

Devotions – November 1-7, 2020
By Pastor John Kuziej
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Sunday November 1, 2020

Text: Revelation 7:9-17

Verse: ***“They will hunger no more; and thirst no more; the sun will not strike them, nor any scorching heat; the Lamb at the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”***

I was helping with the planning and preparation of an evening meal for a Homeless Shelter the congregation supports. We not only deliver the meal but eat with the residents too. It just so happened I was attired in my pastor’s duds—you know the black shirt with white collar. One of the residents, a six-year old girl pointed at me and said, “You talk to God”. At another time she even called me “God”. Then her brother joined the conversation and asked if I could teach him to pray. I think Jesus heard a similar request, so I best not turn him down. We went into another room for privacy and introduced prayer to this eight-year old. I then asked if there was something he would like to bring before God. He told me he would like to see his grandpa. I asked where his grandpa was. He told me he had died. Initially I thought why he couldn’t ask for something simple, like a request for a puppy. I feared that he thought prayer could make his grandpa show up the next morning. I told him that it was okay to feel sad because he missed his grandpa. By talking to God in prayer we know God will understand. We then spent a little time talking about his grandpa.

Today is All Saints Sunday. It is time to remember loved ones who have died. We may indeed have a tear in our eyes as we remember beloved family and friends. The texts for All Saints include the beautiful reading from Revelation. In the author’s vision the redeemed are before the throne of God. They have passed through times of tribulation led by their Shepherd, Jesus, who has guided them to the springs of the water of life. God is gently pictured as one who will wipe away every tear.

The boy's six-year old sister came up to me several times pointing her finger saying, "You talk to God...you talk to Jesus". Certainly we do not have to be clergy to talk with God. As saints of the Lord, redeemed by his grace, we can talk to him all we want. Whatever the need, whatever the request let us be confident we are heard, and even more we are beloved.

PRAYER: *Almighty God, you have knit your people together in one communion in the mystical body of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Grant us grace to follow your beloved saints in lives of faith and commitment, and to know the inexpressible joys you have prepared for those who love you, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.*



Monday, November 2, 2020

Text: 1 Thessalonians 2:13-20

Verse: ***We also constantly give thanks to God for this, that when you received the word of God that you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word but what it really is, God's word, which is also at work in you believers.***

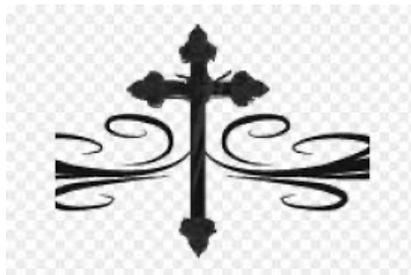
I recall visiting a dear saint who was in her eighties. We would visit and then have a devotion and Holy Communion. She had this huge cat named Anna. Anna would usually make herself scarce when I came. One time as I was getting ready the devotion Anna came out from hiding and went on her back right in front of me. As I read scripture and commented, Anna was focused on me. Her owner got such a kick over her cat's antics that she said, "The cat got more out of your devotion than I did."

Thanks a lot; I was glad the cat did not expect to receive Communion. We do not worry ourselves about preaching to critters. But we do want the humans among us to hear the Word of God. The apostle Paul was writing "to the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." Paul was thankful and joyful for their reception of Paul's preaching and teaching.

Naturally Paul used words when speaking the good news of Jesus and the people received this not as so much talk but as the Word of God. The Word of God was at work within them creating faith and forming them into obedient followers of their Savior. Just how can preaching the gospel word be at work within? It is the work of the Holy Spirit. Earlier in Paul's letter he was thankful the people received the word "with joy inspired by the Holy Spirit" and the message of the good news of Jesus came with "power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction."

As a seminary student a professor told the class, "Do not worry about the effectiveness of sermons; if you do you will drive yourself to the loony bin. Instead trust the Holy Spirit to deliver the message to people's hearts." Pastors be faithful and preach Jesus. And people listen as the Holy Spirit delivers the living Word: the Savior who forgives, the Savior who welcomes, the Savior who accompanies, the Lord who saves by grace, the Lord who has conquered the forces of sin, death, and devil.

