



NORTHMINSTER'S DAILY DEVOTIONS

VOL 34 No 4

APRIL 29 – MAY 26, 2007

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

It's warming up! While we enjoy great weather most the year, we are heading into what I call "Arizona Blizzard Season". Growing up in Buffalo, NY there would be times in the winter where I wouldn't be allowed to go outside for days at a time - at least without the proper equipment! In reverse, we are blessed with a blizzard of heat and sun - and if we don't have the right equipment, we might fry!

Though seasons change, God never does - as Isaiah 40:8 says, "*the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever.*"

We continue this year our journey through the daily reading of God's Word and these devotionals are written to complement our continuing discipline of reading through the One Year Bible - join us!

I hope you will discover the Sunday Study Guides that have been provided here for small group, family or individual use. They complement Sunday morning worship at NPC, and are a launching point for going more in-depth into the bible reading for the morning.

Don't forget...this entire resource is on our website - www.godmorning.org - so don't forget to tell your friends.

In Christ,



Pete Seiferth
Associate Pastor
Spiritual Formation and Church Life

Thanks to our dedicated team of writers, we have this daily devotional resource to share with you. We could also use more people to use their God-given talents to spread the task of writing out a little. If you are interested, call the church at 520-327-7121 and talk to Publications Editor, Jim Peck. This is a very flexible ministry and can be done from anywhere!

The next issue of the Northminster Daily Devotions will be available on Sunday, May 27, 2007.

Sunday Study Guide

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Sunday
April 29, 2007

Judges 9:22—10:18
Luke 24:13-53
Psalm 100:1-5
Proverbs 14:11-12

If you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. -Romans 10:9

Each Sunday, we offer a study guide for individual, family, or small group use, based on the week's Biblical text for the sermon.



Connect Together (*How can we connect better together as Christ's family?*)

1. What is a memorable household "rule" you have growing up? What happened if it was broken?



Grow Together (*How can we grow better together as students of God's Word?*)

1. Read **Romans 9:30 – 10:15**
2. What would you say are the general views about how people are "saved"?
3. What is Paul's hopes for the Israelites (*10:1*)
4. Jewish religious life was centered around the covenant of the law – how does Paul describe it?
5. What is the problem with approaching "righteousness" (*being right with God*) this way?
6. What are other stumbling stones that keep people from God?
7. How does ones attitude about God change depending on the two approaches here?
8. What does it mean to confess Jesus as Lord, and how does this tie to belief?
9. What is God's assurance for those who trust him?



Serve Together (*How can we serve better together both each other and the church?*)

1. How can "confessing" your faith encourage others?
2. How can you do that with both using words and using actions?



Share Together (*How can we share the love of Christ better together in our community?*)

1. How do these verses apply to those:
 - a. whom have lost hope
 - b. whom have become disillusioned by "religion"
 - c. whom are complacent and comfortable



Worship Together (*How can we worship God better together through our prayers, and songs?*)

1. Find the words to "Just As I Am" - Sing or pray them together.
2. How can this group support you and pray for you this week?

4 *When the Cosmic Became Flesh*

by Dick Leon

Monday
April 30, 2007

Judges 11:1—12:15
John 1:1-28
Psalm 101:1-8
Proverbs 14:13-14

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. -John 1:14a

There are few texts in the Bible that can match the Prologue to the Gospel of John for sheer beauty, power and shock. Let your mind trace the stunning distance between the beginning of all creation and the crying baby in the manger. It is more than any of us could imagine on our own.

In Calvin Miller's book called *The Singer*, God the Father is called "Earth-maker" and Christ is called "The Singer" because he comes with a song of liberation. The incarnation is portrayed as starting with a conversation between Earthmaker and his Son as they observe this small globe in the sky that is "peaceless."

Earthmaker says to Jesus: "Give me your vast infinity, my Son, I'll wrap it in a bit of clay. Then enter Terra microscopically to love the little souls who weep away their lives.' 'I will', I said, 'set Terra free.'"

And then Miller imagines these words being thought by Jesus: "And then I fell asleep and all awareness fled. I felt my very being shrinking down. My vastness ebbed away. In dwindling dread, all size decayed. The universe around drew back. I woke upon a tiny bed of straw in one of Terra's smaller towns."

I love this imagery because it helps us rise above our frail human perspective to see the eternal and cosmic Christ before he became a small baby in a cradle and before he died on the cross for us all. I don't think any human mind could have dared to think God would do this. It is only something a loving God could and would do!

Young People: If you were to write a story about how Christ took on human form, how would you write it?

Adults: Have you ever stopped long enough to dwell on the radical mystery of this event: *the cosmic Christ took on human flesh*?

Prayer: Great God, our little minds cannot fathom the wonder of what you have done. We stand in awe of the magnitude of your love for us that sent your Son into our world so that we might be saved by him! Amen.

Beyond Time

5

by Scott Coverdale

Tuesday
May 1, 2007

Judges 13:1—14:20
John 1:29-51
Psalm 102:1-28
Proverbs 14:15-16

My days are like the evening shadow. I wither away like grass. But you, O Lord, sit enthroned forever; your renown endures through all generations.

-Psalm 102:11-12

Last summer my family went on a long camping trip to Colorado. One morning we rose early and climbed up a mesa to make an exploration. We found an Indian grave and some scattered pottery shards around the area. When I look at any artifact, whether it is an 800 year old pottery shard or a fifty year old house or a photo of my boys as toddlers, I am poignantly aware of how fleeting our lives are, and how bound we are to the processes of time. This is not a complaint - it is a mystery, a marvel, a wonder.

The passage that we read in Psalm 102 today points past all of our chronologies, past our brief lives and beyond time itself. It points us to the Lord, enthroned forever, who views the earth from Heaven, knows our frailty and hears our plea, “that a future generation, a people not yet created, may praise the Lord.” The passage tries to give us a larger perspective of the world and our place in it. It is showing us that God will work to bring about justice, and bring about mercy and that our cries do not go unheeded.

