

**Devotions – October 17-23, 2021**

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**Sunday, October 17, 2021**

Text: Mark 10:35-45

Verse: “**And Jesus said to them, “What do you want me to do for you?”**”

An App on the phone measures the number of steps taken in a day. As a novice in this digital age, I am amazed at all the things the smart phone provides. I have a goal of 10,000 steps daily and the phone keeps track. It tells me if I am ahead in the count compared to a week ago, a month ago, even a year ago. It even tells me how fast I am walking. Usually my speed is leisurely, about three miles an hour.

The backdrop for today’s reading is Jesus’ journey to Jerusalem. His walk was not a leisurely three miles an hour. I surmise Jesus’ pace was a power walk. He walked ahead of his disciples at such a pace that left them in the dust and completely amazed. They were even afraid. When they finally caught up to him, he told them what awaited him in Jerusalem. Without sugarcoating words Jesus told them of the cross - “they will condemn (me) to death.”

After Jesus’ Passion Prediction two disciples, brothers James and John came forward with their prestige prediction. The Zebedee brothers were very forward with Jesus. “Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.” Jesus did not respond with caution and condition but cheerfully responded, “What is it you want me to do for you?”

There is plenty to talk about with this text but I wanted to pause with Jesus’ response to the Zebedee brother’s bold request. For me it is an encouragement to pray. Whatever our petition Jesus is not concerned with wording or grammar. Jesus welcomes our prayers. He genuinely wants to help and “do for you.” Jesus knows our humanity and is totally patient. Let us not be afraid to be bold with our prayers. As Luther wrote in the Catechism, “We pray ‘Our Father’ so we truly believe God is our Father and we are truly his children, in order that we may ask him boldly and with complete confidence, just as loving children ask their loving father.”

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, thank you for the gift of prayer and the assurance of your compassion and welcome as we come to you with our petitions and supplications. What a “privilege to carry everything to God in prayer.”*



**Monday, October 18, 2021**

Text: Luke 4:14-21

Verse: **“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”**

Jesus was in Nazareth, the village where he was raised. On the Sabbath, Jesus gathered with family and people who knew him to read scripture and pray. Jesus is the guest teacher and was handed the scroll of the prophet Isaiah. He read a passage describing the mission of the Messiah, the Spirit-anointed one. The Messiah would not be holed up in an ivory tower of advanced study of the Scriptures. The Messiah would live the scriptures among the poor, the captives, the blind and oppressed. The Messiah would preach good news, the glad tidings of God who has not forgotten the least and lowly but would announce God’s grace and favor.

Jesus said to the people, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” Today the church celebrates the festival of “St. Luke, Evangelist.” The word “today” is important in the “Gospel According to Luke.” The word has the power and punch of fulfillment with no delays. In a story found only in Luke’s gospel, Jesus invited himself over for dinner at the home of Zacchaeus, a chief among tax collectors and most unpopular. An encounter with the healing grace of Jesus led to genuine repentance as Zacchaeus promised to pay back those whom he cheated and gave a sizeable donation to help the poor. Jesus, with joy said, “Today salvation has come to this house...For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”

On the cross we hear words from Jesus found only in Luke’s gospel. When one of the criminals crucified next to Jesus asked to be remembered in God’s kingdom he replied, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.” Jesus was sent to the poor with good news. We are the poor and hear Jesus speak the power of “today”: today your sins are forgiven; today I am with you never to forsake you, today I am with you to guide you to be an instrument of God’s peace for someone in need.

Luke was a physician who helped the apostle Paul in his missionary work. According to the book “Festivals and Commemorations” by Philip Pfatteicher, “St. Luke’s Day is the traditional time to emphasize the church’s ministry of healing by showing concern for hospitals and nursing homes, for physicians and nurses, and for conducting healing services.”

