

Daily Devotions

July 10-16, 2022

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Sunday, July 10, 2022

Only a Gypsy Boy

Text: I Peter 2:9

"You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession...."

"Oh, he's only a gypsy boy," someone whispered with disgust when Rodney Smith walked to the front of the chapel to receive Christ during a service in 1877. Nobody thought much of this teenager, the son of uneducated parents. Yet, Rodney didn't listen to those voices. He was certain that God had a purpose for his life, so he bought a Bible and an English dictionary and taught himself how to read and write. He once said, "The way to Jesus is not by Cambridge, Harvard, Yale, or the poets. It is . . . an old-fashioned hill called Calvary." Against all odds, Rodney became an evangelist who God used to bring many to Christ in the United Kingdom and in the United States.

Peter, too, was just a simple man--untrained in the Jewish rabbinic schools. He was a fisherman from Galilee, when Jesus called him with two simple words: "Follow Me." Yet, the same Peter, despite his upbringing and the failures he experienced along the way, later affirmed that those who follow Jesus are "a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession."

Through Jesus Christ all people--whatever their education, upbringing, gender, or ethnicity--can be a part of the family of God and be used by him. Becoming God's "special possession" is for all who believe in Jesus.

We pray: *Thank you, Heavenly Father, that my identity is found in you. Amen*

Monday, July 11, 2022

Side by Side

Text: Ecclesiastes 4:9

"Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor."

In ancient times, a city with broken walls revealed a defeated people, exposed to danger and to shame. That is why the Jews rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem. How? By working side by side, that expression described in Nehemiah 3.

At first glance chapter 3 might appear to be a boring account of who did what in the reconstruction. However, a closer look highlights how people worked together. Priests were working alongside rulers. Perfume makers were working as well as goldsmiths. There were some who lived in nearby towns and came to give a hand. Others made repairs opposite their houses. Women worked alongside the men.

Two things stand out from this chapter. First, they all worked together for the common good. Second, all of them are commended for being part of the work, not for how much or how little they did as compared to others.

Today we see damaged families and a broken society. But Jesus came to build the kingdom of God through the changing of lives. We can help rebuild our neighborhoods by showing others they can find hope and new life in Jesus. All of us have something to do. So, let us work side by side and do our part--whether big or small--to create a community of love where people can find Jesus.

We pray: *Dear Lord, help me to work with others, side by side, by showing love and pointing others to Jesus. Amen*

Tuesday, July 12, 2022

The Foolish Way of New Life

Text: I Corinthians 1:18

"The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God."

Some things just don't make sense until you experience them. When I was expecting my first child, I read plenty of books about childbirth and listened to dozens of women tell their stories of labor and delivery. But I still couldn't really imagine what the experience would be like. What my body was going to do seemed downright impossible!

Paul writes in I Corinthians that birth into God's kingdom, the salvation that God offers us through Jesus, seemed equally incomprehensible to those who haven't experience it. It sounds like "foolishness" to say that salvation could come from a cross--a death marked by weakness, defeat, and humiliation. Yet this "foolishness" is the salvation that Paul preached!

It wasn't what anyone could have imagined it would be like! Some people thought salvation came from a strong political leader or by a miraculous sign. Others thought that their own

academic achievements would be their salvation. But God surprised everyone by bringing salvation in a way that would only make sense to those who believed, to those who experienced it.

God took something shameful and weak--death on a cross--and made it the foundation of wisdom and power. God does the unimaginable over and over again. He chooses the weak and foolish things of the world to shame the wise.

And the surprising, confounding ways are always the best ways.

We pray: *Lord God, with Isaiah I pray, as high as the heavens are above the earth, so are your ways higher than mine. Amen*

Wednesday, July 13, 2022

God Heals Our Brokenness

Text: Ephesians 2:8

“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God...”

Noah and his wife, Sarah, wandered through the craft store, looking for the perfect picture to hang in their home. Noah felt he'd found the right piece and called his wife over to see it. On the right side of the ceramic artwork was the word "Grace". But the left side held two long cracks. "Well, it's broken!" Sarah said, as she started looking for an unbroken one on the shelf. But Noah said, "No. That's the point: we're broken and then grace comes in--period." They decided to buy the one with the cracks. At the checkout, the clerk examined it and exclaimed, "Oh, no. It's broken!" "Yes, so are we," Noah whispered.