Young people: What things are in your home from people that lived a long time ago? What knowledge have you been taught from long ago?

Adults: How is my life today impacted by the knowledge that my earthly stay is briefly passing, and that God the Creator is eternal? Which things matter and which things don't, in light of this truth?

Prayer: Eternal God, Maker of all things visible and invisible, Giver of life, Master of time - please help me to see my own life from your perspective, that I would hold loosely onto the things that are passing, and tightly onto you and your love for me, and your love for the others who are walking through these days. Thank you for your great compassion. Amen.

We Are Human Dust

by Marshall Worden

Wednesday
May 2, 2007

Judges 15:1—16:31
John 2:1-25
Psalm 103:1-22
Proverbs 14:17-19

As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him; for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust. -Psalm 103:13-14

This great hymn of praise reminds us of how kind and generous God has been to us. It's a psalm that can easily be read often. I'm overwhelmed with thankfulness as I recall

- W He forgives me
- W He heals me
- W He gives me good things
- W He loves me
- W He grants me everlasting mercy.

And then in the middle of the psalm is an idea for which I'm particularly grateful: God remembers that I am human made from dust. But because I follow Jesus, God is compassionate and faithfully loves me despite all my failures and weaknesses as a human being. Even when I'm a source of trouble, he does not treat me as I deserve. For me, the father image is important: my own father was kind, caring and loving in the face of my bad behavior.

But then, in response to God's love, do I faithfully love others? Clearly I'm not as compassionate as God and do not with love recognize and accept the failings and weaknesses of other believers. Too often I forget they also are human dust and, sad to say, too often I'm stingy with mercy.

Young People: What kind things have others done for you this last week? What kind things have you done for others?

Adults: Is there someone in your life to whom you have recently failed to show mercy and kindness? What specific thing can you do to show the love of Jesus to that person?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you for forgiving me and being compassionate with me. Give me a loving heart to show real mercy to those around me. Amen.

Are You Walking Your Talk

7

by Marie Ruiz

Thursday
May 3, 2007

Judges 17:1—18:31
John 3:1-21
Psalm 104:1-23
Proverbs 14:20-21

“You are Israel’s teacher,” said Jesus, “and do you not understand these things? I tell you the truth, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony. I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? -John 3:10-12

In today’s gospel, Jesus speaks to Nicodemus, a learned scholar who claimed earlier to accept Jesus as a teacher and even addresses him as Rabbi. However, Nicodemus has great difficulty believing Jesus’ words regarding the need to accept by faith that everyone must be born again, or born from above, in order to be saved. For some strange reason, Nicodemus, even though he doubts what he can see, Jesus standing before him, tries to elicit information about heavenly things which he couldn’t see. Jesus in stunning contrast says to Nicodemus, “I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things?”

I’ve often thought, if I had lived during Jesus time on earth, surely I would have recognized him and believed in him; after all it was Jesus, in the flesh! But I can’t be too certain of this overconfident reaction, because of doubts I carry every day. I say I’m a believer in Christ, and want to follow hard after him, but do I trust him with everything in my life? This is the struggle we on earth wrestle with every day. I can’t be critical of the disciples who doubted Jesus was the Christ.

Immediately following is one of the most loved and incredible passages. Jesus said, *“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.”* God has done the work for us, our part is to believe and entrust him with our lives. And this I know, to quote an old sitcom ... our Father knows best!!

Young people: God loves you so much he sent his only Son so you could be saved. Thank God every morning for his love and care for you. God wants you to trust him with everything.

Adults: Are you trusting God with your life? Let him carry you today, you’ll be surprised how light your load can be.

Prayer: Thanks be unto God, the author and finisher of our faith! Amen.

Attending the Groom

by Jennifer Monroe

Friday
May 4, 2007

Judges 19:1—20:48
John 3:22—4:3
Psalm 104:24-35
Proverbs 14:22-23

He must become greater; I must become less. -John 3:30

You know the scene: the church is beautifully decorated, an organ or perhaps a string quartet is playing soft music in the background, there are lit candles and flowers everywhere and finally a procession of beautifully dressed men and women marches solemnly down the aisle and lines up at the front of the church. These are the attendants, the bridesmaids and groomsmen and, frankly, while many people may admire their dapper tuxes and elegant gowns, these are not the people the audience is there to see. It is when the bride in her white dress walks in that everyone stands, their eyes glued to her shining face and that of her groom, waiting for her at the altar. These two people are the stars of this show. Everyone else in the building is there to serve, honor, and celebrate them and their wedding.

Just as it would be completely improper for a groomsman to “steal the show” and attempt to make the occasion all about himself, so John the Baptist considered it completely *proper* that, as Jesus’ ministry expanded and grew, his own would diminish and fade. John correctly understood his role as the friend of the bridegroom, the one who was to wait and listen for his coming and then celebrate his arrival by humbly stepping aside. As followers of Christ, we are also called to recognize our purpose to allow him to become greater, while we ourselves become less. Our lives are meant to bring glory and honor to him, never to ourselves. And while this can indeed be a painful process of self-sacrifice, John reminds us that it also brings with it incredible joy.

Young People: Can you think of a time when you’ve had to let someone else go first? Was it easy or hard?

Adults: What is one specific way you can glorify Christ today?

Prayer: Jesus, continually remind us that our purpose in life is to bring glory and honor to you, never to ourselves. Amen.

Do You Remember to Say “Thank You” 9

by Frank Shallenberger

Saturday
May 5, 2007

Judges 21:1—Ruth 1:22
John 4:4-42
Psalm 105:1-15
Proverbs 14:25

Give thanks to the Lord, call on his name; make known among the nations what he has done. Sing to him, sing praise to him; tell of all his wonderful acts. - Psalm 105:1-2

One thing I learned as a child was that all good things I had came from my mother and my father. A child intuitively knows that it is a very wise thing to give devotion and love to both parents. Let them know that their child loves them and appreciates what they do for him. So it should be between us and God, our heavenly father. You and I have a duty, an obligation, to thank God for his many blessings.

