

Devotions – November 22-28, 2020
By Pamela Long
Grace Lutheran Church, South Range, MI

Sunday, November 22, 2020

Text: Genesis 3:10 (NIV)

"(Adam) answered, I heard you in the garden and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid."

Many times this is also my first instinct, to hide; perhaps it is yours as well. I think this is almost an instinctive response, especially in children. We may not actually want to hide ourselves in a closet or some other secret place, but we do want to hide from the truth of our misdeeds or sins. Perhaps it goes all the way back to Adam.

We don't want to stand before God and confess the naked truth of what we have done and what we have left undone. We are ashamed because we should have known better and done better. We all know that we can't hide anything from our Father. Still, it can be difficult late in the night when there's no one else to see or hear us to ask God to forgive the way we spoke to the neighbor whose "in your face" politics are so different than ours. To admit that we yelled at our child for some mistake. It seems somehow much worse to have to name and remember our sins than simply asking for forgiveness for "our trespasses".

God forgives our sins and there is no need to be afraid of God or hide our words and actions from God. And it's good to bring that idea to our children in whatever way they can understand so they won't be ashamed of themselves or afraid of God.

Let us pray:

Heavenly Father, we know we sin against you and cannot help ourselves. We are thankful that you are a loving and forgiving God who gave your only Son, Jesus Christ, to die for our sins. In his name we pray, AMEN.



Monday, November 23, 2020

Text: Lamentations 3: 25-26 (NIV)

The Lord is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him; it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord.

In an entire book of laments these two verses seem to stand out. The laments of the author were mainly concerned with the destruction of the holy city of Jerusalem by invaders. It details what horrendous acts were perpetrated on the people living there as priests and elders were slaughtered as they searched among the rubble for any food they could find. And mothers were reduced to cooking and eating their own children.

All of this was visited on the residents of their holy city by foreigners; people who were hated and not understood as fellow humans by the victims. They were reduced to helplessness by something they did not understand and could not conquer.

All the people in the world are going through something that has us reduced to helplessness and we call it Covid-19. We don't understand it and when we or our loved ones are stricken with it, we die or we go through months of treatment that we can't remember and that often leaves us permanently scarred emotionally and physically.

Let us pray:

Loving God, our hope is in you, please take this horrible contagion from us and restore us to the comfort of worshipping together and holding each other in our arms safe from fear of death from simple human contact. In Jesus 'name we pray. AMEN.



Tuesday, November 24, 2020

Text: John 14:16-17 (NIV)

**"And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever--
-the Spirit of truth."**

This is Jesus speaking to his disciples after he tells them he is going away. He's trying to explain to them about the crucifixion and that he will go to heaven and not be with them any longer. They don't understand. Sometimes we read these verses and think, "You can't be that thick-headed, disciples!" But that of course is with over 2,000 years of knowing what did happen and understanding what Jesus is telling them.

Sometimes I think how wonderful it must have been actually being there when Jesus was alive and talking to his followers in person. But I doubt if I had been there, I could have understood that Jesus was talking about sending the Holy Spirit to be with all of us and with each of us forever. Nope, I wouldn't have understood then and sometimes I don't understand now.

It seems, though, that just when I am at my most confused and facing the most complex and sometimes dire situations, the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, is there suddenly right with me and

right inside of me. And suddenly I'm not confused and what's more amazing is that I'm not afraid --- of anything because I know I am not alone, and I never will be.

Let us pray:

Thank you, Jesus! You gave us the most wonderful gift of all! Just when we and the disciples were the most confused and the most frightened, you asked the Father to send us the living Spirit to be in us forever. AMEN.



Wednesday, November 25, 2020

Text: Micah 6:8 (NIV)

He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

This Old Testament reading talks about what God expects of the people of Israel. It's a bitter pill to swallow. Perhaps most of us believe that we can at least come close to acting justly, maybe not thinking justly all the time, but still, we can tell the difference between justice and injustice. We would not blatantly condemn a person for an injustice that they did not commit.