PRAYER: *Blessed Lord God, you have caused the Holy Scriptures to be written for the nourishment of your people. Grant that we may hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that, comforted by your promises, we may embrace and forever hold fast to the hope of eternal life, which you have given us in Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.*



Tuesday November 3, 2020

Text: Micah 6:6-8

Verse: ***"(God) has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God!"***

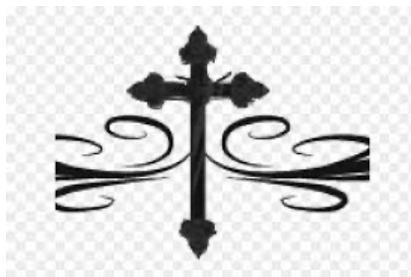
This is Election Day. If you haven't voted early, I am sure you plan to head to the polls today. This election has been called the most important one in recent history. One side claimed the other side-if victorious-will destroy democracy. The other side accused the other of failure to face "existential threats". People

are concerned that disagreements have become so divisive that people would rather choose sides instead of work together. But it does not have to be that way.

On the church calendar Martin de Porres is remembered today. He was born in Peru in 1579 and was trained as a barber-surgeon (sounds kind of scary). Anyway, he had some medical training available for the time which became useful when he became a Dominican monk. He did not cloister himself from the world but treated people who came in droves to the monastery seeking help. He was especially kind to those who were down, discriminated against, despised, and destitute. An interesting detail about this man's life was his care for abandoned dogs and cats. This man loved kindness and walked humbly with God. He was canonized a saint in the Roman Catholic Church and declared to be a patron of racial justice and harmony.

Many of us will stay up late anxious to know the outcome of the Presidential election. As brothers and sisters in Christ we remain centered in another outcome: salvation by grace through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. As his church we have been called out of darkness do follow the Light of the World. Through our baptism we have been elected as saints, set apart to be servants of God in this world God loves. The New Testament was originally written in the common language of the day, Greek. In an interesting twist the word for "kindness" sounds a great deal like "Christ", and in fact this play on words was used to remind the church that the followers of Christ were indeed the kindly ones. Dear fellow saints, in this world of need the church has been elected to do justice and love kindness from the power which comes when we walk humbly with God.

Prayer: *Gracious God, we pray for a peaceful outcome of today's election. May those who have won humbly seek your grace to fulfill their responsibilities for the good of all. May those who have lost accept the outcome and promise to work for unity and justice in the land. As we remember Martin de Porres today may we be guided by his example to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with you. Amen.*



Wednesday November 4, 2020

Text: Matthew 15:1-9

Verse: ***“This people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching human precepts as doctrines.”***

Caller ID is such a wonderful invention! When the phone rings at the house, often during meals or later at night, I check the caller and often the read out is “Potential Spam”. With work on the computer we are occasionally warned to not open emails that are called “scams”. We live in a world of spam and scams. Jesus did not have to worry who was calling him on the phone, but he did have to be alert when visited by the Pharisees and scribes. The text said they “came from Jerusalem” indicating their authority, piety and even biblical scholarship.

They came to raise their concern about Jesus’ disciples but of course this would include Jesus. The scribes and Pharisees asked why they broke the tradition of the elders, specifically a failure to wash their hands before they ate. Now the scribes and Pharisees were not sent from the CDC, worried about poor hygiene habits. The tradition in question had more to do with holiness codes, not so much clean from disease but to be clean before the Divine since all of Israel was considered to be priests faithfully serving God.

Later in Matthew we learn that Jesus was not opposed to the tradition of the elders but was concerned about neglect of far weightier matters like faith, mercy, and justice. So Jesus issued a spam and scam alert: the problem of hypocrisy. Jesus called them out regarding their practice of breaking the commandment, “Honor Father and Mother.” The scribes and Pharisees could apply a tradition of withholding support for their parents claiming the money was designated “for God”. This money designated “for God” was used to support the Temple in Jerusalem and directly or indirectly supporting themselves. So Jesus quoted Isaiah and a classic definition of hypocrisy, “in vain do they worship me, teaching human precepts as doctrines.”

