

Devotions – September 26 – October 2, 2021

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Sunday, September 26, 2021¹

Text: James 5:13-20²

¹³Are any among you suffering? They should pray. Are any cheerful? They should sing songs of praise. ¹⁴Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord. ¹⁵The prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise them up; and anyone who has committed sins will be forgiven. ¹⁶Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective. ¹⁷Elijah was a human being like us, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. ¹⁸Then he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain and the earth yielded its harvest. ¹⁹My brothers and sisters, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and is brought back by another, ²⁰you should know that whoever brings back a sinner from wandering will save the sinner’s soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

Anointing the sick? For the sake of healing and the forgiveness of sins? James is trusting us with a gift for each other, a gift we bring to each other in the name of Jesus. We can lay hands on one another and pray and bring healing to one another. And you can tell a sister, “You are forgiven.” We can share with each other the words of forgiveness and healing and freedom.

Of course, we do not have the power to heal or to forgive sins. But we know the open secret of Jesus: we are forgiven and we will be healed. None of this is magic. When you sit with me and lay your hand on me, I know God’s presence. You are God’s presence. You are with me. We are bodies, not spirits. So do not neglect each other. We need each other’s presence. We have been apart too long. Reach out, however you can. Sit with each other. Be present with each other and witness... just be there... You will heal each other.

Let’s pray: *Creator, you have made us, you knit us in our mothers’ wombs. You made us for one another. Heal us and our hurting world. Set us free to be together again, to hold each other, to love each other. We ask this in the name of our Savior Jesus Christ, your Son. Amen.*



¹ Daily Readings are taken from the Daily *Revised Common Lectionary*.

² All Scripture quotes are taken from the *New Revised Standard Version*.

Monday, September 27, 2021

Text: 1 Peter 1:3-9

³Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, ⁵who are being protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. ⁶In this you rejoice, even if now for a little while you have had to suffer various trials, ⁷so that the genuineness of your faith—being more precious than gold that, though perishable, is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. ⁸Although you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy, ⁹for you are receiving the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

Peter writes to show us how wondrous our hope in Jesus really is. Listen, though, to how he describes our inheritance: "...[it] is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who are being protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." To me, Peter's language is intriguing and revealing. He is not talking about what we can know about the world to come. Instead, Peter is encouraging us to hold onto a hope that we can't really know anything about. He wants us to hold onto a hope we can't even dream of or imagine.

Whatever we will find in the resurrection, it has not been revealed to us: we hope "for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." That is a miracle, in a way. The faith the Spirit planted in our hearts is a miracle. Faith holds onto what it cannot see or imagine or know. So in faith we actually experience the presence of God, we know He is nearer to us than we are to ourselves... and at the same time God is hidden in the world and with the world and under the world. We see Him now by faith, but one day we will wake up to the new creation and be like Him who gave His life for us.

Let's pray: *Jesus, by the faith your Spirit creates in us, we find the beginning of eternal life even now. We do not understand with our minds, but our hearts cling to you. Move us by your Spirit to trust the love that springs from faith so we can be confident that you are God-with-us and we cannot be lost. Amen.*



Tuesday, September 28, 2021

Text: 1 John 2:18-25

¹⁸Children, it is the last hour! As you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. From this we know that it is the last hour. ¹⁹They went out from us, but they did not belong to us; for if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us. But by going out they made it plain that none of them belongs to us. ²⁰But you have been anointed by the Holy One, and all of you have knowledge. ²¹I write to you, not because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and you know that no lie comes from the truth. ²²Who is the liar but the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, the one who denies the Father and the Son. ²³No one who denies the Son has the Father; everyone who confesses the Son has the Father also. ²⁴Let what you heard from the beginning abide in you. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, then you will abide in the Son and in the Father. ²⁵And this is what he has promised us, eternal life.

What is an antichrist? I know that is a strange question. It's a strange focus. But real. John doesn't see just one Antichrist supervillain in the world. John writes of "antichrists", plural. And antichrists are not the usual suspects. For John, the antichrists "went out from us, but they did not belong to us..." So, antichrists are like us. Antichrists are Christians, or they were. They went out from us, but they were not of us. Antichrists abuse the name of Jesus, not with curses, but by holding up the name of Jesus. They confuse love with the world's version of right and wrong. They leave us behind for another call. Maybe they take others away with them. Antichrists spread division for their own human righteousness. They do not see that only together are we Christians. Only in the unity of love are we Jesus' Church.

Let's pray: Spirit, you bind us together in heartfelt love for each other. Teach us to hold together in friendship in our church. Only by the love that pours forth from the faith you give us are we set free from division and self-righteousness. Heal us so that we can live together as sisters and brothers in our Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.



Wednesday, September 29, 2021

Text: Matthew 18:6-9

⁶[Jesus said,] "If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea. ⁷Woe to the world because of stumbling blocks! Occasions for stumbling are bound to come, but woe to the one by whom the stumbling block comes!

