

Devotions – August 29 – September 4, 2021

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Sunday, August 29, 2021

^{1:19}You must understand this, my beloved: let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger; ²⁰for your anger does not produce God’s righteousness.

A portion of James 1:17-27 (2nd Reading for the 14th Sunday after Pentecost)

I recently visited one of my favorite people and shared this reading with her. It is one of the lectionary texts for this Sunday, Aug 29 and it just happened to be the one I chose. I wasn’t sure what I was getting us into *and* it’s not the easiest reading to take it. It is one of those readings I’d rather not read. The book of James is considered to be wisdom literature, not an epistle, and Martin Luther critiqued that the book leaned too heavily on works rather than relying upon faith in God for our salvation.¹ There’s some consolation in his critique.

Gratefully, I was visiting a wise woman of 94 years. Earlier I was sharing with her about something that made me really angry. Without missing a beat, she said, “I’ve never figured out how to get over being human.”

I struggled to find grace in this passage as I read it, but before we dug into scripture that day, grace was spoken across from me, as we sat outside, taking in the goodness of a summer day and time together. Yes, there are standards and goals to live up to as humans and Christians, but I’m grateful for people who give me the grace to accept my foibled, imperfect, sinful self. I continue to pray for the willingness to grow, yet thank goodness there is always much needed grace along the way.

Let’s pray: *Thank you for loving me as I am and for helping me see parts of myself that are hard to see. Help me to grow and change, all while I am steeped in your goodness and mercy. In Jesus’ name. Amen.*

¹Working Preacher Website 8/24/21. Written by Casey Thornburgh Sigmon, Assistant Professor of Preaching and Worship; Director of Contextual Education. Saint Paul School of Theology. Leawood, Kansas



Monday, August 30, 2021

For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known.

1 Corinthians 13:12

Life is a mystery and what is to happen after this life is also a mystery. Yet, in faith with Christ there is promise. A promise of something to come. What would I do without that?

My Grandma Marilyn passed away a few years ago, but today is her birthday, so I have been thinking of her quite a bit today. She collected bells and I now have two of her bells; my two favorites. One is a little, teeny-tiny golden bell with a high-pitched ring that may beckon in a fairy of sorts and the other is silver in color, with a crystal (or crystal-like) heart as a handle. It needs a little tending too, but it used to have the most pure, beautiful ring.

I ran across these two bells a few weeks ago when my aunt, uncle and cousins came to town and were helping us with some home improvement projects around the house. This week I decided to display the bells in our living room and this morning, on Grandma's birthday, my two girls decided to ring these bells. It seemed like out of the clear blue they took interest in them. It really wasn't out of the clear blue since they were placed in a location where they could see them, but still, the ringing of the bells on Grandma's birthday, for me, was a sign that there is something more. Grandma's spirit, and the Holy Spirit, were close and they came to say hello.

There is much I don't know, but in faith and in mystery, I smile as I think of Grandma's presence with us today. I'm grateful for the promise of eternal life, for Jesus, for Grandma, and for the ways in which we remain closely knitted together even as life rolls on.

Let's pray: *God, help us live fully into the mystery of life and the thoughts of eternal life with peace and joy. In Jesus' name. Amen.*



Tuesday, August

31, 2021

They worshipped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy.

Luke 24:52

In The Leaving

In the leaving,
in the letting go,
let there be this
to hold onto at the last:

the enduring of love,
the persisting of hope,
the remembering of joy,

the offering of gratitude,
the receiving of grace,
the blessing of peace.¹

My last official day as an administrative interim pastor at Grace Lutheran Church in Gwinn, Michigan is fast approaching. I cried this week as I read the farewell litany we will all say together in worship on Sunday. It has never been easy for me to say goodbye. How about for you? Will you share your secrets if you've done well with it?

This passage from Luke tells a piece of the story of Jesus' ascension. We hear that he blessed his disciples, withdrew, and was carried up to heaven and this verse is the disciples' response. They worshipped him, carried on and were left with a feeling of "great joy." Wow. I wonder what else they were thinking and feeling?

Let's pray: *God, please give us the measure of grace we need to go through (and not around) the goodbyes we need to say and the grief we need to feel, and may we, too, be left with joy and praise of you. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

¹Richardson, J. (2015). *Circle of Grace: A Book of Blessings for the Seasons*, pg. 166. Wanton Gospeller Press.



Wednesday, September 1, 2021

Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own?

1 Corinthians 6:19

I turned 21 as a student in the Dominican Republic, studying Spanish and health related issues. It was the first time I had been out of the country, which translated in my youthful brain as a wonderful opportunity to be adventurous and take risks and do things without the loving eyes of my parents watching! Some of the decisions I made that summer were better than others, and that's being generous.