So our reading is a spam and scam alert: may the church not look for human excuses to avoid obedience to the commandments! As the church, representing the compassion of Jesus Christ in the community, let us continue to seek his guidance and grace for our outreach and service in his name.

PRAYER: *“O Christ, create new hearts in us that beat in time with yours, that, joined by faith with your great heart, become love’s open doors. We are your*

body, risen Christ; our hearts, our hands we yield that through our life and ministry your love may be revealed.” (ELW #722)



Thursday November 5, 2020

Text: Luke 1:5-25

Verse: ***“Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear a son, and you will name him John.”***

In this time of pandemic with large group gatherings discouraged, church leadership must decide about Christmas Eve services, a time when our sanctuaries are often full. As plans are made in the midst of a serious infection, it is good to hear the first words to the priest Zechariah from the angel Gabriel, “Do not be afraid for your prayer has been heard.” In the book *Festivals and Commemorations* this is the day we remember Zechariah and Elizabeth, parents of John who would be known as John the Baptizer.

In the upcoming Advent season, we will hear more about John the Baptizer so now is not a bad time to read a bit about his parents. Both Zechariah and Elizabeth loved the Lord and lived by God’s Word. But there was sadness with their inability to start a family. To compound the sadness Elizabeth felt she had to endure disgrace because she was unable to bear a child. When Gabriel appeared to Zechariah in the middle of his priestly duties, it just about gave the old man a heart attack. Angel visitations have that effect and hence the common plea, “Do not be afraid”. Gabriel was no mere angel but an archangel from the throne of God. He gave the good news of the birth of a son. He will be filled with the Holy Spirit and lead many people back to God and interestingly he will “turn the hearts of parents to their children.” The name of the child has been decided: it will not be Zechariah, Jr. but John. Zechariah had trouble with this message thinking he was an old man, and in a sweet way said his wife “was getting on in years.” But one does not doubt the words of a high-ranking angel so poor Zechariah will become mute until the day when John is

born. (I wonder if Elizabeth thought this was a blessing along with being pregnant.)

This text is like an Advent preview. As church leaders seek to plan Christmas worship, as families wonder about holiday plans, may we continue to pray ever assured that prayers are heard. God will guide and show us the way for the logistics of Christmas planning. We think now about the promise of John the Baptizer. May his preaching direct us to God and the blessed assurance of repentance leading to the forgiveness of sins. It could very well be that many children are frightened during this time of pandemic. May parents be attentive and turn their hearts to their children, embrace them, and show love that reassures and casts away fears. May this text of John's birth announcement prepare us for the celebration of Jesus' birth, Emmanuel, God with Us, never to forsake us.

PRAYER: *Almighty and everlasting God, by whose grace Elizabeth and Zechariah, parents of the forerunner of your Son, Christ our Lord, were righteous before you and walked blameless in all your commandments: Grant, we pray, that, after their example, we may so faithfully serve you in this life that at the last we may receive the crown of righteousness which you, the righteous judge, will give to all those who truly love you; through the same, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.*



Friday, November 6, 2020

Text: Ephesians 3:7-12

Verse: ***“Although I am the least of all the saints, this grace was given to me to bring to the Gentiles the news of the boundless riches of Christ.”***

Today on the church calendar of remembering saints, we learn about William Temple, Archbishop of Canterbury. In this month of November, which began with All Saints, it is good to learn about the lives of men and women who blessed the Church with their devotion to the Gospel and who found plenty of

ways to apply the gospel—God’s love made clear and proven by Jesus—in their communities. William Temple, born in 1881, was the son of an Archbishop of Canterbury. Needless to say, William grew up in the Church of England (Anglican) and his love for the church ever grew. He served as a vicar (pastor), bishop, and eventually Archbishop of Canterbury himself. He was never so high up in the church hierarchy to be “holier-than-thou”—that would have been an abhorrent notion to William Temple. It is said that William Temple had a deep and profound belief in the Incarnation, the belief that God became flesh, a human being in Jesus (“The Word became flesh and dwelled among us”—John 1:14). This was no lofty doctrine from the Ivory Tower for Temple because the good news of God becoming a human being made every human being sacred. Temple was known for his work for social justice concerns and was involved in the Ecumenical movement. In spite of the degradation those in poverty feel, Temple wanted to lift them up with the good news of Jesus who draws all to the cross for salvation. And in spite of a variety of denominations with their doctrinal differences, there is the overpowering unity of all being saved by grace and the call to follow Jesus into the world for ministry.