We also know that we should love mercy and we usually have mercy on those who have treated us unjustly and those who have even committed crimes against other people. We believe that no one is capable of living perfect lives and so should be treated mercifully when they do sin. So, we probably do see ourselves as just and merciful children of God, at least most of the time.

But...BUT. Do we really walk humbly most of the time? Even some of the time? I certainly do not. I get proud of myself at the drop of a hat. I'm sure part of that is conditioning from teachers and parents trying to instill a sense of self-esteem in their students and children. I think a good part of that is our own sense of self-worth. I'm proud of writing daily devotions for the synod, instead of thanking God for giving me the skill and intelligence to do so.

This is why Jesus died for our sins because I, for one, want to take credit for talents that are not my own, but are gifts from God.

Let us pray:

Thank you, Heavenly Father, for giving each of us special skills to use in your service. Remind us daily that all we have comes from you and teach us to use these gifts in service to your kingdom. AMEN.



Thursday, November 26, 2020, Thanksgiving Day

Text: Luke 17-19 (NIV)

Jesus asked. "Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" Then he said to him, "Rise and go; your faith has made you well."

You remember, no doubt, the story of the ten lepers who called out to Jesus as he was approaching a village to have pity on them and he told them to go and show themselves to the priests as was the appropriate thing to do when someone had been cured of disease. As they walked away, they were cleansed of their leprosy, but only one came back to thank Jesus, and this person was not even a Jew like Jesus, but a Samaritan with whom Jews did not usually associate.

I suppose I am more like one of the lepers who kept on going instead of returning to thank Jesus. It's not that I don't know that my good health, my steady supply of good healthy food, my loving family, friends and neighbors come from God, it's just that I don't think about it very often. Many of you may be guilty of the same sin of omission, at least some of the time.

We have so much, and we so often take it for granted. On this Thanksgiving Day, and hopefully on every day, I will make a point to stop and thank God for all he has given me. And I will try to stop and observe all the beauty of the nature surrounding me; and the safety, security, and comfort of my home, and so, so many other things that I overlook.

Let us pray:

Father, we thank you for all of the daily blessings you shower us with and we pray that you will increase our faith so that we may stop daily and rejoice in all that you have given us so that our thanks may multiply. In Jesus' name we pray. AMEN.



Friday, November 27, 2020

Text: Philippians 4: 5-6 (NIV)

Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your request to God.

Paul's advice to the Philippians some 20 years after Christ was crucified seems like he could have been talking to the citizens of the United States today. Indeed, with COVID-19 raging in overdrive these days and the presidential election still dividing the nation, it seems we have plenty to be anxious about. But as experts have pointed out to us, anxiety has negative effects on each of us that can exacerbate our worry and negatively influence our behavior.

We would do well to heed Paul's advice to ask God to replace our worry and fear with a gentleness that will shine through our faces and attitudes so we may greet everyone as true brothers and sisters despite our differences.

Let us pray:

Gracious God, calm our anxiety and replace our fears with your peace. Turn our minds to see the goodness and love in others and lead us into rediscovering that we are one nation, under God. AMEN.



Saturday, November 28, 2020

Text: Galatians 3:28 (NIV)

There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for all are one in Christ Jesus.

There are a few other verses very similar to this one in the New Testament. To me, it means that we should not make distinctions among people because Jesus sees us all as equal. This poses problems, as well, though. We certainly see differences among people all the time, but we can't stop and celebrate our diversity without judging others.

We make assumptions about people based on the way they look to us. Some of us may perceive "old people" as wise while others may think that they are feeble-minded. Some see women as not as intelligent as men, and men as not as sensitive as women. Some see people of color; black or brown or red or yellow and assign negative aspects to them. I could go on, of course, but the problem seems to be that we can't "see" people without appraising them.

I think we can, though, with a little conscientious effort and a lot of help from the Holy Spirit. Think about what a positive difference we could make in this world if we could see a person and only think of them as another child of Jesus, just like us.

Let us pray:

Father, send your Spirit to "stop us in our tracks" every time we see people and see them as anything other than another one of your children. In Jesus' name we pray. AMEN