The very first word in this psalm is a direct command. “Give” does not mean “please give” or “it would be nice if you would give.” We are not given a choice, give thanks or not give thanks. It is our duty to give thanks to our Lord, to give him the glory of honor and praise that he deserves. Remember God has no obligations to us whatsoever and yet he showers his blessings upon us and all that he asks in return is our Thanksgiving. When you consider what God does for us “thanks” isn’t much of a return.

Our obligations, our duties extend beyond prayers of thanksgiving. We need to incorporate into our daily conversations with family, friends and acquaintances our appreciation of all that God does for us. When you and I share our appreciation of all the wondrous things God does for us each and every day of our lives we encourage others in realizing, understanding and appreciating God’s presence in their lives.

Children: Do you appreciate all the wonderful things that your father and your mother do for you?

Adults: Is Thanksgiving a part of your daily prayers? Do you share with others the wondrous blessings God showers upon you each day?

Prayer: Almighty God, our Heavenly Father, burden us with the realization from whence all things good in our lives come. Fill our hearts with appreciation for the very privilege of living as a Christian with Christian family and friends. Make sharing with others your goodness in our lives a daily occurrence. In the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sunday
May 6, 2007

Ruth 2:1—4:22
John 4:43-54
Psalm 105:16-36
Proverbs 14:26-27

He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation." -Mark 16:15

Each Sunday, we offer a study guide for individual, family, or small group use, based on the week's Biblical text for the sermon.



Connect Together (*How can we connect better together as Christ's family?*)

1. What is the most incredible event you ever witnesses?



Grow Together (*How can we grow better together as students of God's Word?*)

1. Read **Mark 16:15-20**
2. See note before verse 9. Does this change the way you approach these verses?
3. Have we seen these words elsewhere in the Bible? (see Matthew 28:18-20)
4. What is the promise to those who believe or not?
5. What signs will accompany the believers? How would you characterize these?
6. Have you ever witnessed "crazy stuff" happening like is described here? What do you think of those who claim they have or not?
7. What is comforting and challenging about this text?



Serve Together (*How can we serve better together both each other and the church?*)

1. Is there someone in your group or in the church that you know of who needs special healing? How can you encourage and pray for that person?



Share Together (*How can we share the love of Christ better together in our community?*)

1. How does this text challenge you to see the world missionally like God does?



Worship Together (*How can we worship God better together through our prayers, and songs?*)

1. How can this group support you and pray for you this week?

Do You Want to Be Right or Well? 11

by Dick Leon

Monday
May 7, 2007

1 Samuel 1:1—2:21
John 5:1-23
Psalm 105:37-45
Proverbs 14:28-29

When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, "Do you want to get well?" -John 5:6

A friend of mine visited a halfway house for adolescent boys that helped those who had gotten in deep trouble make the transition back into normal civic life. On the mantel in their main meeting room these words were carved: "Do you want to be right ... or well?"

There is a stubborn side in all of us; it usually rests right next to our prideful side! And our culture is making it worse by the incessant message that we must look out for number one first.

A recent study by several universities revealed that narcissism (*undo focus on self-interest*) has grown exponentially in America in the last 20 years. We are raising a "me generation" and almost all our social problems can be traced to this self-centered personality type.

Do we want to be right ... and get our own way all the time ... or do we want to be well?

When Jesus asks the paralytic if he "wants to get well," he must have known that something inside this man was keeping him from being healed. Perhaps being "ill" was useful ... as it is with some!! We must want to be well and whole before we can turn ourselves over to the Lord and let him change our ways.

Jesus did more than talk about a better life. His death on the cross gives new life to all who trust in him. He calls us to "die to self" so that we may "live in him." This requires a new outlook on life and it means a radical shift from the "me first" culture that engulfs us daily.

Young People: Is it more important to you to 'get your way' than to get along with parents or friends or teachers?

Adults: Can you think of ways you hold on to self-centered habits rather than give them up to be made well?

Prayer: Lord, we confess, we are an odd people. We refuse to follow your way of loving others on the premise we might lose something of ourselves. But in truth, only when we lose ourselves for your sake and for others do we find ourselves and discover what it means to be made whole. Give us that wellness as we put our trust in Jesus Christ. Amen.

12 ***Blessed is the Man Who Feared the Lord***

by Marie Ruiz

Tuesday
May 8, 2007

1 Samuel 2:22—4:22
John 5:24-47
Psalm 106:1-12
Proverbs 14:30-31

... a righteous man will be remembered forever. He will have no fear of bad news; his heart is steadfast, trusting in the Lord. -Psalm 112:6b-7

Today's Psalm is a startling reminder of the effects of righteousness and upright living in contrast to those who choose the path of unrighteousness and forsake God's commands. We are called "blessed" when we fear the Lord and find great delight in doing his commands. Additional ramifications of obedience to God's laws are felt not only in our generation, but in generations to come.

We are also inheritors of wealth and riches in our homes. This doesn't refer to material wealth as much as the richness of family that are under our roof. The riches we enjoy are in the family that God gives us to nurture, and as a result we are blessed. We are assured that no bad thing can corrupt our joy in the Lord. Because our trust is in the Lord, we can be confident like David of old that God's hand of protection will be upon us.

Out of the blessing and gifts we have been given, we in turn show kindness to the poor. We learn that good will comes to those who are generous and lend freely. We are assured of security, so we have no fear. Boy is that a treasure in today's society! And in the end when our life comes to a close, we can look in triumph over our foes.

What happens to the unrighteous? Verse 10 says this: *"The wicked man will see and be vexed, he will gnash his teeth and waste away; the longings of the wicked will come to nothing."*

In this short life that we are given on earth, we are in training for heavenly living. Let us commit to living a righteous, upright life that will affect generations to come and be remembered forever!

Young People: God's very first command is to "love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your strength."

Adults: We are sometimes prone to wander away from God's righteous plan for our lives. Lord Jesus, help me to remember that nothing is better than what you have for us. NOTHING!!

