

Devotions – October 3-9, 2021

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Sunday, October 3, 2021

Text: Mark 10:2-16

Verse: **“Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.” (vs. 9)**

Pastors will tell you that they sometimes receive strange requests for marriage services. One time a middle-aged couple pleaded with me to perform their marriage. They were from Detroit, and they wanted to share their vows of faithfulness amid the beautiful scenery of the Porcupine Mountains. They could find no one to officiate until they asked me. Why not, it is another opportunity to preach the gospel. During the ceremony hikers happened by and instead of walking through they stood back respectfully and later congratulated the couple. Part of my compensation was micro-brewery beer with the couple’s picture as a label.

Recently a couple approached me for a service. The planned attendance would be four, the wedding couple and the two witnesses. Nice and simple, but not so fast. Their residence was in the Chicago area, Cook County, Illinois. Their wedding license would not be valid with my signature and address in Vilas County. They did not care. They wanted to be married at the church I serve due to family history with the congregation. So I conducted a brief ceremony of all but 15 minutes. The bride was so happy she practically danced in the sanctuary. They would worry about the legalities later. So far I have not been arrested.

But whatever the venue, I say during the service: “Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.” It is an expression of the gospel with the promise that God’s faithfulness will uphold the couple in their promise of lifelong faithfulness. But as our text spoke today, divorce is a reality. A marriage that has been broken may be a painful reminder personally or with family and friends. We know the reasons for divorce and in general Jesus mentioned “hardness of heart.” Hardness of heart or human sinfulness can cause the beautiful vows of faithfulness to be broken causing sadness, anger, and divorce.

God’s vow of faithfulness is never broken by human sinfulness. God’s heart does not harden with this reality. God’s faithfulness is proven by Jesus, his cross and resurrection, his gift of forgiveness and promise to heal, mend, guide and provide grace for newness of life.

PRAYER: *Merciful Creator, we thank you for the gift of marriage and your promise of love and support for the couple. Strengthen marriages everywhere, helping couples grow in love and deepest care for each other. We pray for marriages that have been broken, and as the church help us respond with insight and care. When a marriage comes to an end and a divorce is sought,*

may those so broken seek your forgiveness and healing support, confident of your promise that you will never abandon them in their need. Amen.



Monday, October 4, 2021

Text: Psalm 8

Verse: **“What are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?” (vs. 4)**

Not long ago I was in my office staring down a computer screen, busy with work to be done and absorbed with my own importance. An older woman stood in the doorway and greeted me. We shared the usual ‘how-are-you’ and I thought that would end the conversation. She was at the church for a meeting. But she did not leave. She continued to stand in the doorway. I had to decide to be curt or caring and fortunately the Holy Spirit made the choice. I invited her to sit down expecting small talk. But then she said, “I have to talk to someone about what happened to me years ago, something I never told anyone.” She told me of a trauma she experienced and the years it took for healing. She talked with me for not all that long, I would say twenty minutes. She rose to leave and thanked me saying, “There are times when I just need to talk about what happened to me.” I will not go into details, but she talked about an experience that took place sixteen years ago. Others have told her to forget about it and move on. But as we know trauma is never forgotten and reminders can surface years after the event.

Psalm 8 is wonderful Psalm of praise. Jesus quoted it to shush the cranky Pharisees who complained about children singing praises of Jesus as the Son of David (Messiah). Surveying the wonder and majesty of all creation the question was asked if human beings count at all. Does God the Creator really care for human beings? People can feel so small not just because we live in a vast universe. People can feel small because they wonder if anyone cares. People may think they are too unimportant for anyone to take time for them and listen to them. This Psalm praising God for the majesty of creation speaks of the majesty of human beings. The Psalm says a shocking thing: “...you have made them a little lower than God.” (Some translations say “little lower than divine beings or angels”). God has made us to be god-like so we take good care of God’s creation. (The meaning of “dominion” is creation care and not exploitation.)

So I return to the lady in my office I almost mentally dismissed because I was ‘busy’. She is a precious human being made little lower than God. Does this not call us to praise God for creating us to care for creation and this is practiced in our care, our time, our compassion for one another. Praise God, for you have made us and given us the ability to really make an important difference in the lives of others.

