

## Thursday, February 5

Scripture Reading: Galatians 5:2-15

### **Reflection**

When I was younger, I was Christian because my family was Christian. I went to church every week and learned the songs and Bible stories. Then slowly, as I began to ask questions of the world, the lessons I learned in Sunday school came to fill as answers. When I faced problems in my life, I found support from a faith of which I was barely aware. I have at times rebelled against God's will for my life, and I have questioned the nature and validity of my faith, but I have never been able to abandon it. God chooses to enter each of our lives in a specific way, and he chose to enter mine through the church and family in which I grew up.

So, when I try to put myself in the place of the Jewish Christians Paul is speaking to, I find myself sympathizing with their trials. They grew up in the Jewish traditions. They studied the stories and songs not once a week, but nearly every day. The center-piece of their religious education was the Law of Moses. This collection of laws represented the will of God for man, and the Jewish people believed they would be seen by God as righteous by being faithful to it. The centerpiece of Christianity however is faith in Christ. These cannot fit together. Instead, the former must be replaced by the latter. This is what Paul means when he says, "Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace." Another way to say this is that it is impossible to feel justified by one's own actions, and still recognize the need of Grace. If we do not see our need of Grace, then what use is faith in Christ? It becomes of no consequence.

This lesson was specifically for the Jewish Christians who were struggling to let go of a religion they had practiced alongside their families for centuries. Do we today face the same problems? This is a question that we should constantly ask ourselves. As we attempt to fulfill God's mission for our lives, are we working out of guilt in an attempt to redeem ourselves? Or are we serving out of gratitude for a grace we know is far out of our own reach? It is in our heart that God is interested.

### **Prayer**

*God our redeemer, forgive us when we misunderstand. Grant us wisdom and willingness that your grace may rain down on us all. Amen*  
*Written by Michael Jones, Chancel Choir Director*

## Friday, February 6

Scripture Reading: Job 36:1-23

### **Reflection**

Job had some pretty "difficult" friends. He didn't need to know anything, his "friends" were busy telling him everything he needed to know, so they thought.

When you and I find ourselves smack in the middle of tough times, and we know that they are going to come, we can listen to the negative input around us, or we can listen to our Creator. God said everything that needed to be said when He sent Jesus, the Word made flesh, Emmanuel. God felt you were worth the effort of Him sending the Only Begotten. Note John 3.17, "For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him." God felt that you were worth whatever the cost.

Now, you and I can listen to the "stuff" going on around us, the negatives, the put-downs, the gloom and doom influences, whatever is in our lives that does not promote health and healing, just like Job could have listened to his "friends". Or, we can choose to listen to God, who has already said yes to you, and yes to me. There is nothing that God wouldn't do for you. Jesus is the assurance of that.

Have a good day. God is on your side!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

### **Prayer**

*Lord God, today is a gift from you. Help us to live today listening to your Word in our lives, a Word that says "yes!" to us even when others say "no!" Amen*

*Written by Donn Stephens  
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# Growing Deeper

Daily Devotions  
February 2-6, 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](mailto:mbailey@stjohns-springfield.org)

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## Monday, February 2

Scripture Reading: Luke 2:22-40

### **Reflection**

In the Christian Church February 2 is celebrated as the Festival of the Presentation of Our Lord. It's the day on which we celebrate the infant Jesus' presentation in the temple. In some places of the world, the day is called Candlemas, both because today marks the fortieth, and therefore, the last day of Christmas and because, in some traditions, this is the day when all the candles to be used in worship during the coming year are blessed, in recognition of the song Simeon sung at Jesus' presentation in the temple, "For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel" (2:30-32). Jesus is indeed the light of the world, the light that takes away our darkness. It is to this light that the many candles used in worship point.

I've always been struck by the response of the elders Simeon and Anna to the infant Jesus there in the temple that day. "Guided by the Spirit," writes Luke, "Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what customary under the law, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God" (2:27-28). **Guided by the Spirit**, Simeon recognizes the infant Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah and is led to praise! It is only by the guiding of the Spirit in our lives that we are able to see Jesus for who he is and thus truly praise him! About Anna Luke writes, "She never left the temple but worshiped there with fasting and prayer night and day. At that moment she came, and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem" (2:37-28).