Prayer: *“Almighty God, you inspired your servant Luke to reveal in his gospel the love and healing power of your Son. Give your church the same love and power to heal, and to proclaim your salvation among the nations to the glory of your name, through Jesus Christ, your Son, our healer, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.” Amen.*  
(ELW. p. 58)

Tuesday,  
19, 2021



October

Text: Mark 10:35-45

Verse: **“But Jesus said to them, ‘You do not know what you are asking.’”**

A young girl, about 10 or 11 years old was anxious to begin piano lessons. But after she started she became discouraged. When she asked her parents to arrange piano lessons, she had a dream that she would be proficient in a matter of weeks. She grew bored with the basic drills and after about six weeks she quit lessons.

I knew a young man who wanted to play the piano. He was completely focused on learning. He practiced. He kept at it. He even memorized a hymn or two after awhile and wanted to perform in church. To shorten his story, he attended college and studied music. During college he was in demand as a musician to play for area churches. Today music is his career, playing, composing, and conducting. He understood one did not become proficient in a matter of weeks for much would be expected of him.

In the text we read of the bold - maybe brazen would be a better word - request of James and John for the seats of power and glory, Jesus’ right and left hand men! All they had to do was ask, right? Simple as that! But Jesus did not send them to the robe factory to be measured for kingly attire. Jesus told them of sacrifice before glory, “Are you able to drink the cup that I drink or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized?” Jesus would refer to the cup he would drink, meaning his suffering on the cross. The cross would be a baptism unto death.

We can be nonchalant about following Jesus, calling ourselves disciples without knowing the full depth of meaning. Earlier in Mark’s gospel Jesus made it clear that if anyone would follow him, they must deny themselves and take up the cross. We do not face opposition, persecution, and death from a hostile government for our faith. Yet as faithful followers we join with other Christians, sisters and brothers in Christ, the church, and use our lives to love, serve, and welcome in the example of Jesus. We have been baptized not to fulfill a church membership rule, for by grace we are baptized into Christ. We are baptized into his death, calling forth daily repentance and putting to death the sinful nature. But baptism blesses us with the promise of being raised with Jesus Christ. We have his presence to provide the grace and strength for a new life, a life not just lived for ourselves, but for others in need.

Prayer: *Forgive us Lord, for being too casual about your call to follow you. Grant us grace and your compassionate power for faithful discipleship for the ones who do not know your love, and for the poor in need.*



**Wednesday, October 20, 2021**

Text: Mark 10:35-45

**Verse: “Jesus called them and said to them, ‘You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all.’”**

We have been discussing the request of James and John for the best seats in the kingdom, what they understood as positions of glory and power. When the others heard about their scheme there was anger. James and John were not popular. How dare those two to think they were more deserving for top spots than the others. But one has the suspicion that the anger directed at James and John came from the egos of the rest who thought they were better suited to sit at Jesus’ right and left. Earlier in Mark we heard of the disciples arguing among themselves as to which one was the greatest.

We may judge them as totally unfit and unholy men. One wonders if Jesus’ hair turned gray because of the disciples’ cluelessness. Maybe the disciple’s arguing and greatness debates was self-imposed noise so they would not really hear what Jesus was saying about his upcoming suffering and death. Jesus’ talk sounded so anti-Messiah and they just could not comprehend the cross. But instead of throwing up his hands, Jesus took advantage of another teaching moment.

Jesus talked politics. It was as if Jesus told the disciples, “You guys sound like the rulers of the age, always trying to promote their authority and lord over as many as possible.” Jesus told them they were not to imitate the power struggles of the powerful. The kingdom of God has a different metric. Greatness in the kingdom is measured by service...and that is serving others and not the self! Status in the kingdom is nothing to argue about since there is none.

We live in contentious times. In the political realm there are fierce power struggles that affect how we treat one another. One can be so sure of being right so why listen to others and show respect. It would be best to loudly lord it over others who disagree. Jesus words are needed more now than ever. We will disagree with some folks but that does not mean they are adversaries. The Bible counsels us to look on others as sisters and brothers Jesus died and rose again to save. Jesus has given the Church a different politic: to stop the anger through loving service. As the church we no longer care about the common understanding of greatness or lording over others.

