

Devotions – July 22-28, 2007
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Sunday, July 22

For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope. Jeremiah 29:11

The human mind plans the way, but the Lord directs the steps. Proverbs 16:9

We are creatures who know (we think) what we want in life and we go about getting it – whatever it takes. How often do we sit down and listen to God speaking to us, telling us what to do with our life? Are we afraid of what He would tell us, where He would guide us, the price we would have to pay to get it? I’m guessing the answer may be ‘yes’ to those questions.

I had a good career before I was married, and after I got married I continued in a very fulfilling job. I was quite content with my life. What more could I want – I had a loving husband, a beautiful daughter, a job I loved and felt “called” to be doing. And, yet there must have been something missing – something not even I consciously knew. When I stopped long enough to listen to God speaking to me, I discovered he had a plan for me – I was on the right track, so to speak, just not on the right train. I now find myself in seminary pursuing ordained ministry. The path is not easy and it comes with a cost – time away from family and home, and the guilt that goes with that; time for studying and more studying; tuition costs; doubt, uncertainty in my own abilities – it’s been a long time since I was in school! And yet I am assured that the Lord has plans for me and is guiding my steps, and the path will not harm me, and there is hope for the future.

Gracious God, may we be open to hearing your voice, trusting that you are guiding our steps, and that we can faithfully fulfill the plans you have for us. Amen

Monday, July 23

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect.
Romans 12:2

How is your congregation doing these days – humming right along? Ministries and outreach are happening? How's the attendance? Are there young people involved? Is there conflict? Have you experienced any “surprises” lately? Are you content? Are you satisfied? Are you set in your ways? Do you see a need for something new? Can you even think of the word ‘change’ without getting sweaty palms?

Have you had a conversation with God lately? Have you allowed yourself to sit back and listen to the Holy Spirit speak to you? Are you open to really hearing what the Spirit may be telling you?

Paul tells us we need to open our minds and hearts to allow the Holy Spirit to enter in, to discern what the will of God is, and to be bold and confident, trusting that God will lead us to what is good and acceptable and perfect. Even if that means moving out of our comfort zone, ignoring the words “I/we can't” or “it's always been done that way”, and trying something new. Grounding ourselves in prayer and Bible study, we open ourselves up to conversation and relationship with God.

Dear Lord, when you invite us into conversation with you, may we be open to hearing what you are saying and bold enough to follow you, putting aside our ideas and our self interests, and stepping out in faith, being transformed. Amen

Tuesday, July 24

When you lie down, your sleep will be sweet. ... for the Lord will be your confidence.
Proverbs 3:24b, 26a

Have you ever had one of those nights ... you go to bed weary, even exhausted, ready for a good night's rest ... and then you can't fall asleep?

Last night I didn't sleep well. I tossed and turned, my mind swirled with thoughts of the day, the evening, what happened yesterday, what will happen in the days to come, family near and far, weather, conversations of the past and conversations anticipated, I rehashed what we had learned in class, I thought about future classes, you name it, I thought about it. I was overwhelmed with my thoughts. And yet, I had had a good day, a day filled with friends, community, laughter, learning – I was at peace. At least I thought so. Perhaps I had forgotten one little detail ... perhaps I had forgotten to invite my Lord into my thoughts. For the Lord will be your confidence and your sleep will be sweet in that knowledge.

As we lay our heads on our pillows this night, Lord, may we rest in your confidence, knowing you are there with us, keeping us safe in your love, in your care, in your hope and in your peace. Amen.

Wednesday, July 25

Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work. 2Corinthians 9:7-8

We have some very cheerful givers in our congregation. They may not be the ones who give of their financial resources, but they are the ones who give of their resources of self and time and talents. Our quilting ladies are an amazingly dedicated group of mostly elderly ladies, some with significant health issues – 40 of them – who faithfully come every Tuesday morning regardless of the weather, to share in fellowship and community, and to do their “job” – whether that is tying, quilting, rolling bandages, knitting bandages, sewing, sorting, rolling yarn, making layettes, preparing health kits or HIV/Aids kits or school kits. God provides them with every blessing, so they share of themselves in abundance in every good work. This last year they sent over 700 quilts, and over 600 kits to Lutheran World Relief and Global Health.

Gracious God, we thank you for our quilting ladies. We thank you for all those who share of themselves cheerfully to do the work of your kingdom. Amen.

Thursday, July 26

Romans 8:14-16 “For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry “Abba! Father” it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God”

The work of the Spirit is adopting – finding “children” for God. How many of us are like orphaned children, having no place to call home, no one to call Father or Mother.

We adopted our daughter, Rebecca, from a Russian orphanage when she was 14 months old – today is her 6th birthday – she had no place to call home, no one to call Mommy or Daddy. She needed someone to care for her, nurture her, provide for her – food, clothing, shelter. She needed someone to love her, to hold her tight. She needed a sense of belonging, a family. Jon and I were looking for a child, someone to claim as our own, someone to be our heir.

“We” are like Rebecca in our relationship with God. God seeks us out, yearning to embrace his “children” – “we” are those children. Just as Jon and I adopted Rebecca and claimed her as our own, so too does God adopt all of us and claim us as His own.

Gracious God, we thank you for adopting us and claiming us as your children, heirs of your kingdom. Amen.

Friday, July 27

But Jesus said, “Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs.” Matthew 19:14

Children are a blessing – whether they are ours naturally, or by adoption, or whether they are part of our community. They are full of energy and enthusiasm, they are sponges absorbing knowledge, they are trusting and vulnerable, they need guidance and nurture, they are willing to follow and do, they are carefree and care-less, they love unconditionally, they are uninhibited, willing to engage others and accept others regardless of looks and social status. Sometimes our lives as adults get so full and cluttered by “things” around us, we lose sight of the simple things, the basic things, the important things.

Perhaps we as adults can learn from the children and see the world through their eyes. Jesus says to let the little children come to Him. Is He telling us something?

Dear Lord, we thank you for the example of the little children. May we be like them as we are in relationship with those around us. Amen.

Saturday, July 28

“So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today’s trouble is enough for today.” Matthew 6:34

As I sit and write these words in June it is my anniversary and I am away from home and family. The words of this passage remind me of my wedding day as they were the basis for the homily. We were told not to worry about tomorrow because God is already there waiting for us – to share in our joys and sorrows, to be there to pick us up or walk with us. I have to keep reminding myself of that fact – I am a worrier, it comes naturally to me, I’m good at it, proficient at it.

The passage tells us not to worry about tomorrow, since today’s worries are enough. I can relate as I think about my homework for “tomorrow” and the papers I will have to write, and my mind is struggling with what to write, where to begin, wondering if it will be right. But I have to stop and think about today first, and I’m worrying about writing these devotions – my mind is blank, my mind is overwhelmed, my mind is weary. Where will the words come from? And then I remember ... God is already here and there waiting for me ... God will walk with me, help me find the right words, rejoice with me if I did well or console me if I did poorly ... I just have to trust in His presence ... knowing He is waiting for me ... and being filled with the peace that comes with that reassurance.

Gracious God, thank you for always being there for us – today and tomorrow. Amen.