

Devotions – June 20-26, 2021
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Sunday, June 20, 2021

Text: Mark 4:35-41

³⁵On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, "Let us go across to the other side." ³⁶And leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. Other boats were with him. ³⁷A great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped. ³⁸But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke him up and said to him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" ³⁹He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm. ⁴⁰He said to them, "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?" ⁴¹And they were filled with great awe and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"

Today is Father's Day. Today is also the first day of summer. So as summer heats up, I just like to remind you to always take a sweater along with you.

Likewise, for those of you who are planning to remain in northern Michigan and Wisconsin this winter, you'd be wise to wear something lightweight and with short sleeves.

Now these seemingly illogical suggestion are actually good advice. That's because our culture is addicted to "climate control." Having air conditioning and central heating make it possible for us to create any kind of climate we want. And since we still can't control what kind of weather we'll encounter outside (out in the real world) we often over-compensate in our encapsulated worlds (our homes, our schools, our restaurants and church buildings).

But in reality, all of our illusions about having "climate control" disappear the moment we step outside. Entering the "real world" means encountering the power of real weather. So in spite of all our attempts at living a climate-controlled life, "into every life a little rain must fall."

When Jesus and his disciples hoisted anchor and sailed off across the Sea of Galilee "in the cool of the evening," they weren't expecting bad weather either. Yet a storm did arise. And it's here where Jesus is the one who quiets the wind and calms the waves with a single rebuke, a divine directive: "Peace, be still." No one controls the winds; no one calms the waves; no one commands the weather, except the One who has created them all – the Lord God, the Creator of the universe.

And Jesus isn't just the ruler of wind and waves. Jesus is also the one who can take the most chaotic and uncontrollable forces of this world and makes them a part of the faith community we call "the church." Jesus doesn't just want his disciples to have faith in the midst of life's storms. He wanted his disciples to welcome the wind (the wind of the Holy Spirit) and to welcome the

water (the water of baptism) as part of the “out-of-their-control” avenues to their new lives as his disciples.

Each and every one of us, at one time or another, has been scattered and battered by the weather of life. We live in a world where things can (and many times do) go suddenly wrong. We worship in a church where things can, and at times, do go wrong.

But we also have a Lord who has weathered the storms of life with us. We have a Savior who has shown us how to cherish each and every minute of our lives, even when the storms of life are at their worst and are wreaking havoc with our securities and safety nets. And we can trust our “weather” to the one who has not only weathered all of life’s dangers, but who also controls the weather and holds it in the palm of his hands.

Let us pray...

When the storms of life rage all around us may your presence steady us. Grant us hearts that are focused upon your faithfulness. Keep us steady, Lord, and fill us anew with the power and promise of your Holy Spirit. Amen.



Monday, June 21, 2021

Text: John 1:6–8, 19–23

⁶There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. ⁸He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. ¹⁹This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" ²⁰He confessed and did not deny it, but confessed, "I am not the Messiah." ²¹And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the prophet?" He answered, "No." ²²Then they said to him, "Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" ²³He said, "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,'"

A few years ago, I presided at the wedding of a young couple. The five-year old nephew of the bride happened to be the one chosen to carry the rings down the aisle. However, at the wedding rehearsal he was quite unruly. He kept leaping out at people from behind doors and around corners. He would bare his teeth at them and growl. He chased the flower girls all around, roaring and snarling at them and other folks as he practiced coming down the aisle. Finally, his mother pulled him aside and demanded to know why he was behaving so badly.

“But Mom,” he explained, “I have to act fierce — I’m the ‘Ring Bear.’”

So how many of us (like this little boy) misunderstand just what our role is supposed to be as a follower of Christ? This little boy thought that he was the one called to be big, imposing, fearsome, large and in charge. He thought that he was supposed to be the “star of the show.” He thought that the spotlight was supposed to rest on him.

But he wasn’t supposed to be a “ring bearer.” He was supposed to offer the supportive role of “ring bearer.” His role was important. As the pastor presiding over the wedding, not to mention the bride and groom, we needed to have those rings down front. But the focus of the wedding ceremony wasn’t supposed to be on the “ring bearer,” but on the marriage of this young couple.

As we can see, John had no trouble here with his role as the one who is to “testify” – to bear witness to the light, from the One who actually is the light. And although John the Baptist was “a man sent from God,” he was still just a man. John doesn’t want to talk about himself. He doesn’t want to talk about who he is or about what he may or may not be. The only identity that he’s willing to claim for himself is that of “the voice of one crying out in the wilderness.”

So what about us? Can we, too, be “bearers” of the light? If so, then let’s not try to be the light. Let’s not try to go out and seek the spotlight. Instead, let’s be one who bears the light of Christ out in the world today.

Let us pray...