PRAYER: *God of majesty, amid the grandeur of your creation you sought us out, and by the coming of your Son you adorned us with glory and honor; giving us dominion over your works. Enable us so to care for the earth that all creation may radiate the splendor of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.* (From Evangelical Lutheran Worship)



Tuesday October 5, 2021

Text: Galatians 6:14-18

Verse: **“May I never boast of anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.” (vs. 14)**

Yesterday many churches honored the feast day of St. Francis of Assisi. I volunteer at a community charity housed at St. Francis Episcopal Church. In the narthex is a large painting of St. Francis surrounded by many birds and attracting a wide range of forest critters. His joy in God’s creation has inspired “Blessing of the Animals” services often observed around the Feast Day of St. Francis. I recall a couple of past animal blessing services at the church I serve. The hymn sung is “All Creatures of our God and King” with the text from Francis of Assisi. When the music started two spaniels would join in with joyful howling, singing praise to their Creator in their own way.

If you know Francis’ biography, he was born in 1182 and enjoyed a life of privilege. One day in a church of his hometown he heard the crucifix on the altar speak to him: “Francis, go and repair my house which is falling into ruin.” He then decided to live a life of poverty taking Jesus’ commission to heart of proclaiming the kingdom of God without expectation of any compensation. He and his followers would trust God to provide for their needs. In the “New Book of Festivals and Commemorations” by Philip Pfatteicher it says Francis inspired “a new vision of the Christian life, one that combined complete lack of earthly possessions and rigorous asceticism with a joyful, comradely fellowship, a strong sense of humor, and gladness in God’s creation.” Francis lived by the words of Apostle Paul today, “The world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.” Our daily remembrance of baptism calls us to live “crucified to the world”, living not by worldly standards of finding worth in the accumulation of possessions.

Grace prompts us to go against the grain of the world and boast only in the cross of Jesus Christ from whom we receive the gift of salvation, and with such love given and received we are equipped to love one another. Martin Luther wrote the world is “full, full of God; in every street, before your door you find Christ...Come down, come down Christ says; you will find me in the poor, I am too high for you in heaven, you will be stranded.” We don’t want to be stranded for

we have our life's direction, our baptismal vocation to bear the cross of service, seeing Christ in the lowly and least among us.

PRAYER: *“All who for love of God forgive, all who in pain or sorrow grieve, Alleluia! Christ bears your burdens and your fears, still make your song amid the tears. Alleluia.”* (From the hymn of St. Francis – ELW #835)



Wednesday, October 6, 2021

Text: Luke 22:24-27

Verse: **“For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one at the table? But I am among you as one who serves.”** (vs. 27)

The text began with the disciples in dispute. The argument was just which one would be regarded as the greatest. Can you imagine the racket made by twelve men insisting who should be first? Can you imagine the finger pointing as they took turns giving reasons why the others were not as worthy? Luke placed this episode right after Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper. The unleavened bread of the Passover became the Body of Jesus. The wine, the cup of redemption in the Passover, became his blood sealing the new covenant. Jesus spoke of his death and told them “Do this in remembrance of me.” Well, the disciples remembered for about 10 seconds before starting their greatness grumbling. For added poignancy, the dispute debacle was sandwiched between Jesus' announcement of betrayal and Peter's three-fold denial.

It would be easy to criticize the disciples for their failure to grasp the grace at the Lord's Supper. Jesus gave them salvation and the very next minute they are arguing about who should be regarded as the best. But are we today any different? After receiving Holy Communion, do we still think we are better than others; do we feel a need for recognition for all we do for the church; do we fail to build up and lift up members of the congregation that are often overlooked? Let us not overlook the gravitas of grace: my goodness as sinners Jesus still invites us to his table! What he has done for us is powerfully spoken in one of the older Thanksgiving prayers, “Jesus is the one who, handed over to death he freely accepted, in order to destroy death, to break the bonds of the evil one, to crush hell underfoot, to give light to the righteous, to establish his covenant, and to show forth the resurrection, taking bread and giving thanks....” A prayer after Holy Communion calls us to show “fervent love for one another.” The Jesus standard of greatness turns the world's standard on its head: “The greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like one who serves.”

