

## **Devotions - September 30 - October 6, 2007**

**by JoAnne Barrix**

**Faith, Rock**

Our church is currently involved in the Synod's Transformational Ministry program. One of our assignments was to discern the "guiding principles" of our congregation. We came together as a group and brainstormed after prayer and study of scripture. The Holy Spirit was present as we described what we are about. This is not only a must for the church, but is also a great personal exercise; for in baptism we were made members of the body of Christ we call the church. We are "the church".

### **Sunday, September 30**

*Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." – Matthew 16:16*

***Jesus is Lord!***

In Matthew 16, Jesus inquires of the disciples: "*Who do the people say the Son of Man is?*" Only Peter confesses that Jesus is divine and the promised, long-awaited Messiah. Many churches will confess that this is a guiding principle, but if Jesus were to ask you this question, how would you answer? Is Jesus your Lord?

When Jesus is lord of your life, you are his disciple. Prayer, study of scripture, and worship are what your life is all about. You love, serve, and welcome as Jesus did. You do this because you are saved by God's grace and you can do nothing else. You are aware that all that you have, all that you are, and all that you hope to be are gifts from God. Your priorities change and you change.

***Dear Heavenly Father, In the midst of this world's busyness and temptations, help me to always remember that Jesus is my Lord. Amen.***

## **Monday, October 1**

*But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. – 1 Peter 2:9*

### ***We are disciples of Jesus.***

In the times of the Old Testament, a priest would act as the intermediary between God and the people. Sinful human beings could not approach God directly. Now that Jesus has won us victory over sin, we can come directly into the presence of God without fear. We are also given the responsibility of bringing others to him. We are the priests, we are made holy in our baptism, we are God's children, *we are disciples of Jesus!*

What is a disciple? A disciple seeks God through daily prayer, meditation on the Scriptures and other devotional writings and practices. A disciple assesses their spiritual gifts and uses these gifts in ministry. A disciple practices biblical stewardship and is generous in response to God through financial offerings, servant ministries and caring for God's world. A disciple nurtures and teaches younger generations.

Each Christian is on a life-long journey of growing as a disciple. We are all invited to deepen our faith life as we are rooted and grounded in the Christian faith through Christian education. From this home base of the church, we are then sent out as servant ministers in our daily lives, sent to be the church in our community and the world. And the inheritance of a disciple, one of God's chosen, is nothing less than salvation-imperishable, uncorrupted, and unfading.

***Dear Heavenly Father, This journey of discipleship is not easy. I am impatient and want things to be my way in my own time. Teach me to grow as your disciple and to always remember that I belong to you. Amen.***

## **Tuesday, October 2**

*They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and prayers. – Acts 2:42*

***We are guided by prayer and scripture.***

Prayer life is clearly one of the attributes of the early Christian community. It probably originates from participation in the hours of prayer of Jewish devotion. So too our congregations should be schools of prayer. Prayer is essential for our discipleship journey. Prayer is needed to discern a vision of what God wants for us and our churches. We must refresh ourselves with prayer and scripture, or our work as disciples will suffer. Prayer is not just another item on the list of “to do’s”, prayer is intentionally placing ourselves in the presence of God and opening our hearts and minds to his will.

Jesus calls his disciples to engage in worldwide mission. This missionary training begins in the book of Acts in the church in Jerusalem and continues with us today. It is studying of scripture within the church that equips us with the understanding and skills needed for action in the world. The continued preaching of the gospel to the church today is necessary so that it remains as a church, living out its mission, doing the will of God. It is in the congregational setting that we are helped to discern our gifts and can experience fresh energy and renewal in leadership. It is studying of scripture that teaches us to live our faith in the family, in the workplace and in the community.

***Dear Heavenly Father, I so often lose my sense of purpose and direction. Keep me grounded with you in prayer and scripture. Amen.***

## **Wednesday, October 3**

*I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. – John 13:34*

### *As Jesus Loved – We Love*

The commandment to love others was not a new commandment, but to love with the sacrificial love of Jesus was new.

Before his arrest and crucifixion, Jesus has a last meal with his disciples and gives them lengthy instructions in what is called a “farewell discourse.” The farewell discourse is a speech delivered in the face of imminent death and is known from ancient Jewish literature. In this speech, the speaker makes known his deepest concerns and desires for those that he is leaving behind. Jesus is concerned most for the community that he will leave behind. He is concerned for the quality and character of their lives together and for the witness that they will bear in the world. His deepest desire is that the community be characterized first and foremost by their mutual love for God and one another.