Lord God, into the wilderness you sent your messengers to bear witness to the coming of your Son. In every age, your Word has called your people to do the same. Open our hearts to your good news. Help us to share the light of Christ with the world. Amen.



Tuesday, June 22, 2021

Text: Romans 8:9-11

⁹But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. ¹⁰But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. ¹¹If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you.

In my hometown, you can’t drive down most of the rural roads that run alongside the rivers or lakes without seeing the bright yellow road signs with silhouettes of ducklings warning you to “Slow Down. Duck Crossing.”

Nothing says spring as sweetly as a line-up of little fuzzy ducklings waddling across the road or swimming behind their mother. The babies look so devoted and are so completely in lock-stepped with their parent, that they will blindly “follow-the-leader” right into oncoming traffic.

However, it isn't love that keeps those baby ducks so obediently bonded behind their parent. Flocking birds (like ducks and geese) are genetically programmed to “imprint” on the first creature that they see after cracking out of their eggshell. Of course, that first creature would normally always be the baby duckling's mom or dad. Imprinting on their parents keeps the hatchlings from wandering off on their own or trying to make up-close and personal friends with say, a cat or a Buick.

But imprinting can also go very wrong. Baby ducks imprint on the first moving creature that they encounter, no matter what that creature is. So if the eggs are hatched in an incubator box, then it's the human being caring for the new hatchlings who will become the object of the babies imprinting. And if the eggs happen to hatch close to a friendly dog, then the duckling's mom will forever be a barker and not a quacker.

In Romans 8, Paul gives us a way to avoid being imprinted by the world and senselessly following in its sins. Paul contrasts those who live “in the flesh” with those who through faith now live “in the Spirit.” Those who have come to faith in the resurrected Christ are not just “imprinted” with an idea, they're “implanted” with Christ himself. “Christ is in you,” Paul insists.

It's the living presence of the living Spirit that resides within each and every one of us. That presence is what sets our faith free from following in lock-step with the world and instead implants a new way of living, the way of life and peace. This living presence is why Christianity is always more than just a decent morality or a compassionate code of conduct, or a collection of creeds, or cultic rituals. To be a follower of Christ is to literally share in the resurrection life of Jesus. Those who are living “in Christ” are therefore implanted with his Spirit and are to manifest that same Spirit out in the world.

Let us pray...

Lord God, bring to us your life and your peace. Open our hearts to discern your leading and imprint upon us the way of Christ. Equip us to do your will, for we are your people. Amen.



Wednesday, June 23, 2021

Text: John 8:31-36

³¹Then Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, "If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; ³²and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." ³³They answered him, "We are descendants of Abraham and have never been slaves to anyone. What do you mean by saying, 'You will be made free'?"

³⁴Jesus answered them, "Very truly, I tell you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. ³⁵The slave does not have a permanent place in the household; the son has a place there forever. ³⁶So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.

Back during the time of Martin Luther, as Europe struggled out of the “dark ages” and into the “middle ages,” one of the most precious commodities, available to only the elite and the educated, were books. Books were often tucked away and treasured in monasteries, which housed the only libraries in Europe. Later on, if a community was wealthy enough, there might actually be one or two chained books in the church for parish members to gaze at.

Chaining up books was the high security system for protecting these treasures at the time. It meant bolting the Holy Bible to a heavy stone lectern. It meant chaining up the “word of God” inside the church building.

In John 8, Jesus has a word for those of us who would follow him: “If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.” Jesus knew that the only way for us to be set free, was to be immersed in God’s truth – which is revealed to us in the Holy Scriptures. When the “word of God” becomes a living, God-breathed part of our soul, it becomes a part of us and we become a part of it. We become what Paul called “a living epistle.”

So let’s set God’s Word free, which will also set us free. Let’s find a way to unchain God’s Word from our church pulpits and begin to truly make it a living part of our daily lives.

Let us pray...

Your Word, O God, is living and active, a powerful way in which you speak to us. Give us ears to hear what you are saying. Give us courage to measure our attitudes and actions by your truth. Enlighten us with your Spirit and set our hearts ablaze with the yearning to know you and love you even more. Amen.



Thursday, June 24, 2021

Text: 2 Corinthians 13:11–12

¹¹Finally, brothers and sisters, farewell. Put things in order, listen to my appeal, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you. ¹²Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the saints greet you.

How many of you remember your “first kiss?” Well, I hate to burst your bubble, but all of those “first kisses” that you think you remember (whether it was a stolen smooch in the schoolyard, or a braces-locking embrace as a teenager) – whatever you call your “first kiss” – was really not. Chances are that your “first kiss” was doled out to you when you were too small to recall.

Babies are snuggled, cuddled, and kissed by their parents and relatives and sometimes, even by complete strangers. So your “first kiss” was probably toothless and slobbery and left something gooey behind. But it was that “first kiss” that initiated you into the uniqueness of being human. It was that first kiss that connected you to the universe of relationships.