⁸"If your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away; it is better for you to enter life maimed or lame than to have two hands or two feet and to be thrown into the eternal fire. ⁹And if your eye causes you to stumble, tear it out and throw it away; it is better for you to enter life with one eye than to have two eyes and to be thrown into the hell of fire."

My prayer every day is that I won't be a stumbling block. It is a blessing if I do some good, but please let me do no harm. For the Reformer Philip Melanchthon, we grow from fear into love. So we hear Jesus' words and we think we should fear condemnation. I don't want to have a millstone fastened around my neck! I don't want to go through life with one eye or one hand! I don't want to be a stumbling block and earn condemnation! Melanchthon hears Jesus' words and sees that we are afraid... at least in the beginning of our life of faith. But that is not the life of faith that is marked by the fruits of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Maybe our fear plants a seed in us, but the life of faith grows into love.

When we pray not to be a stumbling block, now it is out of love for the little ones. We live for each other and, especially, for them. Our faith is marked by care for our little ones. That is a gift in ways we probably do not even imagine or understand.

Let's pray: Father, you give us our little ones as gifts. Move us by your Spirit to walk with them on the way your Son Jesus shows us. Let us be their teachers and guides and friends. Amen.



Thursday, September 30, 2021

Text: Galatians 3:23-29

²³Now before faith came, we were imprisoned and guarded under the law until faith would be revealed. ²⁴Therefore the law was our disciplinarian until Christ came, so that we might be justified by faith. ²⁵But now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian, ²⁶for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. ²⁷As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. ²⁸There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise.

The freedom of a Christian is something we do not often talk about... not fully, not without qualifying it until it isn't really freedom anymore. We are afraid of Christian freedom. Not for ourselves, but for our neighbors. We do not trust each other to live for each other. Our freedom is the freedom of love. But love really has no rules. It listens. Love sits with a friend. Love waits. It asks: "What does my friend need now?" If we don't trust each other, we don't love each other. Not as fully as we could.

Love responds from the heart to the heart. Cor ad cor loquitur. Heart speaks to heart. We can't have rules for that kind of love. We have to trust each other to listen to each other and to our own hearts, where the Spirit dwells. It is time to learn to live together again.

Let's pray: Jesus, you have set us free from the Law to live for love alone. You call us to live for you in each other. Move us by your Spirit to listen to one another so that our hearts will truly speak to one another. Amen.



Friday, October 1, 2021

Text: Romans 8:1-11

¹ There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. ²For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. ³For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and to deal with sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴so that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. ⁵ For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. ⁶To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. ⁷For this reason the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law—indeed it cannot, ⁸and those who are in the flesh cannot please God. 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.

When I hear Paul in Romans, I want to sing: there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus! More than that, we hear in Colossians that in Jesus, God has reconciled all things to Himself. That is, there is death in the body because of sin... just as Paul tells us. But that death was taken on by Jesus for us all. It was taken to the cross. And now, also in Jesus, death is the way to new life... for us all.

Jesus is the way to true life. He is true salvation. So now our minds and our hearts rest in Him. And we can rest in Him because we know there is life in Him... for me and for us and for all. Knowing that there is no condemnation in Jesus Christ, that He is true salvation, sets us free. We can live in the only freedom there really is: the freedom of love, the freedom of the heart. We can live, listening to the Spirit who dwells in us, trusting Her to guide us by the movements of our hearts. And if we fall, we fall. We will be lifted up again and again. We will never be lost. We are free in Jesus.

Let's pray: Spirit, you dwell in our hearts to bring us to life in Jesus. Create faith in us so that we will trust in you and live freely in love for each other and live for the life we will find when we are raised to new life in Jesus Christ. Amen.



Saturday, October 2, 2021

Text: Luke 16:14-18

¹⁴The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all this, and they ridiculed him. ¹⁵So [Jesus] said to them, “You are those who justify yourselves in the sight of others; but God knows your hearts; for what is prized by human beings is an abomination in the sight of God. ¹⁶“The law and the prophets were in effect until John came; since then the good news of the kingdom of God is proclaimed, and everyone tries to enter it by force. ¹⁷But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away, than for one stroke of a letter in the law to be dropped. ¹⁸“Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and whoever marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery.”

For many of us, especially in my generation, we have several long-term relationships along the way to getting married. And sometimes after. Today, we think of marriage as a civil contract. But I would think those long-term relationships probably fit in with the vision of marriage they had in Jesus’ day better than our civil law version of marriage does. We give our hearts to each other in those long-term relationships. It’s worth thinking about how we give our hearts to each other and why we take them away.

Jesus seems to be holding up the spirit of the Law against people who want to interpret it legalistically. The question for us today, maybe, is: how do we approach those sacred relationships our Creator has blessed us with? Do we see them as gifts? Do we trust each other with our hearts? Or do we treat relationships as something to be enjoyed and discarded and replaced? Are we in a transaction together or holding onto each other in love?

Let’s pray: *Father and Creator, you gave us each other at the foundation of creation as partners and as lovers. Teach us to treat each other as holy and sacred. Teach us to be careful with each other’s hearts. Teach us to see each other as gifts of our God. Amen.*