A disciples’ love not only shows faithfulness to Jesus, but also is a reflection of the unity between the Father and the Son and the unity that all disciples will have with Jesus, even after his departure. Living this sacrificial love will not only bring believers to Christ, but will keep believers strong and united in a world that is hostile to God. Jesus was a living example of the love of God, and we are to be living examples of the love of Jesus.

*Dear Heavenly Father, You have shown me the truest example of love by sending your Son to suffer and pay for my sins. Strengthen me that I may love those that I do not know or find to be unlovable, as Jesus did. Amen.*

## **Thursday, October 4**

*For the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many. – Mark 10:45*

### *As Jesus Served – We Serve*

The church is unlike any business, organization or institution that we know. Membership may have privileges and greatness is measured by high personal achievement in businesses and organizations; however, in Christ's kingdom, service is the key. As disciples of Jesus, following his example, greatness comes from serving others.

So often, our service is conditional. We will serve if we have spare time, if we have nothing else better to do, or only if it is our turn. We will serve if it is convenient and doesn't interfere with our plans for our lives. We will serve only if we can do things the way that we want them done. Some may even decide that they have served enough and that others should step up. This is not the example that Jesus gave us to follow.

Disciples need to first discern what God is calling them to do. We need to spend time in prayer and Bible study. We need to discover our spiritual gifts and use them as God intends. We need to open our hearts and minds to follow God's will. And we need to have confidence that in every calling, God is always supplying us with everything that we need.

Rather than finding ways to have our own needs met, we, disciples of Christ, are called to look for ways that we can minister to the needs of others.

*Dear Heavenly Father, You sent your Son, not only as a guide to understanding the greatness of service in your kingdom, but as the price paid to release me from the power of sin so I may be free to serve. Lead me to serve as Jesus did. Amen.*

## **Friday, October 5**

*Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it. – Hebrews 13:2*

### *As Jesus Welcomed – We Welcome*

Jesus welcomed everyone: the foreigner, the excluded, the sad and lonely and hurting. It didn't matter what country you came from, who your parents were, what you did for a living, or whether you were a man or a woman or a child. It didn't matter what you had done with your life, if you had lied, cheated, stolen, gossiped, or run away. Jesus, still today, welcomes everyone.

And if Jesus can welcome everyone, who are we to turn people away? We tend to want to surround ourselves with people that are like us. We want to socialize with people that have the same cars, clothes, and status that we do. We want to gather with people that have the same heritage and beliefs. We want to judge other people's lifestyles and habits. This was not the example that Jesus set for us.

Jesus reminds us that our relationship with him starts at the foot of the cross. Here, no one has anything to brag about. Here we are seen for what we truly are: sinful, weak, and in need of salvation. Here we are all truly the same. Here everyone is welcome. Here everyone is welcome because Jesus says so.

*Dear Heavenly Father, Thank you for welcoming us even though we have wandered away from you. Thank you for forgiving us when we have turned our backs on you. Thank you for sending your Son to save us when we have done nothing to deserve salvation. Help us to welcome others as you welcome us. Amen.*

## **Saturday, October 6**

*Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. – Matthew 28:18*

### ***The world needs Jesus!***

We have a job to do and we have to do it now. Our job is to tell people about Jesus and help them get to know God. Our job is to care for those in need and heal the sick. Our job is to share with everyone the joy that comes from following Jesus. Our job is to understand why we have been given the gifts we have and how we are to use them. Our job is to dare to try the impossible and risk everything to be a part of what God is doing in this world.

You see, the church does not exist to meet our needs. We talk about “my” church but this is not what God intended. We pay the bills. We do the work. But the church does not belong to us. In her book, *Reclaiming the “L” Word*, Kelly Fryer puts it this way:

*The church may be the only organization on the planet that exists entirely for the sake of those people who don't belong to it yet. In fact, as soon as we forget this and start making it all about ourselves, we stop being the church.*

We need to ask ourselves: Who are we here for? What is our mission in the community and in the world. We need to be a people who put the needs of others ahead of our own and only then will we really be the church. God gave us Jesus and Jesus set us free from everything that can harm us. It is our job to share that freedom with others.

***Dear Heavenly Father, Fill me with the courage and strength to be your presence in the world. Help me to feed the hungry, heal the sick and welcome the stranger. Help me to share the message of Jesus, because the world needs Jesus. Amen.***