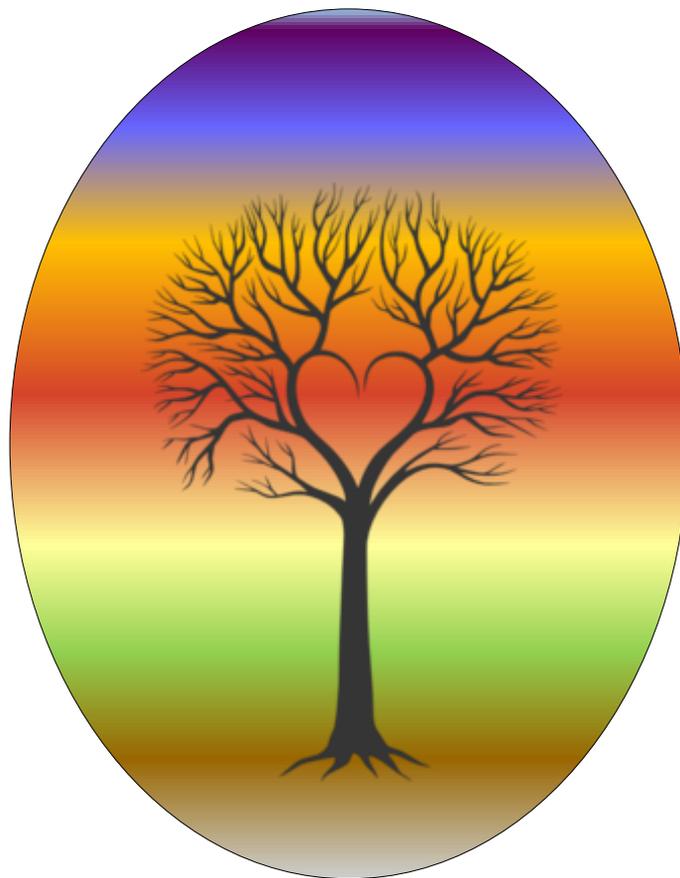




Daily Stewardship Devotional 2020



“Giving in Gratitude”
*Devotions for Faith Formation,
Stewardship Discernment, Renewal
and Action.*

“There are three conversions necessary,” Martin Luther wrote of Christian discipleship: “The conversion of the heart, the mind and the purse.” Luther was experienced enough in the affairs of the world to add, “Of these three, it may well be that we moderns find the conversion of the purse the most difficult.”

503 years later, Luther’s words are still relevant. Although “stewardship” involves the proper use of *all* the gifts that God has given us — time, health, intelligence, special abilities, friends, family, church and more — some struggle to understand how and why God wants us to share our financial gifts with others.

This short collection of daily readings from the Holy Scriptures is to be utilized for the time of our annual stewardship appeal. Through each reading, the commentary which follows, and your own prayers, we can see that our gifts are tools God gave us to minister to the world around us with the love of Christ. Our gifts are expressions of our gratitude for a loving and faithful God, who is always with us.

First, look up the daily text and read all of it. Then read the devotion. Consider what these words are illuminating for you. And say a prayer. Also, take a moment to consider how your personal stewardship to Holy Spirit can be expressed in the coming year. You can mail your completed pledge card in the envelope provided, or bring it with you to worship on October 4, and together we will set a course for this community of faith.

Broadly speaking, when people are generous with their money, it often indicates their hearts and minds are in the right place. Isn’t that what Jesus meant when he taught, “Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also?” (Luke 12:34)

Clifton D. Eshbach
Pastor

Wednesday, September 16

Psalm 119:169-176

Let my cry come before you, O LORD; give me understanding according to your word. Let my supplication come before you; deliver me according to your promise. (verses 169-170)

This longest of all the psalms reveals the good news of the Lord’s intervention on earth. And for the ancient Israelites the torah is the instrument through which the Lord intervenes. The poet of this psalm writes of a close relationship with God. In this relationship the poet, and we the reader, find a purpose as we dedicate ourselves to the Lord.