Prayer: Blessed Assurance, Jesus is mine! Oh what a foretaste of glory divine! Thanks be unto God for the blessings and gifts he has bestowed on those who follow him in righteous living. Amen.

Wisdom To Be Lived

13

by Anne Price

Wednesday
May 9, 2007

1 Samuel 5:1—7:17
John 6:1-21
Psalm 106:13-31
Proverbs 14:32-33

Wisdom reposes in the heart of the discerning and even among fools she lets herself be known. -Proverbs 14:33

As I go through life I become even more aware of the contrast between wisdom from God and the foolishness of temporary gain. I am certainly guilty of acting without going to our Father for direction at times. Then I recognize that there are consequences for my actions.

There are many kinds of Christians. A couple of examples of which I have been both, are the carnal Christian and the spiritual Christian. When I have been a carnal Christian I am led by the flesh. I would overeat, over spend and even overwork. I guess that I could also be called an over consumer.

As a spiritual Christian I can open my soul to the wisdom that my Lord imparts to me. My actions can reflect the joy filled life that worldly things could never satisfy.

Wisdom is at home in an understanding heart. May the Lord be with you today.

Young people: What can I do today that God will enjoy?

Adults: How can I let Wisdom have her way with me throughout this day?

Prayer: Thank you Father for living the example for us to follow today. Amen.

Life's Perfect Work

by Deb Van Scoyk

Thursday
May 10, 2007

1 Samuel 8:1—9:27
John 6:22-42
Psalm 106:32-48
Proverbs 14:34-35

Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. On him God the Father has placed his seal of approval. -John 6:27

As Christians, we find great strength, peace and security in the knowledge of eternal life - a concept that completely modifies the entire scope of our worldly existence - the rules by which we play the game, how we love and how that love is expressed, the significance of a relationship as compared with an acquisition, what we perceive as truly constituting achievement. Ultimately, as Christians, this life is reduced to a heartbeat in the grand scheme of things, but hugely significant as the foundation from which our eternal lives will flourish.

For our non-believing friends, we have witnessed or can imagine the acquisition of the job of their dreams, attaining title and position, believing they are the envy of their peers as they covet every material possession hoped for, even bestowing the fruits of their success on family and loved ones, only to come to that heart-wrenching moment in which they question what it was all for.

Every Christian is destined to come face to face with this non-believer, accomplished by the world's standards, who espouses a sense of satisfaction with what "life" has given them while simultaneously admitting an emptiness, a void, a longing for the peace and joy we, as Christians, emanate.

What greater joy could we attain than by leading such a non-believer to the concept of work "for food that endures to eternal life"? Imagine the transformative power of this process and the endless potential!

Young People: Do you have friends who ask you about why you go to church? Do you think they are looking for God?

Adults: Are we walking the walk, immersed in God's grace, serving God by the example of our lives? Are friends and co-workers coming to us seeking that "something special" they see in us?

Prayer: Lord, open our eyes to the boundless opportunities in our lives every day to perform work that endures to eternal life; help us to lead and influence by example. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Word of Life

15

by Scott Coverdale

Friday
May 11, 2007

1 Samuel 10:1—11:15
John 6:43-71
Psalm 107:1-43
Proverbs 15:1-3

Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God."

-John 6:68-69

As a young man, I was raised in the Church, and had a strong biblical foundation. As I became a bit older, I came to the point when I had to sort things out for myself. This led me to become a self-avowed Rationalist, determined to only believe things that were logical and rationally defensible. When I began applying these strict rules to my Christian faith, I found that it could not hold up. In despair, I concluded that I must become an atheist. I did so one day for the duration of about five minutes. In those five minutes, while I knew that while Christian faith is riddled with mystery and inexplicable puzzles, atheism struck me as irrational and emotionally deadening. I came back to my uneasy Christian faith with a new understanding of the limitations of my knowledge, and a new humility regarding my demands for logical explanations from the Eternal God.

In the passage from John, many who were followers of Jesus became discouraged and turned back from following him. Jesus asks, "Are you going to turn away also?" Peter answers with the verse above, saying, "Where else do we have to go?" I know that my own understanding of God is far from complete. I remember that the transcendent God is far above all of my thought and imagination. But this knowledge will not make me turn back from following Jesus. In him, I too have found the words of life.

Young people: What is the hardest thing to understand about Jesus? How is it possible to follow Jesus even though we do not understand everything?

Adults: What is the hardest thing about following Jesus? What words of life has God spoken into my life through Jesus?

Prayer: Eternal God, please have mercy on me as I seek to follow your Christ. Please help me to make my heart receptive to your words of life. Amen.

Go With a God Song!

by Andy Ross

Saturday
May 12, 2007

1 Samuel 12:1—13:23
John 7:1-30
Psalm 108:1-13
Proverbs 15:4

Awake, harp and lyre! I will awaken the dawn. I will praise you, O Lord, among the nations; I will sing of you among the peoples. -Psalm 108:2-3

Songs get you moving don't they? They can change your attitude and outlook ... they can rev you up for a challenge ... they can calm you down into a spirit of peace and inner strength.

Ever wonder why bagpipes were said to have defeated the enemy a long way off - before the highland regiments ever arrived?

Ever wonder why fight songs help the home team pull off the upset?

Ever wonder why a love song becomes "our song?"

When I think of the feelings of peace and joy that come to me when I reach for my "lyre" - how it uplifts me to sit down and sing and play - I am reminded that one of God's great gifts to us is music ... especially the music of worship.

Perhaps the problem with Saul was that he didn't lead with worship.

Perhaps the schemes against our Lord at the festival would have been changed if there was really a heart of devotion and praise.

Perhaps your day today can be renewed and inspired - if you start this morning with one song of praise - and you make it your friend for the day?

Hmmm ... what's that I hear? Sounds like music for the heart!

Young People: How is music and worship a part of your life these days? How can it become a bigger part of who you are?

