

Devotions - October 8-14, 2006
by Lillian Strom
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Sunday, October 8

John 6:35

“Jesus said to them, I am the bread of life, he who comes to me shall not hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst”

We have heard many sermons this summer regarding bread. I didn't always regard bread so highly. Even during Depression days I didn't eat plain bread and butter. I always had to “dress it up” with sugar, jam or sometimes peanut butter. My maternal grandmother came from a life of extreme poverty in Sweden. When she had a heart-attack at 79 years old, I visited her at the hospital at supper time. The nurse brought her tray. She looked it over and picked up a piece of bread. She turned it slowly in her hand, looked at both sides and began to eat - no butter, no sugar, just bread. I felt as if I was in the presence of a sacramental moment. It made me realize that when we eat bread, we need to look beyond it to those without bread and pray for them, and to thank God for what he has given us.

Dear God, Let us grasp more fully that you provide us with our daily bread, and that your son is the bread of our spiritual life that sustains us from day to day. Amen.

Monday, October 9

Ephesians 1:3-8

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. He destined us in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace which he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace which he lavished upon us."

Having come from a background where fear of God's wrath and judgement played a larger role than Christ's undying love for us, Christ was not "real" to me. Apparently others struggle with this too. Didn't one hymn-writer ask that the dimness of his soul be taken away? As I would read my Bible, I would think about all the names given to Christ: Savior, Wonderful Counselor, Prince of Peace, but finally I settled on my favorite.

In Paul's letter to the Ephesians he called Christ, "The Beloved." That name helps to take some of the dimness of my soul away. This name puts all the rhetoric of wrath and judgement in perspective. It puts me in mind of a time when I was sitting at the kitchen table with my four-year old grandson. I asked him what he would do if Jesus came to the door. He replied; "I'd run over and hug him." May God grant us the capability to run to our Savior, the Beloved, and hug him for eternity.

Dear Lord, Send your Holy Spirit into our lives to make Jesus "real" to each of us.

Tuesday, October 10

Philippians 4:8-9

"Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, do; and the God of peace will be with you."

One of the fun things in my life is sewing quilts for Lutheran World Relief. Taking a pile of fabric and turning them into something useful to those who have nothing, puts our efforts into a different category than our daily routine of doing dishes and cleaning floors. This effort allows us to visualize the recipient receiving something beautiful and essential to life, given in the name of Christ. I get more out of this project than I give, and I find that the gift I receive is the realization of a life that is beyond my petty complaints. One day, while sewing on my machine, it kept jamming up on me. Suddenly, in the midst of fixing it, I realized that each time I had a less than Christian thought about someone or something, my machine would jam up. Apparently, when I was judging others, I pressed too hard on the foot pedal. If negative thoughts do this to the simple operation of machinery, what do they do to our physical, mental and spiritual health? William Law once said, *"the best way to love people is to pray for them."*

Lord, Only you can direct our thoughts. It is time for us to house clean our "grudge list." Allow us to do this by the power of your Spirit. Amen.

Wednesday, October 11

Philippians 4:6-7

"Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

No one has to tell us that we live in an age of great anxiety. We are bombarded on every side. But looking back through history, wasn't it always so? Fear of the end of the world, disease for which there is no cure, famine, natural disasters etc.. Having passed the three score and ten years, I can speak to the anxiety of the aged. "Shall I sell my house and move to senior housing?" "Can I make it to the mailbox on a snowy day?" And then there is the ever-present emphasis on youth. The big question is not, "Will I die?" but rather, "Will I dye?" Old age does bring problems, but it brings gifts too. As an elder, you usually are given the best seat to sit in at a party, and you don't have to jump up and do the dishes after it is done. But old age also brings a whole new occupation to each one of us. You see, we have lived a lot of years, and in doing so we can realize that a loving Lord protected us and provided for us for all those years, through the good years and the bad. This piece of wisdom allows us to give a gift to the next generation, our realization that God is with you, always.

Lord, help us to forget our aches and pains and to see you in all things, and to see our usefulness in this single task of witnessing to your love. Amen.

Thursday, October 12

Psalm 4:7

"Thou hast put more joy in my heart than they have when their grain and wine abound."

If joy is one of the marks of a Christian, how do we measure up? C.S. Lewis said, "Joy is the serious business of heaven." Can we experience that, here on earth? Too often we confuse happiness with joy. Happiness that comes with a raise in pay, a bargain at the store, or a new possession. Joy is deeper and more lasting than that. Joy, for the Christian, is knowing that whatever the sorrow, whatever the burden, whatever the pain, there is a light at the end of the tunnel. That light is our Savior, Jesus Christ. That light is in the shape of a Cross.

Dear Lord, We know that we can't create joy in our lives, so we ask for the help of the Holy Spirit to give us that "peace which passes all understanding." Amen.

Friday, October 13

Matthew 28:19-20

"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, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age."

Our family camp is situated on a very high ridge near the Rapid River Falls Park, known as the old "Dutch Mill" to the locals. The evening had finally arrived to put my son Steve's ashes to rest on the side of that beautiful hill. The families arrived one by one and came up the hill slowly. We all gathered under the tall pine trees. My son Paul began with a prayer and a simple eulogy. After that, the ashes were buried alongside those of his brother Todd. Family members reminisced and consoled each other. Afterwards there was a simple meal and a time of fellowship. As the last group left, I decided to stay at the camp for the night. At one a.m. I still had not fallen asleep, so I sat by one of the large windows, overlooking the forest below. The stars seemed enormous, making the pines look like decorated Christmas trees. As I sat there I thought, "I haven't seen a shooting star for years." Seconds later a bright light shot across the sky. I knew in my heart that I wasn't alone. I believe that He is nearer than we think.

Dear Lord, Help us to sense your presence always. Amen.

Saturday, October 14

John 3:17

"For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but rather that the world might be saved through Him."

While I was in my training for nursing in Chicago, I had to work a night shift in the emergency room. We saw all kinds coming in, especially on the weekend nights. One particular night, I saw a man staggering down the hall towards the reception desk. The first thing that came to mind was, "great, here is another drunk to deal with." I pre-judged this man based on my past experience with others I had seen in the emergency room. This is an easy thing to do, especially in this day and age. Telemarketers make us cynical about charities, because of T.V. and movies we are cynical about police officers and others in authority. The easiest thing in the world is to become cynical about everything. But on that particular night in that emergency room in Chicago, I found out something that changed forever how I would view people. What I found out was that this particular man had a brain tumor, and it took everything that he had to come to the hospital to visit his sickly wife. I often have heard the phrase, "There but for the grace of God go I." I have lived long enough to realize that the more accurate quote is this, "There, by the grace of God, go all of us."

Dear Lord, help us to look at others as mirrors of ourselves and mirrors of you. Amen.