Very importantly, very graciously Jesus said he remains among us, among us as one who serves. Today the Lutheran Church remembers the work of Theodor Fliedner, his first wife Frederike Fliedner, and after her death, his second wife Karolina Fliedner. They devoted much of their lives to renewing the deaconesses, women in community devoted to living out Jesus' words about greatness, to be among those in need as women who serve.

PRAYER: *Jesus, "send thy love with fire from heaven, love that longs to help and bless, be it in the world a leaven, unto peace and righteousness"* (From a hymn by Theodor Fliedner)



Thursday, October 7, 2021

Text: John 21:15-17

Verse: **"Feed my lambs...feed my sheep."**

Peter the fisherman was told by Jesus to feed his sheep. Jesus was not suggesting a change of occupations. The call to feed the lambs and take care of the flock meant the care of the people of God. Peter was to guide the people with the Gospel good news of the forgiveness of sins. If you recall, on the evening of the first Easter Jesus appeared before his disciples with a message of peace. Then Jesus breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit, if you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

Peter was set apart for leadership in the early church of Jesus Christ. Jesus approached Peter and asked him three times if he loved him. We may wonder why Jesus asked Peter three times, and the text said Peter was hurt by Jesus' insistent "Peter, do you love me?" Peter may very well have felt a sense of shame because of his three-fold denial of Jesus just before he was crucified. Jesus was not trying to shame Peter by reminding him of his worst day with the denials at a crucial time. Jesus loved Peter immeasurably and he wanted him to know that truth. Jesus showed love, acceptance, and forgiveness earlier when he showed Peter where to fish after a night of catching nothing. Then Jesus made breakfast on the shore of the lake, a breakfast of fish and toasted bread. That certainly must have tasted good after a long night of fishing.

It may have sounded strange hearing Jesus asking Peter if he loved him. Jesus was reaffirming Peter's call to preach the gospel and lead the church. Forgiven for his denials, Jesus now asked Peter for his love. This love meant commitment, faithfully obeying Jesus and feeding and tending the flock, the church of Jesus Christ.

Today the church calendar recognizes Henry Melchior Muhlenberg, "Missionary to America." He was sent to minister to the Lutheran congregations in the middle of the 18th century. Many settlers of German heritage were delighted to hear a pastor preach a sermon in their Mother

Tongue. Besides German, Muhlenberg preached in English and Dutch. He was a man who fed and tended the flock, in this case the Lutheran congregations scattered throughout Pennsylvania, New York, South Carolina and other places. He wrote liturgies and helped establish the first Lutheran Synod in America. He has been called the patriarch of the Lutheran Church in America.

Jesus not only calls us to follow him but to love him. This is not superficial love, but love known in our care, compassion and gospel outreach to others.

PRAYER: *God our heavenly Father, your servant Henry Melchior Muhlenberg displayed courage and perseverance in the face of opposition and slander, and brought order both in life and in worship to scattered and dispirited congregations. Give to the pastors of your church such strength and faithfulness that the devotion of your people may be enriched, and that unity and cooperation may be advanced, to the glory of your Name; through your Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.* (Prayer from “New Book of Festivals and Commemorations by Philip Pfatteicher)



Friday, October 8, 2021

Text: Psalm 112

Verse: **“For they will never be shaken; the righteous will be kept in everlasting remembrance”.** (vs. 6)

It was time for my haircut and my hairstylist called me over to her chair. She had just come from another job...not a paying one but volunteer. She was helping at a local church VBS. She is a person of dynamic faith. She volunteers for two area churches, able to attend one on Saturday evening, and the other on Sunday. She asks me questions like, “What is your favorite Bible verse?” This time she showed me a plaque she bought at a flea market. It was the ABCs of Bible promises. Every letter of the alphabet had its turn with a promise of love and grace. You might wonder about the letter ‘X’. With a little poetic license it read, “eXperience His presence.” For the letter ‘z’ it read, “Zealously share the reason for your hope.” I took a picture of the plaque and refer to it now and then.