Greatness now is shown by bearing one another's burdens, affirming God-given worth, and never losing sight of the cross of Jesus.

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, we confess that anger with others is hard to let go. We know of anger in our own congregations. We pray for peace in our congregations. We need your love and forgiveness, and we need your grace to inspire courage to go against the grain of the world's understanding of greatness. Help us to be great in you, Lord Jesus, and help us to humble ourselves and follow you faithfully.*



**Thursday October 21, 2021**

Text: Mark 10:35-45

Verse: **“For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”**

This has been quite a dramatic text: James and John putting themselves forward before Jesus demanding that he give what they want: the best seats of power when Jesus displays full glory. The other disciples caught wind of what James and John were doing and they were angry. Gentle protocols for respectfully resolving anger were probably not followed.

Jesus intervened to remind the disciples of their calling. They were not to aspire to positions of greatness to lord over others. As followers of Jesus, they were to be an inspiration by living a different greatness, being servants. The disciples heard Jesus teach this lesson before. As followers of Jesus, they must deny themselves. Jesus taught that to welcome children, the lowest and least likely to provide wealth and power, was to welcome him. But still the disciples did not understand. They would promise to drink the cup of suffering and share the baptism Jesus would experience, the baptism of the cross. But as the journey to Jerusalem completed, the disciples would end up running away when Jesus was arrested and bound over for crucifixion.

Followers of Jesus fail. This is why we need to hear Jesus' words of faithfulness. Jesus said the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve. His use of “Son of Man” brings us to that term in the book of Daniel referring to the one who would receive an everlasting kingdom. Jesus said the “Son of Man's” power would be revealed in the ultimate act of servant love on the cross. Jesus made it clear: he would give up his life as sacrifice, “a ransom for many.” The word “ransom” refers to a price paid to set one free. The apostle Paul used a similar term when he wrote of the “Redemption that is in Christ Jesus” whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement.

Followers of Jesus fail but Jesus did not and will not. His sacrifice has set us free from the burden of guilt and the fear of condemnation. Jesus faithfully accepted the baptism of the cross

so we can be baptized into his death and resurrection for forgiveness of sins and a new life. The apostle Paul will write that we have been bought with a price, a reference to the cross of Christ. We have been bought with a price; therefore, we are brought into the Kingdom of God free to live under Jesus and his grace. We are set free to walk with Jesus as ministers, as servants, ever showing us the way to true greatness.

Prayer: *Dear Lord, we confess that we do fail and mess up as disciples. But instead of shame you are with us to share the good news of grace: you gave your life for us to free us from the condemning power of sin. Thank you for ever sticking with us and by us, teaching and showing us the way to serve. Thank you for enabling us to live under the power of your servant love.*



**Friday,  
22, 2021**

**October**

Text: Psalm 91:9-16

Verse: **Because you have made the Lord your refuge, the most high your dwelling place, no evil shall befall you, no scourge come near your tent.**

The men of the church were having their Bible study after their Saturday breakfast. A comment was made encouraging us to trust in the Lord and be assured God will take care of us. This sounded like a fine statement of faith. But it was soon challenged by a man who lost his wife of over 30 years; she was only 52 years of age. She died unexpectedly in hospital after a sudden illness. The challenger wanted to know why God did not protect his wife. Although she died over ten years ago, he still missed her and was still bothered by scriptures that seemed to say faith in God will exempt one from misfortune. His challenge was met with silence and although awkward it was a good experience to think deeper about scripture. We all know people with heavy hearts and troubled souls, and we naturally would like to offer comfort.

The Psalms are a good place to look since they are prayers, praising God but also pleading with God for help to keep faith. All the Psalms call us to trust in God even if some of the Psalms called laments protest God's inaction. Innocent people suffer and the wicked prosper complain some of the psalmists. We should not be surprised if some folks do not find comfort with verses from the Bible. They can be going through a tough time and they do not want their pain and grief to be treated in an off handed way.

