

Devotions -- March 7-13, 2010
By Members of Faith Circle
First Lutheran Church, Gladstone

Sunday, March 7

By, Lynn Thomas

*“A man had a fig tree...and he went to look for fruit on it,
but did not find any. So he said, ‘Cut it down, why should it use up the soil?’”*
Luke 13:6-7

Last summer, while stopping at a roadside stand in California, I was amazed at the number of workers in the fig orchards, even though harvest time was months away. It's surprising how much extra work is needed throughout the year to ensure a good harvest. Apparently times haven't changed much since the cultivation of figs began in 2900 BC! The scripture is about a fig tree that wouldn't bear fruit so the owner planned to cut it down. The story continues as the vineyard-keeper stops the owner from destroying the tree and asks to be allowed to spend some time pruning and fertilizing it. Perhaps that was all it took to get the tree to bear fruit; we aren't told what happens next. Frequently, we interpret this passage as a warning to bear fruit lest we be cut down! This parable is often seen as a judgment and a warning that God will not tolerate fruitlessness indefinitely.

However, I believe there is another important message in this story. Consider the vineyard-keeper who prevented the tree from being destroyed by offering to provide extra care. We, like the vineyard-keeper, are obligated to take the time to cultivate the fruit of faith, both in ourselves and in others. Just as fig trees need continual care to help them bear fruit, we as Christians need continual care to manifest faith in our lives. We must be caretakers for others, encouraging them in their faith journey. In that way, we are like the keeper who asks that the tree be given another chance. We act as caretakers whenever we gather together for worship and whenever we pray for each other. It is our blessing and our duty to support and nurture the faith of our sisters and brothers in Christ.

Dear Lord, thank you for the friends in my life who have nurtured my faith. Help me be a caretaker for others that I might also encourage them in their faith.

Monday, March 8

By, Dorothy Westerback

Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen. Matthew 28: 19-20

At the end of the gospel of Matthew and Luke 24:47 Jesus commands us to reach all nations. Christians then and now are ordered to be missionaries.

Paul was one of our first missionaries. He went to the world within his reach. The Roman Empire had built a network of paved roads and the Christian movement spread. Paul also went on dangerous sea voyages. Then he wrote letters to encourage them. The same spirit who helped the first Christians can help us.

In 2010 we have access as never before to reach all nations, but are we sending the message we were told to send?

Ask yourself this question. What new ministry possibilities do you see for yourself and your church in the whole world and right outside your door?

Dear Heavenly Father, Help us to be witnesses for you and to follow the Great Commission as given to us in your word. Amen

Tuesday, March 9

By, Cindy Sjoquist

The LORD preserveth the simple: I was brought low, and he helped me.

Psalm 116:6

I was in a waiting room the other day and got into conversation with a husband and wife. The man told me their family made the decision to discontinue having TV in their home.

They saw benefits very soon. Their three children play outside more, play creative games and invent games, and socialize more with each other and the parents. In addition, he recently lost his job, so the money which would have gone to pay for the cable, now goes to help with other, much more important bills.

The wife added that the kids eat breakfast at home and take cold/bag lunches to school rather than eat in the cafeteria. I know this is being done in many families but it was a reality check to speak with one of them. I believe God was watching over their family to help them make what probably initially seemed to be a simple decision, but ended up being a very significant one.

I have never asked God to help me simplify/unmuddle my life, believing I could do it by myself. But now I look back and recognize that I needed help and God had provided it through friends and siblings, by visits and phone calls.

Dear Lord, don't let us forget you are our focal point for simplifying ourselves, our lives; not just the material items but especially our hearts and minds, towards you.

Amen

Wednesday, March 10

By, Pam Chouinard

Then Jesus asked, "What is the kingdom of God like? What shall I compare it to? It is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his garden. It grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air perched in its branches." Again he asked, "What shall I compare the kingdom of God to? It is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into a large amount of flour until it worked all through the dough." Luke 13: 18-21

Do you ever get discouraged? I certainly do. Sometimes we look at things and they seem so overwhelming that we get discouraged. We work so hard to only see a little getting accomplished. The disciples also are overwhelmed and having trouble understanding the nature of the kingdom of God that Jesus is proclaiming. So Jesus searches for a comparison the help them understand, and so gives us these familiar parables.

A mustard seed was considered by the Jews as the smallest of seeds, yet when planted it grows large enough that the tree can support wildlife. Small beginnings, large endings.

Yeast- In Jesus' day, they would save a little bit of one day's dough, and keep it moist to mix into the dough for tomorrow's bread. Unfortunately they didn't have the convenience of Red Star or Fleischman packets of yeast we have. A small amount of yeast will leaven a large amount of flour. The tiny lump of yeast will soon turn a large volume of dough. Small beginning, large endings.