Adults: Think of a song of praise that you could read slowly and contemplate ... and then hum through your day.

Prayer: O God, sing your Spirit into our hearts this day, so we might respond to you, and lift a joyful noise! Amen.

Sunday Study Guide

17

Sunday
May 13, 2007

1 Samuel 14:1-52
John 7:31-53
Psalm 109:1-31
Proverbs 15:5-7

He called out to them, "Friends, haven't you any fish?" "No," they answered.

-John 21:5

Each Sunday, we offer a study guide for individual, family, or small group use, based on the week's Biblical text for the sermon.



Connect Together (*How can we connect better together as Christ's family?*)

1. What kind of outdoorsy fisher hunter camper are you?
2. What is your favorite food on a cookout?



Grow Together (*How can we grow better together as students of God's Word?*)

1. Read together **John 21:1-23**
2. Where does this account take place? How far is that from Jerusalem? Imagine what the walk home was like and what they talked about.
3. Why might Jesus have provided a great catch and a tasty breakfast?
4. Why did Peter jump in the lake?
5. Why do you think Jesus asks Peter his question three times?
6. If Jesus asked you that question, how would you respond?
7. What is the crucial truth Jesus is conveying in verse 22?



Serve Together (*How can we serve better together both each other and the church?*)

1. It really hurts when we think we have "blown-it" and really messed up. How can you be an encourager and help bring restoration and healing to those who are down?



Share Together (*How can we share the love of Christ better together in our community?*)

1. What kind of miracles are possible where you live, work, play, and worship? How can Jesus turn your "empty fishing expedition" into a miraculous catch?



Worship Together (*How can we worship God better together through our prayers, and songs?*)

1. How can this group support you and pray for you this week?

BLAST FROM THE PAST

*Occasionally, we will reprint a devotional submitted in the last 33 years ...
... a connection to our roots as a Christ-centered, Bible-focused congregation.*

originally submitted by John Cheek and printed August 27, 1983.

Monday
May 14, 2007

1 Samuel 15:1—16:23
John 8:1-20
Psalm 110:1-7
Proverbs 15:8-10

Then they asked him, "Where is your father?" -John 8:19

I traded in a pickup I owned and purchased a used automobile which seemed fine when I test drove it. After I had paid for the car (spending all of my money) I went to visit friends and found that my new car had begun to make a very disturbing noise which became worse the longer I drove it. When I began the long trip home, I felt hopeless because my truck and my money were gone and humiliated to have been taken advantage of when I had been so confident. I felt so heartsick that I stopped in Benson and telephoned my father long distance and asked him to wait up so I could talk to him when I got home. When I got home an hour and a half later, his lamp was on and, after midnight, he came out in his pajamas and rode "around the block" with me. He assured me that the noise didn't seem serious and that the car was alright. As it turned out, a minimal expense repaired my car and it is still my favorite of the cars I've owned.

Within two years my father had died of cancer. The incident related here is the most vivid as well as the most precious of any I recall from the twenty-one years I knew him.

A few weeks ago, I told this story to a friend who observed that, "You never get so old that you don't need your dad to pick you up, dust you off, and send you on your way again."

This earthy love finds its completeness in the relationship between each of us and our heavenly Father.

Young People: Our parents are never perfect, but they sure can share special things with us! Jesus called God his Father, and we can too! How is God like a father to you?

Adults: Our parents are never perfect, but our heavenly Father is. As an adult, what is it like to think of yourself as a beloved son/daughter of God?

Prayer: Help us appreciate each day we have with our parents. Make us secure by your grace to face this world with the confidence of being your children, sharing the love of your Son Jesus. Amen.

by Ken Skodiak

Tuesday
May 15, 2007

1 Samuel 17:1—18:4
John 8:21-30
Psalm 111:1-10
Proverbs 15:11

So David triumphed over the Philistine with a sling and a stone; without a sword in his hand he struck down the Philistine and killed him. -1 Samuel 17:50

When I was in high school we had our share of bullies at school. There was one particular guy who for whatever reason thought I was destined to be his victim. At least once a week he would do something to me that would get me either mad or frustrated and the more I tried to fight back or get back at him, the more trouble I would get into. Finally one day I told him we needed to settle this little game once and for all. I was on the boys basketball team and I was a pretty good player. He was not but he loved to shoot free throws. So one day I challenged him to a duel of sorts. The stakes were that if I won he would stop picking on me and if he won, I would be his slave for the rest of the school year. Looking back I probably couldn't have been more stupid if I had tried. Anyway, the word got around, and the day came and after school we both lined up at the free throw line with half of the bleachers in the gym full of students each cheering on either me or 'the bully'. In a sense that was one of the Goliath moments I have had in my life. I know I wasn't representing a nation, never mind God's nation. And I know that if I failed I wouldn't lose my life and the school would no longer have their future King, but for me, on that day I knew this was my shot and I wouldn't get another for quite a while. We all have those things in our life that come against us, that call us out, that test our faith in God and his word. David faced Goliath trusting that the same God who had carried him this far would carry him all the way. David had heard the voice of truth and he staked his life on it as well as God's people's lives and God saw him through. The question is never, 'will I face Goliath's in this life?' The only question is 'will I listen to the voice that tells me I can't do this, and God isn't there?'...or will I listen to the voice of truth? By the way, on that day at least, in that gym; I brought down my Goliath.

Young People: Think of something that gets on your nerves and how can you trust God to help you conquer it.

Adults: What is a Goliath that you have seen God conquer in your life and what Goliath might you be facing now?

Prayer: Lord, help us to hear your voice and not the voices of the world that tell us we and you are not strong enough to get us through the trials and situation this life seems to bring. Amen.

Delighting in the Torah

by John Cheek

Wednesday
May 16, 2007

1 Samuel 18:5—19:24
John 8:31-59
Psalm 112:1-10
Proverbs 15:12-14

Praise the LORD. Blessed is the man who fears the LORD, who finds great delight in his commands. -Psalm 112:1

It's hard for us to imagine being delighted with commands made to us. We may obey them, or disobey them at our peril. But delight in them? I doubt it. We know there are speed limits, and we obey them (don't we?). But we wouldn't say they delight us.

