

Thursday, February 19

Scripture Reading: 2 Corinthians 2:12-17

Reflection

Very few of us live in complete solitude. The nature of our lives today necessitates that we are with other people most, if not all, of the time. Have you thought recently about the impact your interactions with others can and should have on their lives?

Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians, “But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads in every place the fragrance that comes from knowing him.” You are the vessel through which God works! In and through your life, God spreads the message of Jesus and his redeeming love. Are your words, deeds, and actions helping to tell Jesus’ story?

A tale has been told of a young salesman disappointed about losing a big sale. As he talked with his sales manager he lamented, “I guess it just proves you can lead a horse to water, but you can't make him drink.” The manager replied, “Son, take my advice: your job is not to make him drink. Your job is to make him thirsty.” So it is with the task of ministering to others. Our lives should be so filled with Christ that they create a thirst for the Gospel in everyone we meet. Or, in terms of today’s scripture, our lives should be so filled with the wonderful fragrance of Christ that those around us can’t help but breathe in that wonderful fragrance as well.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, you are everything good in our lives. Fill us with even more of you, so your story is all that’s seen in what we do and what we say. Amen

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Friday, February 20

Scripture Reading: 1 Timothy 1:12-20

Reflection

There is a kind of vicious cycle that keeps people from finding inner peace. Apart from God’s healing grace, we can never get away from what might be described as an inner prosecuting attorney with a condemning spirit. The fear that people would not like us if they really knew who we are does have a basis in reality. It *is* true, as scripture points out, that none of us measures up fully to God’s good design for our lives. We do, in fact, subvert our own best intentions. Then that inner voice begins to accuse and we are likely to hide a bit deeper within. Then the inner accusations gain strength and we hide even more.

All of us have ways to cope with this situation and develop a “persona” or way of presenting ourselves to the world. The “me” you see is not one hundred percent the “me” I know. Some persons have a *critica persona* which is critical of everyone and everything. That protects them from their own inner person of which they are secretly and persistently critical. Others have a *savior persona* which wants to save and take care of everyone and everything. The *savior persona* is meant to protect the inner person from people thinking badly of him or her. How could anyone not like someone who is always helping others or saving the day? One of the more difficult personas is the *negative persona*. The *negative persona* sees everyone and everything in such negative terms that the inner person feels more at home. It’s not so bad that I am so bad if everyone else is so bad! Therapy can help, but God’s grace can heal.

Because God *knows* you for who you really are and *loves* you regardless of who you are you can break free of that inner prosecuting attorney and from the attitudes and expectations of others. If the Lord God of this universe knows you, loves you, and redeems you, then there is no one to fear. This is beautifully expressed by Paul in his letter to the Romans: “Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us” (8:33-34).

Lord God, in my baptism you have accepted, loved, and redeemed me. Help me to live in the glow of that grace. Amen

Written by Pastor Paul Olson, Lead Pastor

Growing Deeper

Daily Devotions
February 16-20, 2009



Written by the staff of St. John’s Lutheran Church

To receive daily devotions by email, send email address to mbailey@stjohns-springfield.org

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Monday, February 16

Scripture Reading: 2 Chronicles 26:1-21

Reflection

Uzziah, unanimously crowned king at the age of 16 after his father's death, ruled in Jerusalem for 52 years. Our youngest inaugurated president, John F. Kennedy, was 43 when he took the oath of office. I'm trying to imagine a 16-year old in charge of a country and all of the pressures and questions that he had to deal with. Because he was focused on God's will, he waged successful wars upon countries with his huge armies. He rebuilt the broken walls of Jerusalem and the land flourished because of his leadership in agricultural knowledge. All of this heightened his fame as king and it was OK because he did not abuse it. So what happened during those years that led him to end up with leprosy and his ultimate death? It seems that somehow pride and arrogance became a part of his life and he lost sight of God and his disobedience caused him to be punished and separated from God.

God doesn't want us to lose sight of him. If we truly have sight of him, we will want to do what is pure and holy for him and the rewards are plentiful. There are so many ways our lives can become impure and the temptations are so strong to be a part of "this" world. We all know what our "leprosy" are and we should ask God to cleanse us from them.

Prayer

Dear Heavenly Father, you know our hearts better than we ever will. Protect us from this world and its evil forces that try to turn our focus from you. Thank you for all you have given us. Amen

*Written by Jean Welch
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Tuesday, February 17

Scripture Reading: 1 Corinthians 10:14-11:1

Reflection

Everyday we are faced with choices. Our lives are defined by the choices we make and the paths that we choose to travel. The little things that we choose to do every day can either bring us closer to God, or take us farther away.

God grants us the freedom to make our own choices. This freedom is a wonderful gift that comes with an extra-ordinary responsibility. We can pretty much do anything we want on a day to day basis. However, Paul reminds us in 1st Corinthians that we are to do everything for the glory of God. He doesn't tell us what to do with our lives, he only tells that us that whatever we choose, we should do it all for the glory of God.

I find this to be an incredible and exciting statement. We were all created to be unique, all of us with special gifts and God-given abilities. God wants us to enjoy life, and to use all of the wonderful gifts and resources that we have been given. God wants us to embrace life, use our talents to the fullest. He wants us to use these things for the good of others, and for the glory of God. What a freeing and amazing thought! How full and rich and wonderful our lives can be, if we live every day, giving everything to God, and walking in his path, and in his way.

Prayer

Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for my gifts, talents, and abilities. Help me to live each day to the fullest, giving you all of the glory. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

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Wednesday, February 18

Scripture Reading: Job 30:16-31

Reflection

To say that Job is depressed is an understatement. Job is drowning in utter despair. All has been taken from him. The light had been turned to darkness. Job had no hope, no joy, no comfort. And, more than that, Job blames God for his misery. "I cry to you and you do not answer me; I stand, and you merely look at me. You have turned cruel to me; with the might of your hand you persecute me" (30:20-21).

Yet, despite all that Job doesn't have, the one thing he never loses or gives up on is his faith. Even when he can't see God's presence and even when it feels like God had utterly abandoned him, still Job cries out to him. Still Job talks to him. Still Job prays to him. Still Job seeks to be in relationship with him. After all, that's what faith is, isn't it? Believing in God even though we cannot see him. Trusting God even when we cannot understand his ways. Holding onto God even during those times in our lives when it feels as if God has let go of us.

I like Job. Job is real. Job's faith in God is not just false pretense. It is real. Tried and true. Faith that has been tested in the fire of suffering and adversity. Job reminds me that it is ok to be honest in our feelings and emotions with God. Job reminds me that even with faith, life really stinks sometimes. Job reminds me to keep hanging on even in those moments when I might feel like letting go.

Faith is trusting deep down inside of us that God still holds on to us, even when life around us is falling apart. Don't let go. Keep crying out to God. God is still holding you, even when you can't feel his presence.

Prayer

Lord, I know you are there even though I can't see you or feel you sometimes. Please don't let go of me. Amen

Written by Pastor Greg Busboom, Pastor of Outreach and Discipleship