The author of the letter to the Ephesians felt like the least of apostles, yet his calling was to preach and teach among the Gentiles the boundless riches of Jesus Christ. I like how the author of Ephesians wants his readers to know that the grace of Jesus is not something minuscule. In the first chapter we read of our redemption, the forgiveness of sins according to the riches of God’s grace, which God lavished upon us. At the end of the third chapter the author invites all the saints to meditate on the love of God, love that surpasses all knowledge.

So we remember William Temple, saint of the Lord, who died on this day in 1944. He is an example for us as one who loved the church in spite of all of its human failings. Blessing the church is the Lord of the Church, Jesus, God in the flesh, who ever lavishes the grace of forgiveness upon us with love that surpasses all knowledge.

PRAYER: O God of light and love, you illumined your Church through the witness of your servant William Temple: Inspire us, we pray, by his teaching and example, that we may rejoice with courage, confidence, and faith in the Word made flesh, and may be led to establish that city which has justice for its foundation and love for its law, through Jesus Christ, the light of the world, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.
(from *Festivals and Commemorations*, page 546)



Saturday, November 7, 2020

Text: 1 Peter 2:9-10

Verse: ***“Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.”***

If you are Dutch, you have an excuse to celebrate today. The church calendar of commemorations remembers Willibrord, missionary and Archbishop of Utrecht who died on this day in 739. He received his theological training in Ireland and developed a zeal for evangelism. He decided to devote his life to spreading the gospel in northwestern Europe. By his preaching and teaching he laid the foundation for the faith and growth of the church in what is now the Netherlands. Traveling as a missionary in such an early time must have had its dangers from hostile forces but he had the patronage of the King who controlled the area. A contemporary said of Willibrord, “He allowed no error or past ignorance to pass unnoticed and lost no time in shedding upon them the light of the Gospel, so that soon among that people the statement of the properly was fulfilled, ‘In that place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people, it shall be said unto them, Ye are the sons and daughters of the living God.’”

We can always learn from the example of the saints who labored before us. The church needs a renewed zeal for evangelism. But we are weary due to the pressures of the pandemic and how to be faithful to the Gospel in times when we are advised to stay home. Evangelism does not depend first on our genius and creativity. May we be confident of the Holy Spirit’s work with the Church. May the Body of Christ be inspired (Spirit-breathed) with the Spirit’s work of assuring us that we are not slaves to fear. Instead be reminded daily of the promise of baptism, that we are baptized into Christ Jesus, marked with his cross of redemption and called to live faithfully as the beloved children of God. We do have good news to share. We know people who may think they are “not God’s people”. Due to discouragement and distress people can conclude that God is not for them but may actually be against them. When people feel under siege let the Church ever be of service giving people renewed hope through the

mercy of God. Jesus' invitation ever stands: Come to me all who are weary of the bad news of sickness and death from Covid-19; come to me all who worry about their future with a loss of income; come to me all wonder if the days will ever get better. Jesus does not give a light-hearted optimism, but a Savior who gives his peace and abiding presence. The gospels remind us that Jesus bears all grief and all our infirmity. The church may have to deal with shut-down restrictions due to safety and health concerns. But this does not mean the Gospel is shut down. This reminds us of Paul's confidence that even though he was in prison and chained, he said the good news of Jesus is not chained. The Church has dark days but is never in the dark. Jesus is our light, the light of love, hope, and mercy for the world. On this day remembering a saint who worked among the people in what is now the Netherlands, say a prayer for the Church in the Netherlands and also see if you can enjoy a piece of Dutch chocolate.

PRAYER: *O Lord our God, you call whom you will and send them where you choose: We thank you for sending your servant Willibrord to be an apostle to the Low Countries, to turn them from the worship of idols to serve you, the living God; and we entreat you to preserve us from the temptation to exchange the perfect freedom of your service for servitude to false gods and to idols of our own devising; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen. (Festivals and Commemorations, page 548).*