Can quoting Bible verses actually comfort one who has lost a loved one, or someone dealing with other kinds of life's troubles like divorce or loss of work? There is comfort as long as we do not just quote and go but share with care for the long-haul. May we bear one another's burdens in the example of Jesus of whom it is said bears all our infirmity and all our grief. The

text said having made the Lord your refuge no evil shall befall you. This does not mean one's life will be free of troubles. Evils will be faced but we do not face them alone. The Psalm said, "I will be with them in trouble." Other Psalms known to us state the same truth: "Even though I walk through the dark valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me" (Psalm 23). "My flesh and heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever" (Psalm 73). Scripture ever directs us to the Lord God who is with us and is committed to never forsaking us. This is our refuge.

Prayer: *Compassionate God, help us to be comfort for people in distress. Guide us to use scripture with love and understanding. May we use scripture never to ignore pain and suffering, but as witness to your mercy, steadfast love, and presence. Amen*



**Saturday October 23, 2021**

Text: Matthew 13:54-58

Verse: **“And they took offense at him.”**

I was still a seminary student and completing a summer of what was called CPE or Clinical Pastoral education. I was assigned to St. Luke's Hospital in Milwaukee where I joined other seminarians of various denominations. We would serve as chaplains and visit people in the hospital. Weekly we were to write about one of these visits and share our experience and feelings before the others. I was staying with my grandmother while in Milwaukee. I would accept preaching opportunities, filling in for pastors who would be on vacation. I felt I needed the practice. My grandmother and aunt would accompany me on my preaching forays. I looked forward to the end of the service because Grandma would take me out for breakfast. Sermon writing so early in my career could cause considerable handwringing and worry. After one sermon in a Milwaukee suburb a woman came up to me. I thought I was surely in for it now. But she came not with a brick but a bouquet. She liked an illustration I used comparing the members of a church to a quilt. We are different in shape and gifts, yet all knit together with the love of Christ for the ministry of warmth and welcome. (I've used that illustration time and time again whenever it is time to bless quilts ready to be shipped out through Lutheran World Relief.)

My experience was different from what happened to Jesus when he taught in his hometown synagogue. People hearing him were astounded at Jesus' wisdom and on top of that what they must have heard about his deeds of power. Strangely, and puzzling, this recognition of wisdom caused the hometown folks to take offense at him. The unbelief was so prevalent that Jesus was limited as to deeds of power at home.

The gospel of Matthew assures us that Jesus came to bear all our infirmity and all our grief. Now we can add another to the list, all our rejection. People can take offense because we have acted in offensive ways. Then we need confession and forgiveness. But there are times when some just take offense; they become critical and hurtful and we are not sure why. Certainly this is painful, but we know from today's reading that Jesus knows about rejection from people you thought you knew were supportive. This hometown rejection points us to Jesus' rejection by the religious leadership which led to his crucifixion. The cross appeared to be the ultimate scandal but yet it turned out to be a deed of power revealing the full depth of Jesus' compassion for sinners through the forgiveness of sins.

On this day, according to the Church Calendar of Commemorations we remember James, the brother of Jesus. Our text today mentioned him first among Jesus' siblings. The apostle Paul mentioned meeting James, the Lord's brother (Galatians 1:19) and Paul mentioned James as a witness of the resurrection of Jesus. James is considered the first Bishop of Jerusalem and was martyred for his faith in the year 62.

We are thankful for all the witnesses of Jesus' resurrection, from the first apostles till now. Through the work of the Holy Spirit, we too are witnesses of Jesus' resurrection. We can faithfully witness to Jesus and his love, our gracious living Savior.

Prayer: *Grant, O God, that following the example of your servant James the Just, brother of our Lord, your Church may give itself continually to prayer and to the reconciliation of all who are variance and enmity; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen*

(From Festivals and Commemorations by Philip Phatteicher)

