

## **Devotions - July 15-21, 2007**

**By, Daniel J. Durbin**

**Seminarian - Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago – Middler**

**Home congregation – First Lutheran Church – Gladstone, MI**

*This summer Dan is doing CPE at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, MN*

### **Sunday, July 15**

*You have heard of this hope before in the word of the truth, the gospel that has come to you. Just as it is bearing fruit and growing in the whole world, so it has been bearing fruit among yourselves from the day you heard it and truly comprehended the grace of God. - Colossians 1:5-6*

Do you have friends with extraordinary talents? I know that I have had many friends with exceptional gifts throughout my lifetime. Some of them have been talented visual artists, songwriters, gardeners, musicians, poets, and laboratory technicians, just to name a few. Unfortunately, I rarely tell them how much I appreciate their wonderful gifts and talents.

Perhaps part of this stems from the sense of competition so strongly embedded in our society and culture. I think that we often spend too little time appreciating the gifts of others or the time we do spend is tainted by feelings of jealousy or inadequacy. However, it is vital for us to look around and see how the Gospel is bearing fruit in those around us and within ourselves in order for us to enter into community as the unified Body of Christ.

*Dear Lord, please help transform our hearts so that they are not jealous or intimidated by the gifts of others. Help us use our own unique gifts to build up community all around us and glorify your holy name. Amen*

## Monday, July 16

*Listen, my beloved brothers and sisters. Has not God chosen the poor in the world to be rich in faith and to be heirs of the kingdom that he has promised to those who love him?  
James 2:5*

Even though there are a multitude of sayings that tell us about how we cannot take our belongings with us when we die, I think most of us strive to remain naïve about this until we are forced to accept the finite nature of our existence here on earth. Most of us, I'm sure, would rather not be confronted by our mortality and continue building our own earthly kingdoms. We could continue filling them with the nicest cars, biggest houses, and the latest electronic gadgets. However, what consequences do our own individualism and greed have on our relationships, families, society, spirituality and even our environment?

I have always been fascinated by the results of studies that try to measure the correlation between a family's income and their overall happiness. Although there is certainly some correlation between income and happiness, most studies show that after the basic needs of the family have been met there is very little correlation between wealth and happiness. This has certainly been the case with my experience. What will it take for us to say that we have enough when our basic needs of food, clothing, shelter, health care and education have been met?

Happiness comes from a transformation of the heart, not the transformation of our financial portfolios. So rather than strive for wealth that exceeds our needs, let's spend our energy promoting things that are truly life-giving for ourselves and others, leading us further towards a more loving relationship with God, the creator and sustainer of all life.

***Dear Heavenly Lord, please let our hearts be satisfied when our needs have been met. Let us lift up the poor among us so that we may enter into true Christian community and prevent us from filling our lives with material wealth that prevents us from growing closer to you. Amen***

## **Tuesday, July 17**

*We know that we have passed from death to life because we love one another. Whoever does not love abides in death. – 1 John 3: 14*

How do we define what is life and what is not? How do we truly know that we are living? I think this verse from 1 John is a wonderful place to start. How do you think our lives would be different if each of us defined the amount of “life” in our day by the amount of love we showed towards one another? I know this certainly is not the way I typically describe how I live each day. Often I will spend some time each evening reflecting on the day, but I typically evaluate my day by considering the amount of work I did, the number of pages I read, or the time I spent exercising.

I can only imagine what it would be like to measure each day by the moments I have loved others. What would it be like if the first thing on each day’s list of things to do was the wonderful task of loving those around me? I am sure I would find much more pleasure in each day and I could rest every evening knowing that at least I had accomplished the most important thing on my list.

*Dear Lord, please help us see ordinary actions as acts of love and kindness, full of your life and empty of death. Please help us slow down and recognize the importance of loving and caring for those around us each and every day. Amen*

## Wednesday, July 18

*Then the king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.'* – Matthew 25: 34-36

Although we, as Lutherans, confess that it is not our works that enable us to obtain salvation, sometimes we forget just how important our good works really are. Martin Luther certainly believed that it is only by God's grace through our faith that we can accept Christ's gift of salvation, but he also realized that *because* of our faith we *will* do good works. In other words, because of the wonderful gift of grace that God has given us we cannot help but do good works with delight.