Thursday, September 17

I Corinthians 2:1-5

My speech and my proclamation were not with plausible words of wisdom, but with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God. (verses 4 & 5)

At the beginning of First Corinthians, Saint Paul is addressing and contrasting the “message of the cross” as opposed to human wisdom. In a time when flashy, visually oriented displays of faith were common, Paul writes that he came in a low key style as he preached the good news of Jesus and his resurrection. His message is our message. We focus upon the power of the cross which redeems, and we are to act in a way which is centered on God

Friday, September 18

Psalm 90: 13-17

Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us, and prosper for us the work of our hands— O prosper the work of our hands! (verse 17)

“And so this verse asks God not to be offended at that remnant of sin which is still left in us because of our flesh, and not for this reason to deprive us of life and the remission of sins but rather to remain friendly and kindly disposed toward us.”

(Martin Luther Commentary on Psalm 90, 1535)

Saturday, September 19

Psalm 98:1-5

The Lord has remembered his steadfast love and faithfulness to the house of Israel. All the ends of the earth have seen the victory of our God. (verse 3)

“...he who has not been brought low, reduced to nothing through the cross and suffering, takes credit for work and wisdom and does not give credit to God. He thus misuses and defiles the gifts of God.”

(Martin Luther from The Heidelberg Disputation, 1518)

Sunday, September 20

Luke 15:1-10

The 16th Sunday after Pentecost

Just so, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.” (verse 10)

In order to grab the powerful implication of these little parables, we should remember how this chapter begins. Pharisees were whining that Jesus eats with tax collectors and sinners. Well, where else should he be? Helping the lost is a major aspect of his ministry. And it is a major aspect of what he is teaching his disciples to emulate in the future. We’re here to serve, to help, to restore, all in the name of the risen Christ.

Monday, September 21

Matthew 9: 9-13

Commemoration of Matthew, Apostle and Evangelist

Go and learn what this means, ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’ For I have come to call not the righteous but sinners.” (verse 13)

We hear frequently of how we are to emulate the life of Jesus, through his example of service and witness. This text places the issue directly in front of us for consideration. By eating with “tax collectors and sinners” Jesus aligns himself with those who have been ostracized by the society. Jesus serves those who are on the margins of society. It gets him in trouble. The opponents of Jesus want it all for themselves. No wonder we are reminded that the lives of people different from us matter. They were the people Jesus ministered to first. God values mercy for everyone, not just those who are in the majority and in control. Jesus declares that mercy must be shared with those who have been calling for it, and continue to be denied it.

Tuesday, September 22**James 5:1-6**

Your gold and silver have rusted, and their rust will be evidence against you, and it will eat your flesh like fire. You have laid up treasure for the last days. (verse 3)

Well now, here is some text for a stewardship devotion! James writes that sitting on your money does no one any good. Because when that happens, what you have accumulated will wither, rot or otherwise wear away. Remember that the rewards we receive are gifts, to be shared, as a thanksgiving to God.

Wednesday, September 23**Jeremiah 1:4-10**

"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations." (verse 5)

Have you ever been a Jeremiah (at least in the context of this text)? "I can't do that! I'm not capable! You sure you want me?! God says, "Yep, I do!" God knows that your talents go far beyond what you think you are capable of doing. The stewardship of our talent is as important as the stewardship of our time and treasure. Be acceptable to the invitation to share your talents when asked. Actually, feel free to offer them without being asked.

Thursday, September 24**Psalms 19:7-14**

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. (verse 14)

The second half of Psalm 19 reminds us that that the law must be used to glorify the Lord. Since it is the Lord's, the law is seen in this psalm as a source of life. Our *rock*, the Lord, is the one who preserves us from sin so that we may engage in all good things for the benefit of the community. The last verse is our own personal testimony to the Lord.

Friday, September 25**Matthew 5:13-20**

In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven. (verse 16)

Coming immediately after the Beatitudes, this reference to salt and light give us instructions from Jesus on how the groups mentioned in the Beatitudes can be blessed. Salt was valuable for its many uses. Light symbolizes the impact of Jesus' teachings through our service in his name. We hear this sentence at every baptism when the baptismal candle is presented. Christ himself is directing us to be salt and light for the world.

