

Daily Devotions



LUTHER SEMINARY

GOD PAUSE

Monday, 9/10/2018

Isaiah 35:4-7

In many stories in Scripture, faithfulness is rewarded with physical healing: If you only believe hard enough, you will get rid of whatever is keeping you from living your best life! These stories are difficult for me to read--no matter how hard I pray or how deeply I believe, I will always have anxiety that must be treated professionally, and there are a lot of folks who will always need glasses, a wheelchair or help with anything academic. It's how we are made. Does that mean our faith isn't strong? No. These stories are told to help us rearrange our own perceptions. Believers, don't worry about what society sees as "less than"! God loves you just as you are--and that's something to celebrate. My being beloved might not cure my anxiety, but I can be sure that God will love me always and care for me just as I am, and for that I am grateful! *Loving God, help us to trust that you love us and celebrate us as we are, even when the world would tell us to think otherwise. You love us in all our imperfections and uniqueness, and for that we give thanks. Amen.*

Stefanie Fauth, '15, Associate Pastor of Faith Formation, Redeemer Lutheran Church, White Bear Lake, Minn.

Tuesday, 9/11/2018

Psalms 146

Praise the Lord! Don't trust in mortals. How hard is that, though? I see the people who get the most attention and praise. I see those in power. I can taste the things money can buy, and I can really be excited by the future that people in power offer. But God doesn't care about the newest fashion, the fastest car, the latest social media trend or what celebrity couple is together this week. God probably doesn't even care about powerful and influential people unless it concerns how they are treating others. God cares about the unflashy--the poor, prisoners, the blind, strangers, orphans and widows--you know, those who won't really advance your popularity or status. But when our lives are finished on this earth, our money and fame and big houses won't matter. What matters is that the Lord is steadfast and true forever--and cares about how we treat others. Challenge yourself to care for others--and practice grace for yourself when you can't resist trusting mortals. *Lord of all creation, you've given us beauty in this world and life. Guide our hearts to care for others in need rather than to follow the passions of this world. Help us follow you and trust what is good and true. Amen.*

Stefanie Fauth, '15, Associate Pastor of Faith Formation, Redeemer Lutheran Church, White Bear Lake, Minn.

Wednesday, 9/12/2018

Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23

Seven of the 12 "evil things" Jesus mentions as coming out of the human heart directly refer to the second table of the Ten Commandments, the part that has to do with our relations with our neighbor. Surely the other five cause harm to the neighbor as well. The contrast Jesus is drawing for us is not between law and gospel per se but between God's own good instruction, which has the love of neighbor as goal, and all the human additives we devise to put extra distance between ourselves and others. At the same time, the heart affliction Jesus points to is present in everyone, no matter how godly, good or plentiful their rules, and will need a more radical intervention. Hear what Jesus says today, but also look at what he does. He shares his table and he shares food, far and wide--with disciples, with Pharisees, with crowds, with sinners--and with you. *Gracious Lord, I have too often tried to cloister myself from my neighbor, and yet you come near to me anyway and make yourself neighbor to me. Thank you for breaking bread with me and pouring your love afresh into my heart. Amen.*

Mark D. Williamson, '05, Pastor, Grace Lutheran Church, Dodgeville, Wis.

Thursday, 9/13/2018

Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23

If the commandments God has given serve as a very sensible fence around the garden of God's people--to promote life and longevity and draw the neighbor's attention--the tradition of the elders mentioned in this story is like a fence around a fence. A high one at that. So now it's starting to get hard for others to see inside, much less get inside. That can happen to religious communities in every age. Have you experienced it? Either from within or from without? Church, where the emphasis has all been put on the exterior, the boundary--so much so that the center has been neglected? Church, where people chitter and point, from a concealed position, at those on the outside and how they're doing things all wrong? Jesus says, No, no, no, friends--that's one of the oldest blunders in the book. You won't get closer to God by getting farther from your neighbor. Start by looking inside, and see that there's already one thing you and they have in common--a heart problem. *Lord Jesus, thank you for calling us back to the truth when our concern for externals has overtaken our concern for others. Cleanse us from within so we can embrace our neighbor with humility and kindness. Amen.*

Mark D. Williamson, '05

Pastor, Grace Lutheran Church, Dodgeville, Wis.