One of the friends I met in the Dominican shared with me this Bible verse in a note. I don't know why and I don't remember what I had told her about my life, but I've never forgotten the gesture. At the time, I was struggling intensely with an eating disorder. The letter from her was both Law and Gospel wrapped up into one. On the law end I heard: "Don't abuse your body by

eating too much in isolation and then going out mid-day in a tropical climate for a run to sweat it all off.” I felt terrible and *known* and guilty. The Gospel side of it spoke to me like this: “Your body is precious. You are beloved. I (God the Spirit) live in and with you and I am here for you.” This friend showed up as a messenger of God for me and it was both uncomfortable and comforting all wrapped into one.

How has God worked through the Word in your life? How has God worked through others? How has God pushed you to feel uncomfortable and what did you learn?

Let's pray: *Loving and Healing God, help those who are struggling with their bodies today. May the knowledge of your Spirit within us give us peace. In Jesus' name. Amen.*



Thursday, September 2, 2021

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

A short story about prayer with our three-year-old, Maggie:

Sometimes, as you know, children say the most profound things that humble you to the point of realizing God is surely at work in them in ways that are beyond you as a parent and that children are in fact teachers just as parents are. This is not one of those stories, but a story of a three-year-old being a three-year-old.

As Maggie and I (her mom) and her little sister Aurora were on the way to her daycare today I began praying for her and I started praying about all the people who love her, including God, Jesus, her mom and dad and grandparents, her friends, and her aunt and uncle. She then added our neighbors and maybe others (I can't remember!) to the list of people who love her. Then I asked Maggie what she would like to pray for, and she said she'd like some more toys and maybe another Elsa (from Disney's Frozen) doll. Then we arrived at school.

I'm grateful she knows that people love her and that she could add to the list. One of my biggest hopes and prayers is that she knows just how much Jesus loves her; unconditionally, wildly, without exception.

I didn't have enough coffee in me this morning to talk with her more about how we can expand our prayers to go beyond praying for those things we want. I think she knows that already though.

Let's pray: *Thank you, God, for loving us. Help us move beyond ourselves so that we may rejoice and pray and give thanks in You no matter the circumstance. In Jesus' name. Amen.*



Friday, September 3, 2021

He came as a witness to testify to the light.

John 1:7

Everybody bears a light. Everybody experiences shadow and grief in their lives. That's why we need to take care of our equipment/ourselves and keep the batteries charged. A flashlight can't operate at full capacity 24 hours a day. Know and respect your limits. Don't forget 'me time.' If you're going to search a bigger area, multiple flashlights may accomplish the task more efficiently. Don't be afraid to ask for help. Respect the newer generation. Be open to change. How many people use D-cell batteries? (That's old technology.) *Written by Trooper Thomas Kinnunen of the Michigan State Police.*

Blessed Are You Who Bear the Light

Blessed are you
who bear the light
in unbearable times,
who testify
to its endurance
amid the unendurable,
who bear witness
to its persistence
when everything seems
in shadow
and grief.

Blessed are you
in whom the light lives,
in whom the brightness blazes---
your heart
a chapel,
an altar where
in the deepest night
can be seen
the fire that
shines forth in you
in unaccountable faith,

in stubborn hope,
in love that illumines
every broken thing
it finds.¹

¹Ricahrdson, J. (2015). *Circle of Grace: A Book of Blessings for the Seasons*, pg. 47-48. Wanton Gospeller Press.



Saturday, September 4, 2021

Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.

Luke 1:38

The angel Gabriel came to tell Mary some very significant news and this verse is her response. I'm imagining her with heart racing fear as she hears the news that she will be the mother of God, yet her words are full of such assuredness. I hear it as, "Ok. Yes. I'm here. I'm willing. I am your servant. Take me as I am. I trust you. I am yours."

There is promise in this verse; that God will come to you, asking of you something unique to your life journey and the gifts God has given you. How do we remain trusting and open like Mary?

A Blessing For After

This blessing
is for the moment
after clarity has come,
after inspiration,
after you have agreed
to what seems
impossible.

This blessing
is what follows
after illumination departs
and you realize
there is no map
for the path
you have chosen,
no one to serve
as guide,

nothing to do
but gather up
your gumption
and set out.

This blessing
will go with you.
It carries no answers,
no charts,
no plans.

It carries no source
of light
within itself.

But in its pocket
is tucked a mirror
that, from time to time,
it will hold up to you

to remind you
of the radiance
that came
when you gave
your awful and wondrous
yes.¹

¹Ricahrdson, J. (2015). *Circle of Grace: A Book of Blessings for the Seasons*, pg. 51-52. Wanton Gospeller Press.

