possibility and new life. "Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old. I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?"

Let us pray: *Gracious God, as we live in an ever-changing world, transitions are difficult to make. Often we are afraid of change without know what the result will be or anticipating the worst. Remind us of Jesus changing water into wine; a storm into calm; blindness into sight; and death into life. May we trust in you for new possibilities. Change our perceptions. Change our minds. Change our hearts. Amen*



Friday, October 31, 2020

Text: Ephesians 3:14-21

¹⁴ For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, ¹⁵ from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name. ¹⁶ I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, ¹⁷ and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. ¹⁸ I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, ¹⁹ and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. ²⁰ Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, ²¹ to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

Contained in the letter to the Ephesians is this beautiful prayer for strength and understanding. A prayer worth revisiting in our time and place.

The one praying this prayer asks God for our inner being to be strengthen by God's Spirit; that Christ is alive in our hearts through faith. As a result of Christ living in us – love seeks to grow roots deep within us. Roots that grow beneath the surface. Roots that expand far and wide. This prayer also asks that we are able to grasp love's width and length, height and depth. It goes beyond knowledge and with it we are filled entirely with the fullness of God.

This is a powerful prayer and in it I see a tree as a metaphor for growth of the soul. The root system of any tree spreads far and deep occupying an area four to seven times the surface area occupied by the crown of the tree. Roots extend laterally for considerable distances. Healthy trees have extensive root systems. Healthy roots anchor the tree, provide uptake of nutrients and water for growth and cooling, provide storage for food reserves, and produce organic materials required for tree growth. These root functions are vital to a vigorous and functional tree.



This is our life source – to be rooted and grounded in love. The love of Christ that fills us with the fullness of God.

Let us pray: *Lord God, you are our source and seed. Nurture us with your Word, Christ the living one. Grow within us. Spread beyond us. Amen*



Saturday, October 31, 2020

Text: Romans 8:31-35, 37-39

³¹ What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? ³² He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? ³³ Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. ³⁴ Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. ³⁵ Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?

³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

This passage in Romans, written around 56-57 C.E., carries with it a sense of timelessness and constancy. God's love for us is always present throughout the ages in whatever situation we may find ourselves in. Hardships, distress, famine, fear, anxiety, illness, loss...they are not bigger than God's love for us, nor do they remain as constant in our lives as God's love does.

Years ago, I came across a poem by an anonymous author about a ball of yarn.

*A ball of yarn is full of intertwines,
The core is a mesh of twists and folds,
One thread overlapping another all around,
Like how one path crosses many others,
a twisting, winding labyrinth,
But organized into a sphere.
And when the sphere unravels,
The paths untwist and untangle,
And We realize,
That the thread overlaps not another,
But itself a hundred times over,
A single, long thread remains,
Encompassing all paths into one,
Then we finally see,
There remains a single thread,
With one beginning and one end,
Shared by all.*

Perhaps we see our life at its core a mesh of twists and folds, but God's love continually and constantly wraps around us and over us. It is the one single thread that holds our lives together, not only for ourselves but for others.

Like a ball of yarn, which is never ending, God's love for us is always present throughout the ages in whatever situation we may find ourselves in. Christ is the beginning and the end and the one thing that will always remain constant in our lives.

Let us Pray: *Gracious and loving God, your love is everlasting. Since the beginning of time throughout the centuries your love has been and always will be steadfast. Remind us that through Christ's love we are all connected, sharing your path of life together. Amen*