As we continue to align ourselves with the life and teachings of Christ, God transforms our lives and we are forever changed. It is not a burden to feed the hungry, welcome the stranger, visit the sick and clothe the naked; it is our joy to do so because we know it is the very will of God. When we root ourselves firmly in Jesus' life and teachings, we have a new and exciting way of seeing and interacting with those around us!

***Dear Lord, please help us recognize the needs of those around us and let us respond to them as Jesus did while he was here on Earth. Help us to do your will and live with compassion towards one another. We are grateful for being able to help build up your kingdom on Earth. Amen***

## **Thursday, July 19**

*So also Christ did not glorify himself in becoming a high priest, but was appointed by the one who said to him, "You are my Son, today I have begotten you." – Hebrews 5:5-6*

There are certainly times when I am tempted to pursue certain careers and goals because it will result in great economic or social prosperity. Most of us certainly want to be looked upon favorably by the community, seen as competent in our fields of work, and enjoy financial stability. These are certainly all wonderful things, but are they requirements for living a life that is faithful to the Gospel and our calling as Christians? Do these things sometimes get in the way of living faithfully to our God?

Jesus was certainly qualified to be among the most prestigious religious teachers of his world, as we know from each of the gospels. He also could have easily flourished economically, living a very comfortable life as a religious advisor and teacher. However, during his baptism in the Jordan, he received his call to public ministry, which eventually led to his own death on the cross. Throughout Jesus' ministry he did not seek personal glorification, but rather he sought the fulfillment of the ministry to which he was called. As Christians, I believe it is very important to recognize our own calling and be satisfied doing the work we are called to do, whatever kind of work that may be.

*Dear Lord, we ask that you would help lead our lives in the direction that you would like them to go, no matter what our own desires may be. We ask that you form our hearts so that your will becomes our own. Amen*

## **Friday, July 20**

*Although I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given to me to bring to the Gentiles the news of the boundless riches of Christ, and to make everyone see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things; so that through the church the wisdom of God in its rich variety might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. – Ephesians 3: 8-10*

What exactly does the word “church” mean to you and what kind of memories does it raise? Do you think of the church building itself? Do you think of a sanctuary with stained glass windows? Do memories of church meetings and family gatherings come to mind? What about your church’s role in the community? Are there any painful memories attached to church?

No matter what our own experience and understanding of church may be, there is no doubt that the church plays a very important role in many of our lives and in the life of the larger community. Though we, like Paul, may not feel very worthy of bringing the Gospel message to those around us and help fulfill the mission of the church, by grace we are given this awesome privilege and responsibility.

According to this passage, it is through the church that the wisdom of God, in all its diversity, is made known to everyone including the rulers in the heavenly places! So even though every church has its joys, successes, sorrows and failures, it is important to remember that we are all part of the larger mission of bringing about the Kingdom of God here on Earth.

***Dear Lord, we ask that you help us remember that we are all part of your church and we have an important mission here on earth. Please help us fulfill the mission you have set forth for us as the Church, the true Body of Christ. Amen***

## **Saturday, July 21**

*But as for that in the good soil, these are the ones who, when they hear the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patient endurance. – Luke 8:15*

Can you remember any particular times when the Gospel message seemed like it was speaking directly to you? During my first course on Christian theology I started reading books from Latin America that would now be considered “liberation theology.” It was then that I finally started to understand the power of the Gospel we confess and promise to live by. Liberation theology most often focuses on the fact that we can no longer ignore the material poverty of many parts of the world and that our stewardship and mission work are intimately connected with our life of faith.

This powerful message of liberation for the poor and the oppressed resonated with me greatly and I knew that I needed to change both the way I think and the way I live my life. I decided that the foundation of my personal identity and life’s work must first and foremost be founded in our life-giving and liberating Gospel. Jesus Christ cared not only about the spiritual wealth of people, but also the financial and social welfare of the poor and the oppressed. Thus as Christians we are called to respond to the material needs of the poor and not just their spiritual needs. It is this message of material and spiritual liberation of the oppressed to which I hold fast and pray that I will be able to bear fruit with patient endurance.

*Dear Lord, please help us to see the needs of those around us and enable us to work towards the well being of all your creation. Help us strive to be the caretakers you intended and care for our neighbors, the earth, and all its inhabitants. Fill us with the light and life of our liberator, your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen*