

Devotions - January 27-February 2, 2008
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Siloa, Ontonagon and Faith, White Pine

Sunday, January 27

The people who say in darkness have seen a great light,
and for those who sat in the region and
shadow of death light has dawned. Matthew 4:16

As a child I loved winter. I loved the snow, the cold and the short days. I loved to stay up late at night with just the Christmas tree lights on. I still find myself staying up late with my Christmas tree lights on (yes, my tree is still up). I have always been a night owl but my reasoning for staying up has changed. As I have aged my appreciation for sunlight has increased.

I am still a night person but the darkness can feel oppressive. I think this is why my Christmas lights and Nativity lights are still up and on. They remind me that I have seen a great light and no longer sit in darkness. This is what we are celebrating from Christmas through Epiphany. A light shone on the path, a light in the darkness made the world bright and warm.

During this season of early nights it is nice to know that Christ has the last word and that word shines on all.

Lord of light, my way is not always clear or easy, please shine the light of your love and mercy to guide me on my way. Open my eyes to see your grace shining from those around me. Amen.

Monday, January 28

Hear my voice when I call, O LORD; be merciful to me and answer me.⁸ My heart says of you, "Seek his face!" Your face, LORD, I will seek.⁹ Do not hide your face from me, do not turn your servant away in anger; you have been my helper. Do not reject me or forsake me, O God my Savior.¹⁰ Though my father and mother forsake me, the LORD will receive me.¹¹ Teach me your way, O LORD; lead me in a straight path because of my oppressors.¹² Do not turn me over to the desire of my foes, for false witnesses rise up against me, breathing out violence.¹³ I am still confident of this: I will see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living.¹⁴ Wait for the LORD; be strong and take heart and wait for the LORD. Psalm 27:7-14

We struggle on a daily basis to keep Christ in front of us; it is a constant vigil. We are constantly praying for His help in times of crisis. We have the sure and certain hope of His presence when we have shifted from His presence. But I often wonder if we are so busy trying to live a life of faith that we forget to see Christ in the people around us. This Psalm cries "Seek his face!" Where do we seek His face? Is it in the face of our brothers and sisters in Christ? Are we so in tuned to our congregational family that we forget that Christ can be seen in others?

As we continue to draw closed to Ash Wednesday and Lent I find myself seeing Jesus and who He ministered to. Jesus did not only speak to those who were in good standing with the Jewish religion, He spoke to everyone. I often ask my Confirmands and Church Council 'Where do we find Jesus?' When we are looking for Him we see Him in the midst of everyday life. To 'seek his face' is to welcome and love ALL. To 'see the goodness of the LORD' is to embrace our own fallenness and welcome those who are still seeking Jesus.

This Psalm is a call of acceptance; a call to ministry. We are meant to live in relationships with Christ and each other. We are called to share the love, grace and forgiveness we received with everyone we meet; not just those we know. We are disciples, apprentices, of Christ, as He sought out those in sin so do we.

Lord of Salvation, I often fail to follow your lead; help me to seek your presence in everything I do and say. Grace me with your hands of love, smile of forgiveness and heart of mercy. Amen

Tuesday, January 29

¹³ for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.

¹⁴ Do everything without complaining or arguing. Philippians 2:13-14

As I sit with parents who want their child baptized, I continually remind them that baptism is not something they do or even I do. In Baptism it is the Holy Spirit brought together with the Water and the Word who does the action. I have a similar conversation with parishioners regarding Holy Communion. Again, the presiding Pastor becomes an implement for the Holy Spirit. But, does God only act through the Sacraments? No, God works through us.

When we let go and allow the gifts we are given to flow out of us to those around us, God is using us; you to bring about His will on earth. This is a scary thing for us. Our nature is to try and control everything around us and to let go of this control is terrifying. Yet, it is only when we are able to let go and say with as much certainty as Christ 'Thy will be done' not mine that God works miracles through us.

I can't tell you the number of times I have to remind myself to work God's will, not mine. I can tell you the peace and joy I feel when I do give myself over to God's will is beyond description. The feel of 'rightness' is overwhelming. I know, because of our nature (my nature), I will weave a picture of being in God's will and then not. The whole point is to remember that God's will is always good. God's will creates good out of any situation.

Lord of Breath, you moved the waters at creation; move me to let go of my will that I may flow in the direction of your will. Strength my heart that all the gifts and blessings you have given me freely flow from me to all the world. Amen.

Wednesday, January 30

His father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied: Luke 1:67

Zechariah was struck mute by the angel of the Lord, when he doubted that Elizabeth would bear a child. The angel told Zachariah that he would not speak until the day his son is named John. When Elizabeth and Zechariah present the baby to be circumcised Elizabeth indicates the child's name is John. Those around them question John, who speaks for the first time and agrees with Elizabeth. Zechariah then makes this prophesy, otherwise known as Zechariah's song.

The Holy Spirit uses the humble servant Zechariah to proclaim John's mission in the world. John is the Messenger, the Forerunner to Christ Jesus. The Spirit uses Zechariah as an instrument of proclamation; the instrument which sings the Good News to the nations. Zechariah still sings this Good News to us.

I always find it so amazing and wonderful that God uses any one to proclaim His glory. God does not care if you are unclean, steeped in sin, or righteous. His Spirit moves as the Spirit wills. If you were to take a journey through the Bible you can create a tapestry of the most unlikely people that God chooses to bring about His will. All that is required is an openness to the Holy Spirit.

This leads me to question, how are we as Christians open to the breath of God, the Holy Spirit? Where are we being blow to? Who is the Spirit using in our lives to reveal His Mercy, Grace and Forgiveness? How open are we to His breath? Can we sing out and proclaim His works in our lives?

Lord of Peace, I am but a poor and wounded servant, teach me to sing your praise for all to hear of your glory. Use my life as an instrument that plays your song of salvation. Amen.

Thursday, January 31

His father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied:

⁶⁸ "Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come
and has redeemed his people. Luke 1:67-68.

'He has come.' Christianity is the only religion that I am aware of whose God comes down to them. God knows we are unable to obtain our own righteousness. No matter how hard we try, no matter how disciplined, no matter how cloistered we are, we cannot help but sin. This is the reason for Christ's life, death and resurrection. John the baptizer's father Zechariah prophesied Christ's coming. "He has come and has redeemed his people." The miracle we have been celebrating is not the virgin birth, the madji, the angels, the shepherds, or any of the other parts of the Christmas story. The miracle is the love of God made manifest. The miracle that God loved you so much He took on our form with all its problems and struggles. The miracle is that our God is Immanuel; which means in every connotation and denotation that God is with us.

How many of you appreciate when you turn to someone for guidance or help and they have gone through a similar experience? You know they get it. You find comfort in their ability to understand and empathized with you. This is our God. Christ came so we are never in doubt that He knows what it is like to live in this fallen world. Christ knows all your joy, sorrows, struggles and triumphs, not as an observer but as someone who lived them and can live them with you now.

Proclaim the good news of a people redeemed because Christ embraced all your sins, my sins, and the sins of the world. Christ took them to Himself so we are made right before our God and become inheritors of the Kingdom of God.

Lord of All, I forget that you are the ruler of heaven, earth, and my very self. You are called Immanuel; remain with me so that your presence shines through my heart and face. Amen.

Friday, February 1

Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him.²⁶ It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Christ.²⁷ Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required,²⁸ Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying:²⁹ "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace.³⁰ For my eyes have seen your salvation,³¹ which you have prepared in the sight of all people,³² a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel."³³ The child's father and mother marveled at what was said about him.
Luke 2:25-34

“... as you have promised ... For my eyes have seen your Salvation.” Simeon, this prophet was living to see the Messiah. God had promised him that he would not die until the Messiah came. When Jesus' parents present him in the temple for circumcision Simeon proclaims the fulfillment of the prophecy. We find a phrase often connected to these events indicating that the Law of Moses and prophecy are completed in Jesus.

We often neglect the fruition of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. Jesus fulfilled all laws, prophecies, and will of God.

Lord Christ, you are the promised Messiah, the anointed one; anoint me with your Holy Spirit that I may share the gifts you gave me to others in the hope that we will see the Kingdom of God revealed to all the world. Amen.

Saturday, February 2

Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against,³⁵ so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too." Luke 2:34-35

This is not the kind of word any parent would want spoken about their child. Yet, this is the prophecy made about Jesus. I find myself talking about the love of Christ and all the wonderful gifts He gives us, which are very important; but there is another side to His ministry. Christ did not come to condemn but to save. Yet, in our salvation Christ turns everything upside down. Christ causes our very nature to fall. Christ, in many circles, is considered counter-cultural. Christ challenges how we view the world. Christ challenges how we view ourselves and others. Christ calls us to live in the world but not become of the world.

My confirmation class is studying the Small Catechism. We were talking about the fourth commandment (Honor your Mother & Father). We finished the discussion talking about ways we honor those who are more mature (older, wiser) than us. This led into talking about love given freely versus love demanded. One of the Confirmands went home and gave her mom a hug and thanked her for everything mom did for her. The parent called me up and wanted to know what we were talking about.

Was it so against our nature to appreciate what others do for us? I would say yes; and yet this is what Jesus is prophesied to do for the world. I personally would like to live in a world that went against our negative natures and empowered us to live in the Grace, Mercy, and Forgiveness of Christ.

Jesus Christ, you are my sole strength. I give to you my love freely just as you give your love freely to me. Encourage me to never take a moment, a person, a feeling, or this world for granted, they are all gifts from you. Amen.