With small beginning in our daily lives we may get discouraged. What we've worked so hard to do seems so small and insignificant-- so tiny. Just like the disciples felt about the kingdom of God. Just because the kingdom didn't seem very great yet, doesn't mean that it will stay small. The Kingdom of God begins as small and insignificant, but grows to become large and powerful. Mustard seeds vs. trees, tiny lumps of yeast vs. large loaves of bread. Small beginnings, large endings.

Dear Father, too often we believe only what we can see and get discouraged. Help us to see the Kingdom of God as Jesus sees it and to expand our understanding. We pray, Amen.

Thursday, March 11

By, Betty Froberg

“Before they call I will answer. While they are yet speaking, I will hear.”

Isaiah 65:24

Years ago my beloved Aunt was in a nursing home. She was a widow in her 90's. Her vision and hearing were poor and she was physically handicapped.

One day when I visited her, she was slumped in her wheelchair in complete dejection. She said, “If I had known you were coming, I would never have let you see me like this.” I encouraged her to talk to me, telling her it would make her feel better. After some persuasion, she began to talk and I listened. The words just poured out—feelings of loneliness, grief and frustration. As she talked, she said, “I believe I do feel better.” We continued our visit for a while longer until it was time for me to go. As I left her room, I heard her singing!

In our busy life style with its many distractions there is often little attention paid to listening. Yet it is an important aspect of Christian fellowship, and it is an ability all are able to develop. Christ set the example showing us the relationship between listening and caring. He allowed people to express themselves. He listened before he responded to their needs. It is not our responsibility to provide solutions, only to show we care. God will bring the healing.

*Dear God, have mercy on those who live in isolation from family and friends. Comfort them with the assurance you are always with them and will listen to their every prayer.
Amen*

Friday, March 12

By, Diane Srutowski

"Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven and whose sin is covered"

Psalm 32

In these verses, David gives us instruction on the lessons that he has learned after suffering guilt, frustration and waning of vitality because of his sins. He tells of the wonderful gift of forgiveness that God offers to all who are sinners if we but confess our sins.

In verse 3, David says, "When I kept silent, my bones wasted away, through my groaning all day long." When we sin and turn away from God, our guilt robs us of peace and torments us with the pain of knowing that we have done wrong.

In verse 5, David confesses his faults to the Lord and God takes away the guilt of his sin. Through the death and resurrection of Jesus, our sins are forgiven. Think about this, God so loved us that He gave His son's life as payment for our sin. I cannot imagine offering my child's life as payment for a debt. To me, that seems like an unbearable sacrifice and I am eternally grateful that I don't have to make that choice.

In verse 7, David indicates that God is his hiding place where he is protected from trouble and surrounded with "songs of deliverance." In verse 8, God gives us another gift, that of His Word. We are to use the Bible to guide us through life.

Psalm 32 is an individual thanksgiving and the second of seven Penitential Psalms. Why don't you see what the other six Penitential Psalms tell us?

Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for your gifts of forgiveness and grace. In your ever-patient loving care, you are always waiting with open arms to receive me and for this I am eternally grateful. Amen

Saturday, March 13

By, Pam Durbin

We are careful not to judge people by what they seem to be, though we once judged Christ in that way. Anyone who belongs to Christ is a new person. The past is forgotten and everything is new. God has done it all! He sent Christ to make peace between himself and us, and he has given us the work of making peace between himself and others.

What we mean is that God was in Christ, offering peace and forgiveness to the people of this world. And he has given us the work of sharing his message about peace. We were sent to speak for Christ, and God is begging you to listen to our message. We speak for Christ and sincerely ask you to make peace with God. Christ never sinned! But God treated him as a sinner, so that Christ could make us acceptable to God. 2 Corinthians 5:16-21

Paul's letters to the early Christian communities often contained advice on how to get along with each other. Today's reading cautions us about judging others. At times we are quick to look at the words and actions of others with a critical eye. We wonder about their motives, question their sincerity, even consider their Christian ethics. Perhaps lamenting to ourselves that old verse:

*To dwell above with saints we love, O that will be the glory;
But to dwell below with saints we know, now that's another story.*

And yet, Paul is quick to set us straight. In verse 18 we are clearly given the understanding we need to direct our daily relationships.

God has done it all! He sent Christ to make peace between himself and us, and he has given us the work of making peace between himself and others.

Dear God, Thank you for sending Jesus to die for my sins. Forgive my irritation and impatience with others. Remind me that you paid the exact same price for the redemption of each of your children. Help me to be a peacemaker today. Amen.