However, the idea of taking delight in the commands or the law is a common theme in Old Testament texts. Very often it is an expression of delight in the Torah, which is usually translated Law. And this may be a part of the disconnect we experience. A better translation of Torah is "instruction" or "guidance."

The purpose of the Law, of the commandments of God is not to exercise power coldly and arrogantly. Rather, God, in his grace, gives us instruction on how to be in relationship with him.

As we obey, we are drawn ever closer to God, and it is this closeness, the sweetness of this relationship, that leads us to delight. May each of us know the delight of the Lord's commandments more and more every day

Young People: Think of a time that your parents or teachers set a rule which turned out to be the best thing for you.

Adults: Reflect on the ways in which obedience to the commands of God has drawn you closer to him, and to his church.

Prayer: Lord God, thank you for the gracious ways in which you draw us closer to you. Help us to be more and more obedient to you, day by day. Amen.

Who's Blind?

21

by Dick Leon

Thursday
May 17, 2007

1 Samuel 20:1—21:15
John 9:1-41
Psalm 113:1—114:8
Proverbs 15:15-17

If this man were not from God, he could do nothing. -John 9:33

The latest attack on the credibility of the Christian faith has come from the “discovery” of Jesus’ tomb! It is laughable to me how the bulk of solid evidence for Christ’s life, death and resurrection must be dismissed in order to believe this fanciful story that Jesus married Mary Magdalene and they had a child named Judah and lived many more years. If that is true, the following historic evidence must be discounted:

1. All the writers of the New Testament must be lying. If Jesus was still alive, married and had a son they would have known.
2. The silence about Jesus by the believers would have to be accounted for. Were none honorable and honest?
3. The silence of the Jews about Jesus being alive and married to Mary is impossible to imagine.
4. The silence of the Romans who were also embarrassed that they killed the Son of God is incredible.
5. Who could have faked this “burial box” with those names inscribed on it? Anyone and everyone who didn’t want stories of Jesus’ resurrection to be believed.
6. Whose remains are in the box? Anyone’s remains. The fact that two remains were not related by blood means nothing!

When Jesus healed the blind man, many wanted desperately to discount the evidence; it is the same with many in our world today who will go to any length to discount the evidence of the resurrection. Blaise Pascal put it this way: “There is enough light for those who desire only to see and enough darkness for those of a contrary disposition.” There is enough evidence to believe - if we desire to see!

Young People: What evidence helped you believe in Jesus?

Adults: Is it more ‘useful’ to remain a skeptic than to be a believer?

Prayer: Confront us with the evidence and bring us to faith, good Lord. Amen.

BLAST FROM THE PAST

*Occasionally, we will reprint a devotional submitted in the last 33 years ...
... a connection to our roots as a Christ-centered, Bible-focused congregation.*

originally submitted by O. Robert Abel and printed July 3, 1983.

Friday
May 18, 2007

1 Samuel 22:1—23:29
John 10:1-21
Psalm 115:1-18
Proverbs 15:18-19

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. -John 10:10

Today's society is experiencing a profound power failure ... a moral power failure. Parents know that is right for themselves and their children, but for the lack of backbone they find it easier to go along with the crowd. Children readily pick up this attitude. The result is rapid deterioration of the moral fabric of society. Merely to give good advice to either the old or young is like putting iodine on cancer.

What is needed is radical power. Christianity is not putting of a new suit on a man, but the putting of a new man into the suit. Jesus offers us his power. Not only is there power and freedom from things like alcohol and narcotics, but power to forgive those who have wronged us, to resist temptation, and to love the unlovely.

Twice-born men have new appetites, new desires, new loves. They are, in fact, "new creatures" (2 Corinthians 5:17). Salvation is a literal coming from death to spiritual life.

Young People: Who are the people in your life who teach you what is the right way to live? How tough is it to do the right thing when your friends are doing the wrong thing?

Adults: Who are the people in your life who teach you what is the right way to live? How tough is it to do the right thing when your friends are doing the wrong thing?

Prayer: O Lord, we thank thee for the power of Jesus Christ, our Savior, which enables us to live our lives more abundantly. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

No Easy Path

23

by John Cheek

Saturday
May 19, 2007

1 Samuel 24:1—25:44
John 10:22-42
Psalm 116:1-19
Proverbs 15:20-21

I love the Lord, for he heard my voice; he heard my cry for mercy. Because he turned his ear to me, I will call on him as long as I live. The cords of death entangled me, the anguish of the grave came upon me; I was overcome by trouble and sorrow. Then I called on the name of the Lord: "O Lord, save me!" The Lord is gracious and righteous; our God is full of compassion. The Lord protects the simple-hearted; when I was in great need, he saved me. Be at rest once more, O my soul, for the Lord has been good to you. For you, O Lord, have delivered my soul from death, my eyes from tears, my feet from stumbling, that I may walk before the Lord in the land of the living. -Psalm 116:1-9

No one gets a pass in life. No one gets to walk an easy path. It's certainly true that some of us have an easier way than others, and we don't have to look very far beyond our own neighborhoods to find those who've had a harder time of life than we have.

Still, no one gets a complete pass. Everyone experiences some kind of grief, or loss, or despair.

The Psalmist expresses this loss for us, but he also expresses the ground of all our hope. If there is a key verse in this passage, it must be verse 7: "Be at rest once more, O my soul, for the Lord has been good to you."

The Lord has indeed been good to us. Among all the rest of our blessings, he has given us eternal life through the death and resurrection of his son, Jesus, and has given us his own Holy Spirit to dwell within us as Comforter and Advocate.

When we struggle, and we will, we can know that, in all the big ways, God has already been victorious.

Young people: Think about something that made you sad, and how God was with you at that time.

Adults: Reflect on what God has done, for you and to you, in your losses.

