

Devotions – October 10-16, 2021

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Sunday, October 10, 2021

Daily Reflection: Humility

Text: Ephesians 4:2

“Be humble and gentle. Be patient, bearing with one another in love.”

When I think of humility, I think about three types of people: 1) Folks who think they are the absolute best at everything; 2) Folks that always think they could do better. They may accomplish some miraculous challenge and instead of celebrating they are critiquing themselves; and 3) Folks who pendulum swing between thinking they are the best at something to wondering if they could have done better.

Humility is a hard thing to grasp. The Bible calls us to it time and time again, but it seems that pride or arrogance are always around the corner trying to strike us down. It can be very hard to do what God intends for us which is to celebrate our accomplishments but also have gratitude for God and all the individuals who helped us along the way. As we practice living with humility and gratitude, we find our lives improve. We are thankful for our God given gifts, whatever they might be. We also start to notice all the ways God and others help us and bless us along the way. This realization connects us more deeply and helps us not to feel isolated or alone.

Questions for Today: What are your talents? Who has helped you along the way?

Practice for Today: Today I will practice gratitude.



Monday, October 11, 2021

Daily Reflection: Resilience

Text: Romans 8:38-39

“For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

When I was in middle school one of my spelling list words was resilience. There were two definitions for resilience, but I remember mushing them together into one that made me absurdly happy (I was not the coolest kid in school). I was so intrigued, so pleased, with my definition that I took my #2 pencil and wrote the definition right on the wall above my bedroom desk. Resilience: The ability to bounce back to original form.

My mother did what any rational parent would do when she saw it, she was none too happy. Yet, she didn't make me wash the wall, it stayed there. For the rest of middle school, onto high school, long after I had left the house and my sisters behind me. When the house became quieter and took on a new rhythm. All around that definition on the white wall, the room has taken on a new shape. It is no longer a child's bedroom but a study. Yet that pencil scrawl is still there. Resilience: The ability to bounce back to original form. I guess my mother liked it, too.

There is something poetic about the way those words stayed there. It is truly what resilience is. To be resilient doesn't mean we don't get dragged into the storms and chaos of the day to day. It doesn't mean that sometimes we won't feel heartbroken or angry. It doesn't mean that other people will not affect us and possibly even change our minds on things. But there is that Holy Spirit core in us; this simple place in you and me that is a mix of child-like faith and a strength deeper than you are even capable of knowing. Resilience is the ability to return to that.

Question for Today: What are some things about you that make you strong?

Practice Today: Today I will stop at least three times during the day and take three deep breaths.



Tuesday, October 12, 2021

Daily Reflection: Surrender

Several years ago now my family experienced a loss that will never leave us. It is one that felt unfair and heart wrenching. Not a day goes by when I don't think about her with her crooked smile and wild heart.

We all experience grief and loss in our lives. I'd imagine as you read this you are thinking about some of the folks you have lost. Needless to say, loss is never easy. One of the big struggles is we cannot control it. We can decide what we want to eat for dinner, but we cannot control how long the people we love will be in this world with us.

However, there is a strange and sacred aspect of grief that sometimes goes unnoticed. Grief has the capacity to soften us, to build compassion. On a Sunday morning I watch someone who lost her husband several years ago reach out to a woman who has just lost her partner. She holds

both hands in hers and then wraps the woman in a tight embrace. She knows what to say and she also understands that sometimes there is nothing you can say at all.

A confirmation kid once asked me why God had to save the world in the way that he chose to. “Why couldn’t God just snap his fingers?” the girl asked. Why did Jesus suffer like that? It’s hard to explain but I know why. Because God was never looking to be a God far away on a cloud especially in the most tragic moments of our lives. Instead God was looking to be like that woman I saw on Sunday morning. Grasping our hands tightly and saying I know, honey I know. It’s hard. Because the thing is God does know. Jesus experienced it too.

Question for Today: How has grief or loss allowed you to relate more deeply to others?

Practice for Today: I will not judge the things that happen to me today as good or bad. I will simply experience them.



Wednesday, October 13, 2021

Daily Reflection: Compassion (and the Media)

“Love your neighbor as yourself” - Jesus

The thing that we always must remember about the Samaritan man was that he was a stranger to the Jew, someone not like the man beaten up and left in the street. The least likely and most foreign person to walk by is the one who saved the man in the street. I am sure you have heard this before plenty of times. This is after all, one of Jesus’ most powerful parables and one of the foundational teachings of Christianity. Who is my neighbor? The ones who show compassion. This is a teaching that takes my confirmation kids a while to grasp sometimes.

“Who is your neighbor?” I will ask after reading it.

“My grandma!” one yells out.

“Why?” I ask

A pause. “Because she lives next to me!”

I try to explain that the neighbor is not the one whose physical locality is close but instead the neighbor is the one who shows kindness to the world.

“Oh, she does that too,” the confirmation kid says proudly.

I guess this grandma is doing double duty as two kinds of neighbors.