Psalm 112 is an acrostic; each verse begins with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet. The Psalm began with declaration of happiness: “Happy are they who fear the Lord.” Fear has nothing to do with fright but the study and application of God’s commandments. The commandments were never thought to be a burden but the source of wisdom and a joy-filled life.

Keeping the commandments brings about righteousness. Because we have a righteous God who has not abandoned Creation to chaos, God is the source of guidance and grace for us to keep the commandments. The commandments were never thought of as “spoiling fun” but as instruction for a life well lived. A life well lived is not one solely about oneself. The Psalm tells us the righteous are merciful and full of compassion, chips off the block of our Creator. The righteous give freely to the poor, reflecting the goodness of God who is the refuge of the poor. God’s instructions provide light in any darkness reminding one that God is our light and salvation, so why should we fear. Because God is a faithful refuge the righteous can handle put-downs and evil rumors, safe and secure in the Lord.

The commandments are a treasure more valuable than gold because they reveal life is not to be a matter of our own wills and control, but the will of God who delights in our happiness. The commandments show us what is right for the world, for people to love one another, to build up one another, and not to forget those in need. Why don’t you make your own list of the promises of God for a life of fulfillment and faith, using each letter of the alphabet to order your list. I think of a favorite hymn: “Order my footsteps by your word and make my heart sincere, let sin have no dominion, Lord, but keep my conscience clear.” (ELW # 772)

PRAYER: Lord Jesus, you promise blessing for those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, that they will be filled. Inspire, instruct, and guide us by your word that we find happiness and fulfillment in helping others. Guide us today to someone who feels troubled by the chaos of this world; guide us to be your messengers of encouragement and compassion. Amen



Saturday, October 9, 2021

Text: Luke 16:10-15

Verse: **“No one can be loyal to two rival chiefs. He will have to choose between them, for either he will hate one chief and love the other, or he will honor one and resent the other. You cannot be loyal to the Great Provider and possessions at the same time.” (vs. 13)**

I read today’s passage from an English translation “First Nations Version: an Indigenous Translation of the New Testament.” I do so aware that next Monday is Indigenous Peoples Day. This translation respects the honored story-telling traditions meaning the names of people are given in a full, descriptive way. For example, Jesus is referred to as either “Wisdom Keeper” or “Creator Sets Free.”

In today’s reading Jesus would have us be free from a common chief: wealth or possessions. Notice that Jesus does not condemn ownership of things. It is as if management of wealth is a

preparation for new life in heaven (true riches). The Indigenous Peoples translation says, “If you do well with the small things of this world, you will do well with the great things of the spirit-world above.”

Not long ago a waitress at a favorite breakfast place came up to me with \$50. This was a tip she had received and she said it was too much; would I please give it to someone in need. As it turned out I could not find an individual to receive the money. In conversation with her I suggested a local charity and she agreed. Then she said sometimes she feels that she has so many blessings, actually too much! Her husband joked that if they ever won the lottery, she would have all the winnings given away to help those in need. I think she was living out the meaning of today’s lesson. Creator Sets Free (Jesus) had set her free from the fear of not having enough to actually seeing how much God has provided. Through grace she lives with the joy of building up others with gratitude and generosity.

Today the church remembers a somewhat obscure English Bishop, Robert Grosseteste, who ministered in the 13th century. He faithfully encouraged clergy to teach people in their mother tongue the Ten Commandments, seven deadly sins, and the Creed. The very first commandment calls for worship of the one true God: “You shall have no other gods.” Possessions do not deserve to be served and worshipped because they cannot forgive, comfort, and give eternal life. The seven deadly sins warn against envy and greed. And the first article of the Apostles’ Creed praises our one Creator who daily preserves, provides and protects. In the catechism Luther wrote, “All this is done out of pure, fatherly, and divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness of mine at all! For all of this I owe it to God to thank and praise, serve and obey him. This is most certainly true.”

PRAYER: *Gracious God thank you for providing all that we need for each day. Guard our hearts and minds so we do not fall into the trap of thinking we can serve you and wealth on equal terms. Only in you do our restless hearts find peace. Free us from the lure of the false gods of this world so we know the joy of your compassion and care, guiding us to share what we have with others in need. Amen.*