Saturday, September 26, 2018**Psalms 139:1-18**

O LORD, you have searched me and known me. You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from far away. (verses 1 & 2)

Isn't it nice to know where you come from? And isn't it nice to know who searches, discerns and knows us so well? In this psalm, we are reminded of God's creative power in creating us. As for us, how do we respond to this gift of grace? To quote our mission statement, we "*share Jesus' love in word and deed!*"

Sunday, September 27**Luke 16:1-13*****The 17th Sunday after Pentecost***

"Whoever is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much; and whoever is dishonest in a very little is dishonest also in much. (verse 10)

One of the important themes of the Gospel of Luke is the healing of relationships, which Jesus provides. In the context of this parable, the healing is economic in nature. Jesus is not in opposition to gaining wealth, but he does take issue with those who acquire wealth on the backs of the poor. How do our economic relationships reflect neighborly love? How can God's church step up and present the view of Jesus when it comes to economic justice?

Monday, September 28**I Peter 1:3-9**

Although you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy, for you are receiving the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls. (verses 8 & 9)

The testing of faith is a common biblical theme. It often takes place in suffering, which leads to a more mature faith. The words of this text suggest that ones' present struggles are to be seen in the light of future glory to be revealed in Christ. And note the use of the present tense in verse nine (you **are** receiving). This gift of Christ is here, and now. You have this gift. Now. And it never stops.

Tuesday, September 29

Luke 10:17-20

Commemoration of St. Michael and All Angels

Nevertheless, do not rejoice at this, that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.” (verse 20)

The power of God traveled with the disciples as they followed the Lord’s instruction. On this commemoration of St. Michael and All Angels we give thanks for the protection offered to us so that we may live our lives of faith. Referencing the prayer on page 318 of *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, “Let your holy angels be with us, so that the wicked foe may have no power over us.”

Wednesday, September 30

Zechariah 10: 8-12

Commemoration of Jerome, translator, 420

I will make them strong in the Lord, and they shall walk in his name, says the Lord. (verse 12)

Four times in this short passage we hear God say the phrase, *I will*. God is speaking of the restoration of the kingdom of Israel following the exile. The leaders of Israel and Judah, which led to the exile, were terrible leaders. They abused the law, violated the law and when caught in their lies, tried to talk their way out of it. This is why they were deposed and the exile occurred. God reports that from the length and breadth of the world, these lousy leaders will be dealt with and the people will be rescued and brought back together.

Thursday, October 1

Galatians 3:23-29

There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. (verse 28)

This text speaks to the implication of the fact that *faith has come*. Now all believers are located in the sphere of Christ. Through baptism, we are joined together into a new identity, and a new relationship. Whatever our background, we are to value every person as a sibling of Jesus. Faith has come. Live. Give. Serve. Love in Christ’s name.

Friday, October 2

Romans 8:1-11

To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. (verse 6)

To build on yesterday’s devotion, Paul writes that the work of the Spirit brings hope. Living with the gifts of liberty and adoption as God’s children, life with the Spirit keeps us going forward, not backward into fear. Through Christ, we have a new life. Live in confidence with this truth.

Saturday, October 3

Proverbs 22:8-12

“Those who are generous are blessed, for they share their bread with the poor.” (verse 9)

As you can read, this text is not very subtle. But care needs to be taken. What’s our motivation for providing gifts to others? Recognition? A bigger bank account? No! We share because we are called to do so. There are plenty of other locations in scripture, as well as the life of Jesus himself, where sacrifice for the common good is raised up as a virtue worth emulating.

Sunday, October 4

Pledge Sunday

Commemoration of Francis of Assisi, renewer of the church, 1226

It seems fitting that we celebrate our Pledge Sunday on the day that the church commemorates Francis of Assisi. Francis has a connection with Holy Spirit. The cross which hangs in the nave, the San Damiano Cross, is a replica of the same cross that Francis saw in the church where he worshipped, and heard his call to serve the poor and protect the environment. Two statues of Francis sit outside the building. Francis reminds us of how to serve, humbly, with gratitude for all that God has given us. And so we end with the prayer attributed to Francis:

Lord, make us instruments of your peace. Where there is hatred, let us sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is discord, union; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; where there is sadness, joy. Grant that we may not so much seek to be consoled as to console; to be understood as to understand; to be loved as to love. For it is in giving that we receive; it is in pardoning that we are pardoned; and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen.

“Almighty God, who through the death of Your Son has destroyed sin and death, and by His resurrection has restored innocence and everlasting life, that we may be delivered from the dominion of the devil, and our mortal bodies raised up from the dead: grant that I may confidently and wholeheartedly believe this, and, finally, with Your saints, share in the joyful resurrection of the just; through the same Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord. Amen.”