What does it mean to be a broken person? Someone defined it this way: a growing awareness that no matter how hard we try, our ability to make life better gets worse instead of better. It's a recognition of our need for God and His intervention in our lives.

The Apostle Paul talked about our brokenness in terms of being "dead in (our) transgressions and sins. The answer to our need to be forgiven and changed comes in Ephesians 2, verses 4 and 5: "Because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive. . . It is by grace (we) have been saved."

God is willing to heal our brokenness with his grace when we admit, "I'm broken."

We pray: *Lord, thank you for being rich in mercy toward me! May I boast in you and your gift of salvation through grace by faith. Amen.*

Thursday, July 14, 2022

Text: John 15:5

"I am the vine; you are the branches."

When Christian Mustad showed his Van Gogh to art collector Auguste Pellerin, Pellerin took one look and declared it a fake. Mustad hid the painting in his attic, where it remained for over fifty years.

Mustad died, and the painting was evaluated off and on over the next four decades. Each time it was determined to be a fake---until 2012, when an expert used a computer to count the thread separations in the painting's canvas. He discovered that it had been cut from the same canvas of another work by Van Gogh. Mustad had owned a real Van Gogh all the time!

Do you ever feel like a fake? Do you ever fear that if people examined you, they'd see how little you pray, give, and serve? Are you ever tempted to hide in the attic, away from prying eyes?

Look deeper, beneath the colors and contours of your life. If you've turned from your own ways and put your faith in Jesus, then you and he belong in the same canvas! To use Jesus' word picture, "I am the vine; you are the branches." You and Jesus have formed a seamless whole.

Resting in Jesus makes you a true disciple of his. It's also the only way to improve your picture. He said, "If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."

We pray: *Lord Jesus, I rest in you like a branch clings to its vine. Amen.*

Friday, July 15, 2022

More???????

Text: I Kings 17:16

"The jar of flour was not spent; neither did the jug of oil become empty, according to the word of the Lord that he spoke by Elijah."

In Charles Dickens' classic *Oliver Twist*, little Oliver finds himself "desperate with hunger, and reckless with misery," egged on by his similarly ravenous peers to approach their master after their meager supper. "Please, sir," Oliver famously declares, "I want some more."

The master reels with horror. How DARE this child ask for what he is NOT entitled?

Elijah, too, asked for food from a widow and her son, for more than what they had. They were starving, and the widow believed the loaf of bread she was planning to bake would be her last. Yet, Elijah reassured her that God would provide. Sure enough, her flour and oil did not run out. She, her son, and the prophet ate and were satisfied.

Even when we see nothing but emptiness, God opens his hand. He himself is our portion, pouring out his body and blood for our sake, endlessly sustaining us. No matter our desperation, we know our God loves us unto death and hears our cries for mercy and provision. With Jesus, we can confidently ask for more, knowing that, despite not deserving anything good, he freely gives to us.

We pray: *Lord, help us to pray like Elijah and to trust you to provide whatever it is that we need. Amen.*

Saturday, July 16, 2022

Show Me a Sign!

Text: Psalm 125:1

"Those who trust in the Lord are like Mount Zion, which cannot be moved, but abides forever."

On summer road trips, our family looked for a variety of license plates that share special state facts. For example, Missouri plates include the slogan "Show Me State," a phrase ascribed to a congressman who was leery of empty words and spoke to Missourians' desire for factual proof.

The Bible includes examples of this, too. Following an encounter with an angel, Gideon asked for a sign that he had indeed met with the divine. Thomas, after hearing the accounts of seeing the Risen Savior, insisted on a physical examination of Jesus before he would accept their word. These men, and people in general, like to see something-- and touch -- and test it--to believe it.

While God provided hard evidence to the skeptical Gideon and Thomas, he also values trust in him. God knows that our limited human vision and logic show us only so much. By the Holy Spirit, he mercifully gives what we need today through bread and wine, water and word...and one day, after we have traveled our lives' journeys, we will see and touch and experience all that he has promised.

We pray: *Lord, help us to receive you in faith through your Word and Sacraments, making our faith immovable. Amen.*