Prayer: Lord, you have always been good to us. Help us to remember your goodness at all times and in all circumstances. Amen

Sunday
May 20, 2007

1 Samuel 26:1—28:25
John 11:1-54
Psalm 117:1-2
Proverbs 15:22-23

Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." -John 20:21

Each Sunday, we offer a study guide for individual, family, or small group use, based on the week's Biblical text for the sermon.



Connect Together *(How can we connect better together as Christ's family?)*

1. Is there a going away gift that you have either given or received that still warms your heart?



Grow Together *(How can we grow better together as students of God's Word?)*

1. Read **John 20:21 and 17:6-19**
2. These two texts are Jesus' prayer for his disciples and a later post-resurrection appearance. How would you describe Jesus relationship with his disciples?
3. What words would you use to describe Jesus' leadership style? Mentor? Equipper? Empowerer? Sender?
4. What is Jesus short-term and long-term plan?
5. Have you ever been sent somewhere as a messenger or representative of someone or something? How is your identity affected by your relationship with the "sender"?



Serve Together *(How can we serve better together both each other and the church?)*

1. Together, we are sent by Christ in the same manner that Jesus was sent into the world. How can you encourage each other or a special ministry that equips people to do Christ's work?



Share Together *(How can we share the love of Christ better together in our community?)*

1. In what ways are you challenged in this week to see how you are sent by Christ to make a difference in the places he sends you?



Worship Together *(How can we worship God better together through our prayers, and songs?)*

1. This week, who have you glorified by your living?
2. How can this group support you and pray for you this week?

Crocodiles

25

by Scott Coverdale

Monday
May 21, 2007

1 Samuel 29:1—31:13
John 11:55—12:19
Psalm 118:1-18
Proverbs 15:24-26

In my anguish I cried to the Lord, and he answered me by setting me free. The Lord is with me; I will not be afraid. -Psalm 118:5,6a

I spent two and a half years living in the desert of Somalia along the Juba River. The river was a blessing in that hot and dry country, but was unfortunately occupied by a large number of crocodiles. When I first came to live there, I was told to stay away from the river at all costs. People warned me of terrors, both known and unknown, that dwelt in the depths of the swirling waters. But water in the desert is irresistible, and I began to visit the river regularly. I saw children play in the water, and decided that I wanted to be more like the children and less like the fearful people. I began to swim in the river daily; sometimes with the kids, sometimes by myself; and I found that the Juba River saved me from the desert. I saw plenty of crocodiles in that river, but when I overcame fear, I became free to enjoy the great blessing of the river - crocodiles and all.

In the verse above, notice that what the Lord frees us from is our fear. Life is full of crocodiles - pain and sickness and tragedies both real and imagined. There is plenty to be afraid of, and many of the dangers have real teeth. But the Lord can free us from the fear. God does not remove the danger of life or even the pain of life; but the knowledge that God is with us can free us from fear. We can know that in all things, in “the valley of the shadow of death,” or the anxiety of things beyond our control, or the common griefs that comes to every life, the great Lord of All is with us, and we need not fear. That is true freedom.

Young people: What am I most afraid of? Is God with you even in that situation?

Adults: In what circumstance am I most afraid? Do I believe that God’s presence meets me even there? What would freedom feel like in that area of my life?

Prayer: Dear God, please convict me of your enduring love for me and your presence in all the circumstances of my life. Please set me free from fear so that I can be truly alive to you. Amen.

David's Lament

by Jennifer Monroe

Tuesday
May 22, 2007

2 Samuel 1:1—2:11
John 12:20-50
Psalm 118:19-29
Proverbs 15:27-28

They mourned and wept and fasted till evening for Saul and his son Jonathan, and for the army of the Lord and the house of Israel, because they had fallen by the sword. -2 Samuel 1:12

Imagine that you receive news that your sworn enemy, the man who has been hunting you down for years, capriciously begging your forgiveness one minute and then condemning you to death the next, has died and you are to be crowned king in his place. Do you throw your arms into the air, give a cheer, and lead your soldiers in a victory dance? Do you immediately begin planning your coronation ceremony and the party to follow? Do you give thanks to God and rejoice that you have been spared and your enemy has fallen?

Or, would you do as David did, after hearing of the shameful death of King Saul and his son Jonathan, tear your clothes, weep, mourn and fast? It is hard to imagine greeting such news with such a response, and yet David, the man after God's heart who is to become the greatest king of Israel, composes a heart-wrenching lament in honor of his fallen predecessor, which begins, "Your glory, O Israel, lies slain on your heights. How the mighty have fallen!"

David sees Saul and Jonathan's deaths as a tragic loss for Israel, not only because of the great warriors that they were, but because of the great leaders they were and might have been. Rather than gloating over his good fortune, David shows an appropriate grief over the loss of his best friend and his country's king.

Occasionally, there may be times when we stand to gain from another's misfortune and perhaps even from our enemy's demise. While our culture would encourage us to celebrate, gloat, and lord our success over our opponent, it seems that David's example encourages us to be humble, and maybe even take some time to "weep with those who weep".

Young People: Have you ever benefited from someone else's misfortune? How did it make you feel?

Adults: Is David's example a difficult one to imagine following? Why?

Prayer: Father, give us the grace to be humble in every situation and the wisdom to know when to celebrate and when to mourn. Amen.

Rising Up By Kneeling Down

27

by Dick Leon

Wednesday
May 23, 2007

2 Samuel 2:12—3:39
John 13:1-30
Psalm 119:1-16
Proverbs 15:29-30

Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. -John 13:14

The thirteenth chapter of John begins five of the most poignant chapters in the entire Bible. These are called the “Final Discourses” of our Lord because they are his last words before he leaves them for the cross.

The teaching is absolutely wonderful. It is moving, emotional, enduring, challenging, comforting, memorable ... all of this and more. Read these chapters slowly.

But perhaps even more stunning than Jesus' words are his actions. He begins the evening by taking the role of a household slave, kneeling before each of the twelve to wash their feet. If you have ever been in a foot-washing ceremony you know the deep feelings of humility that come to everyone involved.