There is probably one other thing that you learned wrong in your kissing history, and that is the mantra, “Don’t kiss and tell.” For if you care enough to “kiss,” then you should also care enough to “tell.”

“Kiss and tell” were the watchwords of the early church. Paul here urges the Christian community to greet each other with a “holy kiss.” The “tell” is what that “kiss” both communicates about the faith community and what the faith community has to tell the world — the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Now it might be hard to appreciate how totally unusual this kind of kissing actually was. In most ancient cultures the “familial kiss” was both a right and an expectation, but it was strictly limited to blood relationships or marriage. Yet from the time of Paul and the early church, Christians began referring to each other as “brothers and sisters” and kissing each other to generate a new kind of family – a family formed not out of a biological relationship, but out of a kinship of faith.

Therefore, as followers of Christ, we too have got both the calling and capability to offer a “first kiss” to everyone we meet. So how good of a kisser are you? How good are you at kissing your neighborhood, kissing your community, kissing your enemies? What kind of a “holy kiss” can you offer to the world?

Let us pray...

Thank you, Lord, for being our God and for making us your people. Thank you for this ministry of love that you have entrusted to us. May your will be done in us and by us, both now and forever. Amen.



Friday, June 25, 2021

Text: Revelation 21:5-6

⁵And the one who was seated on the throne said, "See, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true." ⁶Then he said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life.

Back when churches were small inside, they were often open to the outside. So baptisms would happen on the banks of lakes and running rivers. When a baptism took place, the community all got wet together. Not only those who were being baptized, but those who watched from the shore, each drank deeply and were satisfied.

In many of our liturgical traditions today water is still made available to worshipers as they enter the sanctuary. Whether just a bowl or font, the faithful are encouraged to dip their fingers into water as they make their way into worship. They are invited to make the sign of the cross on their forehead and remember their baptism.

In the story of the first creation God, as the Master Potter, couldn't work with the dirt until it was wet. Dirt and water are combined to make mud (or clay). We are the clumps of dirt that the Divine Potter has scooped out of the ground. We are the "mud pies" who have each received the breath of God. Yet in order for God to continue to mold and shape us, our clay must be kept moist.

As John now receives his vision of the new heaven and the new earth, the first thing that God does is to offer water to all who are thirsty. This is the beginning of the new creation, of the new living relationship between all of the peoples of the earth and God.

So, then, what is it that keeps your clay moist? What's your moisturizer? Know that if your clay hardens and loses its wetness, then your soul gets hard and brittle and bitter as well. In order for this living water to keep its properties, it must be continually poured out into our churches, into our communities, into our homes and lives.

Living water must continually be dispensed to others or it will eventually grow stagnant and stale. God wants us to be wringing wet, so that we have plenty of living water in us and on us for God to mold and shape and help us make ready that next generation of Christ followers.

Let us pray...

Wondrous and generous God, your living water quenches our thirst, and your broken bread opens the door to eternal life. Conform us to the likeness of your Son and mold us, so that the world will see him in us. Amen.



Saturday, June 26, 2021

Text: Mark 9:50

⁵⁰ “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.”

A few years ago my son gave to me, as a birthday gift, a 10 lb. block of Pink Himalayan Salt. Have your kids ever given you anything crazy? At first I didn't really know what to do with it. So I did what any good parent might do with something that I have no real use for. I thanked him for it and then I left it in the box, put it on a shelf, and forgot all about it. It wasn't until a year or so later that I was watching a cooking show and the chef began to talk about all of the wonderful things you could do with a block of Pink Himalayan Salt.

So as it turns out, Pink Himalayan Salt is pretty cool because it's hot—or not. In Five-Star restaurants, it's considered “cool cuisine” to serve a grilled entrée (whether it be meat, fish, or veggies) on a superheated big chunk of salt. The heat of the salt block cooks the food, and the salt seasons the food with a smoky, salty goodness.

Jesus ends his discourse with his disciples here in Mark 9, by making a reference to salt. Now salt is good, except when it isn't. Nevertheless, it's kind of hard to make salt a “bad guy.” Salt is central to our human development and culture. Salt made it possible for “curing” food to happen (a way to keep meats and vegetables preserved and edible) before the sciences of canning, preserving, or refrigeration. Salting meat, salting fruit, salting down anything that might later be consumed to sustain life was the gift of salt.

We are reminded that Jesus is “the salt of the earth.” And if Jesus is the salt, then we are called to also have salt in us. Therefore, in everything that we do, let us find new ways to season and salt it with Christ.

Let us pray...

Merciful God, you call us to be salt in the world and to live as your righteous, holy people. May we extend your gift of infinite love to our neighbor and discover new ways to give that love away. Amen.