**Through worship and prayer**, Anna is led to praise and proclamation of the Christ-child. Like for Simeon and Anna, we, too, will see the Christ-child most clearly **through worship and prayer** as we are **guided by the Spirit**. Spend time in daily worship and prayer. Be receptive to the leading of the Spirit in your life. And then, give thanks and praise to God as God breaks through the darkness of your life with the light of the Christ-child!

*Blessed are you, O Lord our God, for you have sent us your salvation. Inspire us by your Holy Spirit to see with our own eyes him who is the glory of Israel, and the light for all nations, your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen*

*Written by Pastor Greg Busboom, Pastor of Outreach and Discipleship*

## Tuesday, February 3

Scripture Reading: 1 Corinthians 7:32-40

### **Reflection**

As a single gal, one of my least favorite holidays is Valentine's Day. I understand the true history behind the holiday; I even visited St. Valentine's tomb in Whitefriar Church while in Dublin, Ireland. The holiday today has grown into something that I'm sure St. Valentine wouldn't have liked – the commercial aspects aside, it has a way of making those who are single feel quite alone and left out.

I, along with many others around the world, have given up Valentine's Day for an alternative holiday – Single's Awareness Day. It's called that because February 14 is the one day of the year that you are made painfully aware that you are single. Recently, however, more and more singles are celebrating it as a good thing – celebrating the notion that it's ok to be single. For centuries, those that are unmarried after a certain age, especially women, have often been looked down upon in society. Single's Awareness Day is hopefully beginning to change some of those notions.

In today's Scripture Paul offers a word of encouragement to those who are single. He is quick to point out that getting married is not sinning, but lifts up the idea that those who are single are free to serve the Lord. I can't wait for the day when I get married and start a family, and I know that when that time comes, I'll have to start making some very hard choices. But until that time, I'm free to serve the Lord, wholly, fully, and without reserve.

This year, when February 14 crops up, try to take some time out and remember those who are still single, perhaps feeling a little lonely and left out from the holiday, and help remind them what a gift their singleness can be. And to those that are single, Happy Single's Awareness Day!

### **Prayer**

*Lord, you have created us to be in relationship with one another. Strengthen both those who are married and those who are single that each, in their own way, might serve you fully, wholly, and with joy. Amen*

*Written by Miranda Bailey, Director of Communications*

## Wednesday, February 4

Scripture Reading: Jeremiah 29:1-14

### **Reflection**

The prophet Jeremiah writes a letter to his people who are now living in exile. This is only a small portion of the letter which actually consists of the whole 29th chapter. True to Jeremiah's character as a prophet, this particular letter may not have been a message that the people wanted to hear; since it contains a rather radical message. First, the people had turned away from God; they thought, erroneously that since they were God's chosen people they could do anything and God would still be on their side, look after them, and protect them from all enemies. Jeremiah adamantly disagreed—he says "No way!" The second thing Jeremiah is saying is, "Folks, hunker down where you are right now; make the best of it because you're going to be there for a while. Don't believe the false prophets who tell you 'you're out of Babylon very soon.' Rather, live as best you can and realize that God is with you there, even in exile in a foreign land." The people had believed that God had given them the Promised Land. What were they to do now that they had lost it? Jeremiah says, "Keep on living, there's much to live for right where you are."

Sometimes we too may get down in the dumps, feeling sorry for ourselves, and thinking that we're living in exile and that God has abandoned us. At times we too may feel like those exiles in a foreign land. We might falsely believe that we've got nothing much to do or live for in this exiled place. We may fight God by trying to erroneously convince ourselves that we want out of this foreign land, this place of exile. Yet, God may be giving us Jeremiah's message as well, "Stay right where you are, make the best of your situation, hunker down, keep on living as faithfully as you can right where you are, serve me where I've put you." In this message to the exiles, Jeremiah says, "See the hope for you and your children in these everyday, ordinary activities. God is with you in and through all of this if you have the eyes of faith to see God at work." That too is a message of hope for us. Do we have the eyes of faith to see God at work in and through us as we go about the everyday, ordinary activities of life? Don't give up, there is hope for us in the future if we but trust in God.

*Lord God, help us to see you with us in the common, the ordinary and the every day events of our living. Make us mindful that we are yours in all the times and seasons of our lives. Help us to recall your loving presence. Amen*

*Written by Pastor Paul Olson, Lead Pastor*