

Cross Keys United Methodist Church

2017 Lenten Devotional

Week 4

Monday, March 20

Ezekiel 47:6-23

"... Their fruit will serve for food and their leaves for healing." Ezekiel 47:12c

Ezekiel speaks to us from a time of great turmoil in the world, 597 BC. Many empires evolved and were subsequently destroyed during those times. Jerusalem was overpowered in 597 BC by Nebuchadnezzar and the Jews were exiled to Babylon. By 586 BC, Jerusalem and the Lord's temple lay in ruins. The theme of Ezekiel teaches that God will be revealed in the fall of Jerusalem, nations will know God through His judgments, and God will be known through the restoration and renewal of Jerusalem.

Israel defied God's laws and was destined to spend forty years wandering in the wilderness. This eventually cleansed them of those who were not hearing the voice of God, and led them to return to His teachings. Ezekiel "assures his fellow Jews that God will one day return them to Jerusalem and restore the temple."

The land was reminiscent of the Garden of Eden. There were trees along the river, fresh waters, many fish, and fruit trees. In the beginning, God put man in the Garden to enjoy the wonders of nature, to experience the healing power of the river of life. This world we live in today is full of distractions and confusion. We tend to forget why we are here, to enjoy our lives, praise God, and enjoy the blessings of God's creation.

When you feel discouraged or lost, you can often find God's healing and strength

by returning to the simplicity and enjoyment of his natural world. Enjoy a walk in the park, go hiking, fishing, or try some other outdoor activity. Listen to the sounds around you, birds singing, flowing waters, wind in the trees. God created the natural world for our enjoyment and to point you to his majesty and grace. As you enjoy the blessings of God's creation you will sense the presence of God and feel refreshed and renewed.

Rich Fowler

Tuesday, March 21

Psalm 103

*But from everlasting to everlasting
the Lord's love is with those who fear him...
Psalm 103:17*

Psalm 103 was written as a hymn celebrating God's love and compassion for his people. In his worshipful song, the psalmist praises God for the benefits (2) of the love and compassion that God shows to those who trust Him and obey His precepts (18). With His everlasting love, God brings healing and blessings to our lives (3-5) and forgives our sins instead of repaying us according to our iniquity (10).

The law that we are to follow was given to Moses from God (7) and was later perfectly fulfilled in the life and ministry of Jesus. God recognizes that we will fall short. Yet, when we do sin, God is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in love (8).

In three different places the psalmist reminds us that God's everlasting love is

given to those who “fear” Him (11, 13, 17). What does it mean to fear God? One Bible dictionary tells us that the concept of fear is used several hundred times in the Bible. God’s sovereignty and majesty inspire an honor or even a terror that always leads to submission and obedience.

Psalm 103 leaves us with a powerful optimism that fills us with a desire to do better and to claim the wonderful blessings that God has for the faithful. The gift of God’s love should inspire our daily walk with the Lord with a greater desire to keep His covenant and to obey His word. To help us in our journey, the gift of the Holy Spirit is given to those who invite God to be in charge of their lives. Our walk in a broken world may not always be easy, but the Holy Spirit will always guide us.

In the end (20-22), the angels, the heavenly hosts and even all of God’s created works praise God for His majesty and power, for His compassion and love. During this Lenten season, I hope that your earnest desire to follow God and to obey His commands will become your own living hymn of praise.

Pat Moran

Wednesday, March 22

Luke 13:1-5

I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish. Luke 13:3

While reading this passage, I am reminded of the great feeling I have every Sunday when I go up for Communion. I know that even if I have had a bad week and have not been the best Christian I am called to be, I can go up and receive the

body and blood of Christ and be forgiven. I believe that this is what Jesus is trying to remind us--if we do not acknowledge the sins that we have committed there will be serious consequences now and even eternally. I use this passage as a reminder that even in my darkest of days I can be forgiven by Jesus. This is just another reason that our God is a great God, who is by our side all the days of our lives.

