

Thursday, October 30

Scripture Reading: Romans 2:17-29

Reflection

Practice what you preach. I think we have all heard this timeless mantra many times throughout our lives. I knew a spiritual leader once who talked of love and grace and the importance of caring for and praying for others, but when it came to applying it to his own life, it never seemed to happen. His words were empty and hollow, with no real life application.

Here in Romans, Paul is telling the Romans that although they preach about religious law, and claim they are shining the light of God, there is no true heart behind it, and thus their words are meaningless. Paul is reminding the Romans that if they preach one thing and completely do the opposite of what they preach, then their words have absolutely no value.

This passage really struck a chord with me. Paul explains to all of us that who we are is not determined by our words, but by our hearts. It is not our external, but rather our internal self that matters. Every time we do something, say something, or make a decision, it's so important to consider the heart behind our words and actions. The next time we gossip about someone, or lie about something, or take something that doesn't belong to us just because no one is looking, or look at someone with fake compassion while we are really inwardly rolling our eyes, or pretend to be singing a song about love and grace in church, when we are really thinking about the anger we feel for the guy in the next seat over, we aren't practicing what we preach. Jesus calls us to be so much better than that. We're called to represent the body of Christ in the best way we possibly can. We will all fall short. That's the nature of being human. Paul reminds us, however, to be the best that we can be, and to remain true to our words, and to our God.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, help us practice what you preach! Amen

Written by Christie Lazarides, Director of Youth and Family Ministry

Friday, October 31

Scripture Reading: 2 Peter 2:1-3

Reflection

When we lived in Wisconsin, the start of the Christmas shopping season usually came sometime around the beginning of October, signaled by the arrival of Farm and Fleet's toy catalog. I have a picture of our children, just 3 and 1 that year, so engrossed in the pictures of the toys that they didn't notice the flash of the camera as I took a snapshot. From that point until Christmas each year, thoughts of new toys filled their heads at least 95% of their waking moments. As young children, they were completely taken by the ads in print, on TV, and in person in the stores.

The book of 2 Peter warns Christians not to let the same thing happen to us when it comes to false prophets and false teachings. For just as children can be inundated with the idea that Christmas is all about toys, we Christians can be inundated with a myriad of different doctrines and teachings that are false. One walk through the religious aisle at a bookstore and you'll discover there are indeed false teachers giving us misinformation, in this case, through books. Many other means abound as well.

How can we arm ourselves against what Jesus calls "wolves in sheep's clothing" (Matthew 7:15)? We can fill ourselves with the true knowledge of the gospel so that we are not easily swayed by false prophets and false teachings. Read your Bible daily and memorize scripture so that you can recognize the difference between what Jesus teaches and what is false. Don't leave yourself vulnerable to those who do not have Spirit-inspired scripture at the heart of what they preach.

From 2 Timothy 3:16-17, "All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work." May we listen and know the true prophecy not from human will, "but men and women moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God" (2 Peter 1:21).

Prayer

Arm us with your knowledge and discernment, dear Lord, so that we might know that which comes from you and you alone. Amen

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Growing Deeper

Daily Devotions
October 27-31, 2008



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

To receive daily devotions by email, send email
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Monday, October 27

Scripture Reading: Deuteronomy 6:1-9, 20-25

Reflection

When your children look at you and how you are living your life, what do they see? Or, maybe your grandchildren? Or, your friends at school? Or, your co-workers? Is it obvious to them by the words that you speak and the actions that you take that “you love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might” (6:5)?

Verses 5-9 in the above passage from Deuteronomy form the Hebrew ‘Shema,’ which faithful Jews recite twice a day. So central is this commandment to love God that Moses commands the Jewish people to recite it to their children, talk about it at home, display it on your hand, your forehead, the doorposts and gates of your house. In other words, make this commandment so much a part of your life that it becomes visible in and through everything you do! Still today, pious Jews around the world take these words literally, wearing plastic boxes called phylacteries on their foreheads and forearms that contain these words of Scripture.

When the scribes ask Jesus, “Which commandment is the first of all?,” Jesus answers, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength” (Mark 12:28-30).

How vitally important it is that we teach our children what this commandment means for us and for them! We don’t need to literally wear it in plastic boxes around our foreheads! But, we do need to wear it on our hearts, in our words and through our actions, as we talk about our faith with them and as we live it out for them to see and observe. As the camp song goes, “They’ll know we are Christians by our love!” Is that what others see when they look at you?

Prayer

Loving God, write your commandments upon our hearts that our entire lives might show others how much we love you. Amen

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Tuesday, October 28

Scripture Reading: James 2:14-26

Reflection

Have you ever told anyone one of your “faith” stories? And they look at you and go “Wow, I wish that could happen to me.”

I followed a young girl into town this morning. The back of her small car was plastered with bumper stickers. These “pulpit above the tailpipe” digital digressions included the Darwin sticker, the very nasty 4-letter word sticker, the “Christians – can’t live with them, can’t live without them, can’t feed them to the lions anymore,” plus a few about serving in our military (didn’t seem to all fit together now that I think about it).

I said a small prayer for God to touch this girl’s heart and let his Son-shine in as I pulled up next to her at the stoplight. I hope you will too and, although we will never know it, perhaps she will reap the works of our faith in Christ.

Faith – don’t leave home without it.

Prayer

Dear Father, you love everyone no matter what kind of bumper sticker they are wearing. Touch the lives of all who do not trust in you as their Lord and Savior that they may come to know you. Show us the way to keep faith and works alive in our lives.

Amen

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Wednesday, October 29

Scripture Reading: Matthew 19:16-22

Reflection

There was a commercial where a man rummaging through garbage finds a lamp and rubs it and a genie pops up. The genie says, “You have three wishes.” And the man says, “OK, I want all the money in the world.” And, BOOM, all the money appears. The genie says, “OK, you have two more wishes.” The man says, “OK, now I want all the women in the world.” And, BOOM, all of the women in the world are there around the man. Finally, the genie says, “You have one more wish. What do you want?” The man says, “I want to live forever.” And, BOOM, he turns him into the Energizer bunny!

The truth be told, we all want more. But could this text be telling us that more is not more, but indeed less is more? The truth is that even on a good day we all still lack one thing. Years ago a pastor I knew used to say, “There is so much good in the worst of us and so much bad in the best of us that it behooves none of us to talk about the rest of us.” I would add the Lord Jesus looks at us and loves us anyhow.

This text says that this man could not have eternal life with Jesus because of what had him! His possessions possessed him. He was stuck on his stuff! He thought he had everything covered, but as Howard Thurman once said, “As much as we seek to cover--and I would add, and congratulate ourselves with what we’ve already done--there is always that exposed flank, the place of lack.” This text helps us remember that Jesus not only paid it all on Calvary but sees it all. He paid it all while still seeing it all.

Your lack is just right for Jesus. Your mistake or being mistaken is just right for Jesus. That which we cannot seem to let go is just right for Jesus. Yes, we all have a lack at one time or another that we have a hard time admitting that it is lacking or have a hard time letting it go. This text does not seek to find fault with us but to free us from that fault.

Prayer

Dear Jesus, you call us to follow you. Help us not to let all our stuff keep us from doing that. Amen

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