Friday, 9/14/2018

John 6:56-69

When we deal with life, we always seem to have good reasons for why we do things. We go to school to get a job. We get a job to earn a living. We do things for fun, for love or for health. Those reasons we go to for why we do things have a way of becoming our gods if we trust in them to give us life. Yet, often the very things we seek after for security end up accusing us, judging us and condemning us to death. Jesus offers us something quite different--he give us himself to eat. He promises us that he will deal with our lives by using mercy and resurrection. Yes, he dies to do that for us, and then he rises from death too! Where shall we go to find such a reason for what we do that raises us from death? Where shall we go to find relief from judgment and death? We go to Jesus, our crucified and risen Lord--and we are not disappointed. *Father of Life, fill our hearts with Jesus, so that he becomes the reason we do things. Let him be our God, our forgiver, the one who raises us from death. Let us live as those who forgive. Amen.*

Timothy Hoyer, '09, Gloria Dei Lutheran Church, Lakewood, N.Y., and Bethlehem Lutheran Church, Falconer, N.Y.

Saturday, 9/15/2018

"O God, My Faithful God," ELW 806, verses 1-2

*1 O God, my faithful God,
true fountain ever flowing,
without whom nothing is,
all perfect gifts bestowing:
give me a healthy frame,
and may I have within
a conscience free from blame,
a soul unstained by sin.*

*2 Give me the strength to do
with ready heart and willing
whatever you command,
my calling here fulfilling--
to do it when I ought,
with all my might--and bless
whatever I have wrought,
for you must give success.*

In this hymn, we beseech God to cleanse us on the inside. As we infer from Jesus' teaching in Mark 7, this is exactly what we need. If we had a window into the prayers of the characters in that story, we

might hear the Pharisees and scribes saying, "Thank you, God, for not making me like this riffraff around Jesus who don't even know to wash their hands." Meanwhile, the disciples themselves had been schooled to pray, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner!" (see Luke 18:9-14). While we probably aren't so brash as to thank God that we aren't like others, we do have a less overt version. It usually takes the form of gushing gratitude for how we've been "blessed," so that our prayer of confession is crowded out. Only by opening our hands as beggars for the "perfect gift" of God do we gain the strength and will to *be* a blessing for the neighbor. How much better that is than merely feeling fortunate compared to them! *Faithful God, my heart strays from you, even as my words and actions may seem religious. Renew a right spirit within me and make me ready to do your will. Amen.*

Mark D. Williamson, '05

Pastor, Grace Lutheran Church, Dodgeville, Wis.

Sunday, 9/16/2018 "O God, My Faithful God," ELW 806, verses 3-4

*3 Keep me from saying words
that later need recalling;
guard me, lest idle speech
may from my lips be falling;
but when, within my place,
I must and ought to speak,
then to my words give grace,
lest I offend the weak.*

*4 When dangers gather round,
oh, keep me calm and fearless;
help me to bear the cross
when life seems dark and cheerless;
help me, as you have taught,
to love both great and small,
and, by your Spirit's might,
to live at peace with all.*

In my father's office there has long been on display a magnet with a picture of John Wayne in cowboy gear and the quote "Talk low, talk slow, and don't talk too much." Verse 3 of this hymn sounds like it comes from that same school of oratory, although really what we are asking is to talk at the right time and in a way that bestows grace. It certainly pairs well with the readings we ponder again this Lord's Day, given James and his concern for "bridled tongues" and given the purity professionals in Mark 7 who use their words chiefly to differentiate and exclude. How can your words be used in this new week to upbuild rather than destroy? To effect peace rather than discord? And whose cross is God calling you to help carry? *Spirit of truth, grant me self-control, discernment and compassion in my speech. In what I say and when I say it, may your grace flow through me to others. Amen.*

Mark D. Williamson, '05, Pastor, Grace Lutheran Church, Dodgeville, Wis.