

## **Devotions - September 23-29, 2007**

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This week we will be considering three verses from the Old Testament reading of Sunday, August 26th, namely Isaiah 58:9b-11. They spoke to me vividly as I thought about this assignment.

If I were still teaching French, I might call this “explication de texte” where one examines closely a given text, extracting all possible meanings and connections.

*Isaiah 58:9b-11*

*<sup>9b</sup> If you remove the yoke from among you, the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil, <sup>10</sup> if you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom be like the noonday. <sup>11</sup> The LORD will guide you continually, and satisfy your needs in parched places, and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters never fail.*

### **Sunday, September 23**

Isaiah 58:9b

*If you remove the yoke from among you ...*

We heard this Isaiah text on a day at St. Mark's when the Finnish-African Gospel Mass served as the liturgy. That service is ALWAYS a spirit lifter! The group of cantors and instrumentalists varies, the preacher varies, but the uplifting impact is the same.

And part of that impact is the music, sometimes contemplative, sometimes imploring, sometimes reassuring, sometimes full of energy and joy. One leaves the service with a smile in one's heart.

*Let us pray:*

***Lord, You know the burdens we have, and You offer ways for us to alleviate them. Music is a way for some of us. Knowing that we are forgiven, that your Son died for our sins, is a way for all of us. Amen.***

## Monday, September 24

Isaiah 58:9b

*If you remove ... the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil ...*

Have you ever looked back at a situation, and asked yourself, Why didn't I ...?

I was sitting in an office, waiting to be called for an appointment, when the person next to me struck up a conversation. Pleasant enough, but then the talk turned to a public figure, with innuendos about his life and morals.

What?! I said to myself, is this for real? The person talking to me can't even remember his name correctly, and is vague about where the "news" came from.

I listened, cautiously suggesting that this sounded unlikely, and then the conversation was over, as the person's name was called for the appointment.

Later, I asked myself, Why didn't I ask more pertinent questions. Why didn't I pursue the source of this "news.". Why did I let this public figure's name be dragged through the mud?

*Let us pray:*

***Lord, help us to think on our feet. Curb our tongues, but give us wisdom to speak the truth.  
Amen.***

**Tuesday, September 25**

Isaiah 58:10a

*... if you offer your food to the hungry, and satisfy the needs of the afflicted,...*

We are so blessed, most of us, with an abundance of food, shelter, good health, and many other things that make our lives satisfying.

Which is why it is a pleasure, yes a pleasure, to contribute to the ELCA campaigns (and others) that lessen hunger and provide shelter, programs that minister to downtrodden spirits.

In the past couple years, I have become much more conscious of accessibility, of easy entry into buildings, for example. The mere presence of steps, though it might be architecturally elegant and appropriate, can mean exclusion from that building for some folks. Or expending extra energy struggling up, and down, the steps.

In a recent walk-through, I was glad to find that our Synod House has a gently sloping solid entry ramp and other amenities to make life more satisfying for all.

*Let us pray:*

***Lord, we praise You for health and home and daily bread. Help us to help provide these precious commodities to all. Amen.***

## Wednesday, September 26

Isaiah 58:10b

*... then your light shall rise in the darkness ...*

We are living in a new house—new to us—as of the end of July, and in the kitchen is a window to the north. There is room in the kitchen for a comfy chair, and sitting in it gives one an angle view to the north-east.

Many are the early mornings, sitting in the upholstered orange chair, that I have watched the daylight come through that window. It is not the sunrise I see; it is the effect of the rising of the sun.

Sometimes the light comes with color, wonderful shades of pink reflecting on the clouds scattered in a brightening sky. Sometimes the light is diffused, colorless so to speak, and clouds predominate.

But always, the light comes, a beacon leading to a new day, a new beginning, another chance at living a Christ-centered life.

*Let us pray:*

***Lord, thank you for light, for newness of life, for the beauty of the world around us. Amen.***

**Thursday, September 27**

Isaiah 58:10b

*... and your gloom be like the noonday.*

Do you ever find yourself in a bad mood? I mean, a real funk, a lasting anger with the unfairness of the world, with the bad attitude of those around you? Do you conjure up situations that will show “them” how wrong they are, and how right, yes even righteous, you are?

I cannot count the times when my feelings and thoughts have been exactly like those above. Talk about gloom. Nothing but darkness and despair, and I can even recognize it but can't seem to drag myself out of it.

How to cope? Well, life goes on, and time is a healing factor. Playing the piano, cleaning or ironing or knitting (something with a positive, tangible outcome), these are some of my strategies.

This series of Bible verses suggests that reaching out to others is a way, and a good way, to get past the gloom. Help others, and you will help yourself. It's a win-win situation.

*Let us pray:*

***Lord, keep reminding us that You are the source of answers in our lives. Be with us, bring us back into balance. Amen.***

**Friday, September 28**

Isaiah 58:11a

*The LORD will guide you continually, and satisfy your needs in parched places,  
and make your bones strong; ...*

Who among us, who have reached “a certain age,” are not concerned with the health of their bones? (By the way, that euphemistic way of referring to aging comes from the French, as in “Je suis une femme d’un certain âge.”).

We exercise, eat the right foods, take extra calcium (with vitamin D so it can be processed in our bodies), and often are on a regimen of prescription meds designed to beef up our bones.

I wonder if the writer of Isaiah ever thought about the intricacies of bone health as we know it in 2007 when he wrote about the Lord making our bones strong. Probably not, although I do believe it is certainly in the purview of our all-knowing God.

There are people whose bones are sturdy and don’t break when they fall. My mother was one of those. Then there are people like me, with four fractures, twice as a kid and twice in the past ten years. It is good to read in the Good Book about our bones being strong.

*Let us pray:*

***Lord, thank you for healing us. Keep us, our bodies and our faith, strong and healthy. Amen.***

## Saturday, September 29

Isaiah 58:11b

*...and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water,  
whose waters never fail.*

Water, in the form of adequate rain, was missing this past summer in our territory.

We saw lawns go brown, crops and gardens barely survive (and some did not), lakes recede, and docks span dry ground.

We saw the importance of water, especially our Lake Superior, featured in a first-ever musical and artistic tribute at a program attended by hundreds in mid-July in Marquette.

Our neighbor, upon hearing the news that there had been 40 days of drought prior to a crashing rain storm in August, commented, "How Biblical!"

The Bible abounds with references to water, a life-giving substance with many metaphorical meanings. The above verse, the last in the series this week, follows from the admonitions in verses 9 and 10 to share the burdens and care for people in need.

*Let us pray:*

***Lord, You never fail us. Through You, we are strong, wise and loving. Help us to be like refreshing water, sharing and caring for our neighbors and our environment. Amen.***