Pastor Jaime Frazier

Thursday, March 23

Proverbs 16:20-24

The wise in heart are called discerning, and gracious words promote instruction...Gracious words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones. Proverbs 16:22, 24

We are surrounded by a deluge of the written word—we text, email, message, post and tweet. If you liked the cheese casserole that your sister’s nephew’s son’s wife made for her cat’s birthday party, you can let the whole world know with a simple Facebook post. In the same vein, if someone disagrees with your comments about said cheese casserole, expect the public rant in response. Indeed, our recent history appears to have advocated the acceptability of ranting, insulting, degrading and defiling other people because of differing viewpoints, beliefs, and ideologies with the written word on any form of social media.

And yet, this is not who God calls us to be or how to act. Instead, as the proverb states, we should be discerning and gracious with our words. How simple is it to step back and contemplate the language we use? Do we consider how our words may be received by others?

Instead of rushing to criticize and judge for every action, do we exercise discernment? Perhaps the better questions to ask are: "What can we say to build someone up?" "How can we show grace with our words?" Throughout this Lenten season, let's focus on words that are "sweet to the soul and healing to the bones."

Friday, March 24 Proverbs 12:13-28

*The words of the reckless pierce like swords,
but the tongue of the wise brings healing.*
Proverbs 12:18

Solomon shares with us some of his God given wisdom in the wise sayings of Proverbs--simple straight forward instructions to live by in all facets of our lives. Plucking verse 18 from the selection above, have you ever used words that "pierce like a sword" or more likely have you yourself been "pierced" by sharp words said in anger or for revenge or in my case teasing about a sensitive subject? It is always done without too much thought. We need to stop and think. Slow down and be wise in what we say. Consider what others really need to hear to feel better or to feel welcome around us, as Jesus would do. I don't need to be the funniest guy in the room if it will hurt or make even one person feel uncomfortable.

If you have read about Jesus at all, you know how famous He is for healing the sick. His touch is known to have cured the blind, the deaf, leprosy; even a faithful touch of the hem of His robe heals. But, the voice or "tongue" of Jesus heals without limits. Jesus can tell a lame man

of faith to pick up his mat and walk, and the man does. In Matthew the Roman Centurion's faith in Jesus was enough for Christ to heal his servant by simply saying it is so and the servant wasn't even in Jesus presence. Mark 5 tells of Jesus commanding Legion to "come out of the man, you unclean spirit" and the man was cured. At Peter's house Jesus cast out demons with a "word". Oh to know what that word was, but Jesus spoke with confidence and the afflicted had faith.

Not many of us speak with the authority of Christ. The Holy Spirit gave the power of healing to His disciples, so as His followers today we should also be able to heal. I think with faith and the love of Jesus in our hearts our words can heal. A kind word can make all the difference in someone's day, a word of confidence in our youth can repair self-doubt, and a word of appreciation to God's servants can heal feelings of a tired spirit. Let's use the time of Lent to practice the use of thoughtful healing words until it becomes our daily practice. Maybe there is a physical healer among us, who just needs the confidence in Christ to say the words, "You are healed."

Sam Sprengle

Saturday, March 25 Luke 8:43-48

*Then he said to her, "Daughter, your faith has
healed you. Go in peace." Luke 8:48*

In these verses, we see one of the many miracles Jesus performed on Earth. However, this one is a bit different than most. Instead of the sick woman approaching Jesus and asking for healing, she reaches out and is healed by touching

His robes. Jesus recognizes this and declares it is due to her strong faith in Him. Like the woman, for us in the end our source of "healing" comes from faith. By trusting God and having faith in Him, we can be at peace with ourselves and our world. Knowing and believing that God is with us and looking out for us, we have the ability to reach out for reassurance and hope from Him when we need help. Just like the woman in the story, we all have ailments- physical and mental- that we are plagued with. We can pray to God for help and healing from those ailments, but what is the point without faith? If we do not believe with our hearts that God can help us and is who He says He is, how can we expect Him to answer our prayers? When we focus on our faith it keeps us strong, and God enriches us with peace, love, and blessings. Faith is also a large part of what defines us as Christians- those who have faith and belief in Jesus. So rejoice in your faith and keep it strong, because like it did for the sick woman, the power of God will be at work through our faith and good things will come from it!

Amber Bertino