With Jesus' lesson about the neighbor, how should we watch the news, approach social media, and deal with the technology of our time?

We remember that a status update and a 20 second news reel does not allow us to truly know our neighbor. We leave space open in our hearts for curiosity about these people who we might not be familiar with that God created and loves. We remember that behind every headline in every culture in every corner of the world there are people who, through their actions, are the Good Samaritan.

Question for Today: How can I use my social media for good?

Practice for Today: I will check any biases that I might find myself falling into.



Thursday, October 14, 2021

Daily Reflection: Hope

Text: Matthew 6:10

“Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done”

There is a book I love called “Let the Great World Spin.” It follows the stories and lives of many people but one who I am drawn to is named Corrigan. He is an Irish man who loves Catholicism and moves into the Bronx in the 1970s to help women on the streets. There is a quote in that book that goes:

“Corrigan wasn’t interested in the glorious tales of the afterlife or the notions of a honey soaked heaven. Instead he consoled himself in the fact that in the real world, if one looked closely into the darkness he might find the presence of light, damaged and bruised but a little light all the same.”

No one can deny that we are going through a rough time right now. Romans would call it birthing pangs, and there is great anxiety. Covid has exposed all the other tensions, traumas, and issues that were quietly bubbling under our society’s surface for years. However, Christians are not called to lapse into fear and hopelessness now. We are called to cling to the Kingdom. Throughout Jesus’ ministry he spoke to a yearning that he held so deeply it was a fundamental part of his being. A yearning for justice, a world set right where both humanity and creation

could have peace. Where greed would be alleviated, balance restored, and deep respect for all life upheld. We yearn for that too. That is why we pray “*thy kingdom come,*” in the Lord’s prayer.

Things aren’t great right now this is true, but we have to keep our eyes on the vision that Jesus laid out and the thing is that even in the worst of times when one looks into the darkness there is light. Our God of light created the world after all, and God is always in it.

Question for Today: What kinds of justice do you yearn for in the world?

Practice for Today: I will write down some things that are wonderful about the world.



Friday, October 15, 2021

Daily Reflection: Hope

Text: Romans 5:8

“Hope does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.”

My friend lives in a one room apartment in New York with her 4-year-old daughter. They are on the 18th floor. Someday I am excited to visit mostly so I can stand on their balcony. Last Christmas her daughter picked up this idea that so many little girls and boys pick up at one time or another during their childhood.

“What do you want for Christmas?” her mother asked.

I can imagine Marta looking up at her mother with her giant black pleading doe eyes. “I want a pony,” she said.

“You mean like a toy pony?”

“No, a real pony.”

“Marta, I can’t get you that”

“Why not?”

“Where will we keep the pony?”

“In our house.”

“How will we get the pony up the elevator?”

“I don’t know.”

“What will we feed the pony?”

“Candy!”

“Marta we can’t get a pony. What else do you want for Christmas?”

Marta paused for a minute and then mentioned some other gift but then said abruptly, “And a pony!”

Her mother looked at her with that look mothers give and Marta quickly said, “Well I can keep hoping, can’t I?”

Last time we caught up on Zoom I couldn’t help myself. Despite it being August I asked Marta, “What do you want for Christmas?”

“A pony!” she cried out. That kid is persistent.

There is a strength in hope, particularly hope that doesn’t disappoint. It allows us to dream and to look forward, to envision something beyond our wildest imagination.

Question for Today: What do you hope for?

Practice for Today: Today I will place my trust in God and allow the day to take shape however it will.



Saturday, October 16, 2021

Daily Reflection: Joy

Text: Psalm 32:11

“Be glad in the Lord and rejoice, O righteous, and shout for joy, all you upright in heart.”

The leaves are red again. It is always a beautiful time of year. I have been jogging down by the river and watching those leaves fly all over. My dog, God bless him, is not a genius. He has

enough labrador in him that mostly he just likes to retrieve things. Last week he found a flipper like the one you use to swim. He brought the slimy algae ridden thing to me like a delightful prize. When I didn't find it as delightful as he did, he ran back into the woods and promptly returned with a long stick, like four feet long. He charged towards me and caught me right on the back of the knees. Needless to say, I didn't find his stick delightful either. When neither of these things worked out for him, he chased leaves that were falling from the trees and tried to catch them in his mouth. I couldn't help myself; I ran under the silver maple trees and started trying too. We did it for a long time and I found myself laughing and laughing about it.

Joy is a very simple thing and it seems to come whenever we let go of the other stuff - the day to day anxieties that get in the way. My husband says that if we are well fed, hydrated, and can let go of stuff then joy is quite easy. The Bible talks about joy a lot largely because joy means presence and that is something wonderful. We don't experience it all the time and that is ok but when it wells up in us whether it is because of the love of God, talking with a good friend, or chasing fall leaves, we might as well make the most of it.

Practice for Today: I will be present in this beautiful world God has so delightfully made.