This is a whole different kind of “Lord and Teacher” than the world has ever seen. We are accustomed to seeing those who rise to prominence asking for special privileges and honors and benefits and bonuses! But in the topsy-turvy world of the Christian faith it is those who kneel in service to others who are raised up the highest - the servants are the heroes.

When you are driving. Or when you are in the grocery line. Or when you are with your family. Or when you are in your work world. Think on this model from our Lord on how to love others. Then just “do it.” All it takes is enough courage to set aside our ego and our sense of entitlement to assume the role of servant to others who live with, near or around us.

Young People: Around your home, how is your attitude toward your brothers or sisters or parents with regard to household chores?

Adults: What keeps you from taking the servant role in the various circles of your weekly relationships?

Prayer: Lord, be our Teacher in these matters. Help us to know that when we rise up to honor ourselves we betray your gospel, but when we take the role of a servant we bring honor to you and to our faith. Amen.

28 **Questions? God Has the Answer!**

by Frank Shallenberger

Thursday
May 24, 2007

2 Samuel 4:1—6:23
John 13:31—14:14
Psalm 119:17-32
Proverbs 15:31-32

Now the Philistines had come and spread out in the Valley of Rephaim; so David inquired of the Lord, "Shall I go and attack the Philistines? Will you hand them over to me?" The Lord answered him ...

-2 Samuel 5:18-20

David's life was a role model for you and me. He maintained a close relationship with the Lord and when he broke that relationship with sin he became sorrowful and contrite. David had recently been crowned king of Israel. All of the important personages in his kingdom had come to swear their allegiance to him.

The very first serious situation that arose occurred when the Philistines had taken over the Valley of Rephaim. Before assembling his wise men and generals, David retired to his room and knelt in prayer. Bowing down before Almighty God he spoke to him as a son to a father laying out the situation as best he could and then asking two significant questions:

1. "Should I attack the Philistines?"
2. "Will you hand them over to me?"

The Lord answered his questions affirmatively. When he received God's answer, David faced and defeated the Philistines. A magnificent story for all of us. We not only learn to consult God about our daily actions and decisions but also we learn that God hears and answers prayers and when we rely upon his recommendations and do things exactly as he tells us, we will be successful. David did not take credit for the victory, but he stated that "the Lord has broken out against my enemies before me."

Children: Do you share your problems at school, at church and at home with God? Do you ask him to help you do what is right? Do you wait for his answer and do what he tells you?

Adults: Sometimes problems arise that seem insurmountable. Do you take these problems to the Lord in prayer, await his answers and heed his directions?

Prayer: Almighty God, we come before you as children before their father to seek your guidance and wisdom. Some problems seem insurmountable and we need trust that you will guide us. Hear us, O Lord! In the name of Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior. Amen.

The Helper

by Deb Van Scoyk

29

Friday
May 25, 2007

2 Samuel 7:1—8:18
John 14:15-31
Psalm 119:33-48
Proverbs 15:33

“And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever -the Spirit of Truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.” John 14:16-18

I was told I could never have children, so you can imagine my surprise when, ten years later, my obstetrician questioned her prior findings and predicted I would miscarry in my first trimester. However, due to my medical history, I was told the best I could hope for was a child who “could be relatively well formed physically with moderate to severe mental retardation.”

Faced with the pressures of family and medical professionals who insisted I terminate this pregnancy or prepare myself for the “burden of a mentally challenged child,” I sought refuge in a tiny cabin in Estes Park, Colorado where, for the first time in my life, my prayers became a plea that God’s will, not mine, be done, and I begged him to send me his Helper - and send he did!

I praise God, as I recall with awe and trepidation, the moment I first encountered the Spirit of Truth and the overwhelming peace and security I carried with me through the remaining months of my pregnancy. I learned that week end, through absolute assurance, that I would have a daughter, and the life-long conversations we were to share with Jesus began then and there.

Christy came into the world - just as The Helper had assured - healthy, God’s perfect creation both physically and mentally. She has lived as a Christian for 27 years, the personification of God’s overwhelming love.

Young People: Do you believe God can perform miracles?

Adults: There is a special place in each and every heart waiting to be occupied by The Helper - “He lives with you and will be in you.” - Ask.

Prayer: Gracious Lord, we thank you for the miracles you perform in our lives daily. Thank you, God, for the gift of the Counselor, our Helper, whose presence abides with us through this life, affording us daily assurances of your love and grace. Amen!

Getting Reconnected

by Marshall Worden

Saturday
May 26, 2007

2 Samuel 9:1—11:27
John 15:1-27
Psalm 119:49-64
Proverbs 16:1-3

I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. -John 15:5

You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit - fruit that will last. -John 15:14-16

After six years of not being part of a Christian community, and after increasingly tough reprimands from my best college friend wanting to know why I wasn't in church, I came to Northminster in January 1979. And there was this great, bold, solid cross that said "I am the vine; you are the branches." I was filled with emotion, sadness and shock and, at the same time, joy because John 15 had been the text of my salutorian remarks when I was seventeen. These were words I knew well; I had read and reread them many times. But more recently they had gone unobserved.

I was confronted that day with how easy it had been to lose focus on who I was and who God wanted me to be. Other relationships had gotten in the way of first being a friend with Jesus. I had easily grasped that idea as a child at camp and church where we often sang "What a Friend We Have in Jesus." Yet, I had lost my grip on that friendship.

And I had become very confused about this "fruit that will last." I had begun to think of Jesus as a business partner who would make the work go well and me successful. I had lost sight of being a servant and that my real purpose was to serve Jesus and others. It was a transforming moment for I saw afresh that my life and work needed to be centered in Christ.

Young People: What does it mean to you to have Jesus as your friend?

Adults: Is Jesus really your best friend or are other relationships, obligations and work getting in the way? What can you change now to have Jesus as your best friend?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you so much for being my best friend. Please help me see more clearly the people I can serve for you. Amen.



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