

Cross Keys United Methodist Church

2017 Lenten Devotional

Week 5

Monday, March 27

John 5:1-14

"Sir," the invalid replied, "I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me." John 5:7

In Jerusalem there was a pool called Bethesda. A great number of disabled people used to lie by it hoping to be healed. Jesus asked a man who was an invalid for 38 years if he wanted to get well? I would have expected the man to exclaim "yes", but instead it seemed like the man made excuses why he wasn't healed. Jesus didn't pray with him, but told him to "Get up, pick up your mat and walk". The man was cured and did what he was told, even though he didn't exercise any faith.

This miracle happened on the Sabbath. So the Jewish leaders wanted to know why the man was carrying his mat, since it was forbidden to do so on the Sabbath Day. The man didn't know who healed him, but his healer had told him to "pick up your mat and walk". So once again, the man's response is not what one would have expected. He did not seem thankful and full of grace that he could now walk after being an invalid for such a long time. I would hope most of us would be so grateful, we would have found out by any means possible, who our healer was. Instead it seemed like he was blaming Jesus for why he was breaking the Sabbath rules and carrying his mat.

Later at the temple Jesus found the man and told him to "stop sinning or something worse may happen to you". There is no mention of him hugging, weeping or even

thanking Jesus. The man seemed quick to tell the leaders it was Jesus who healed him once he found out who he was.

So just because someone's body is healed, it doesn't mean their soul has been touched or healed. Be thankful for what God has given us. Ask for his healing, notice his miracles all around us, big and small. Don't be blind to what he has done for all of us, let your faith and love of God guide you down the right path and enjoy all he has to offer us especially salvation.

Sharon Branco

Tuesday, March 28

Luke 17:11-19

"...Has no one returned to give praise to God except this foreigner?" Luke 11:18

This year members of the Junior and Senior High Youth Group were challenged to wrestle with several Bible passages that pertained to healing. We are pleased that our youth are diving into God's Word and that they were willing to share some of their thoughts with us. The youth were glad that they were asked to contribute; they enjoyed digging deeper, and feel welcomed as an important part of our church.

I think this lesson shows that Jesus has mercy on anyone that is in need of help. When ten men who had leprosy loudly called out to Jesus, He had mercy and cured them of their leprosy. What is amazing is that only one of the 10 was thoughtful enough to thank Jesus.

Dylan Ork

Wednesday, March 29

John 9:1-7

"Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him." John 9:3

When times get tough some often feel that they are being punished by God for their sins and wrongdoings. Everyone faces struggles in life, obstacles that seem insurmountable, pain that seems impossible to bear and in those times it can be easy to blame God or to waiver in your faith. Sometimes it can seem like the difficult times are never ending and it can be hard to see the amazing blessings that God has placed in your life. In our darkest times it may not be easy to see that God is our true guiding light. In those times of great weakness it is most important to remember God's amazing grace. At times we are all like the blind man struggling to see the beautiful and powerful workings of God. People often think that the dark times in their life are there as a punishment, when really it is so that we can learn to truly appreciate the light.

We are always going to face challenges, both big and small, in life. When we reach those moments of weakness (physical, emotional, or mental) we can choose to see the problems we face as punishment for our sin or we can remember that we are loved by an awesome God who knows us inside and out and knows what we can handle. Rather than looking at the struggles, pain, and what at times can seem like never-ending challenges as the wrath of a punishing God we should look at them as a sign from God as to how strong and amazing His believers are. Because as His children we have both the gift of living in his guiding light but also the opportunity to be a guiding light to others. In the moments of our greatest struggles we can choose to wallow in our self-pity or

wash the mud from our eyes and be a true testament of God's amazing love, power, and grace. Which do you choose?

Jon & Tiffany O'Connor

Thursday, March 30

Acts 28:26-28

"For this people's heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them." Acts 28:27

In this passage, Paul is actually quoting Isaiah to the Jewish leaders of Rome, who have a difficult time believing Paul about the kingdom of God and salvation through Jesus's death and resurrection. In fact, in verse 25, just prior to citing Isaiah, Paul states: "The Holy Spirit spoke the truth to your ancestors when he said through Isaiah the prophet..." Clearly he is a little frustrated by their unwillingness to believe.

Yet, Paul's message applies to everyone. Many of us have suffered difficult situations and some disasters which cloud our lives and separate us from our walk with God. How often in those times do we "harden our hearts" refusing to hear the voice of God or see what God has placed before us. We can get so consumed by our own problems and hurts; we shut ourselves off from any hope of discerning God's will. However, God's grace is never out of reach. Just as Matthew 7 says, if we seek, we will find. If we knock, the door will be opened. If we ask, it will be given. James 4:8 tells us if we come near to God, He will come near to us. We just need to keep our hearts; ears and eyes open to Him and all that he offers.

Bill Jennings

Friday, March 31

Acts 3:17-26

Heaven must receive him until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets. Acts 3:21

This passage from Acts 3 seems similar to Peter's first sermon at Pentecost where thousands of people came to know the Lord; Peter's doing an "altar call" again. He's asking the people to repent and explaining why they need to be saved. I love the phrasing of this passage in Today's New International Version of the Bible. Peter says "repent so your sins will be wiped out and a time of refreshing may come from the Lord." What's interesting is what this time of refreshing is referring to.

No, they are not going on vacation; they are not taking a break. Peter is referring to the second coming of Jesus. Peter and the disciples were called to share the Good News of Jesus so that God would send Jesus back to earth. Peter says in verse 21 that Heaven "received Jesus until the time came to restore everything." Creation would be healed and people would be restored to a right relationship with God. Peter longed for the return of his friend and Lord, and passages in the New Testament seem to indicate that Peter and other disciples believed the day would soon come. They longed for it.

How about you and me, do we have this desire and longing? Are we looking for the return of Jesus? A concern that I have is that people are no longer looking for Jesus coming in the way they once were because it's been so long. Long? The Bible says that to God a thousand years is like a day. If that's the case, it's only been a couple of days! Wait on the Lord, for we need to be prepared for the second coming. Ask Jesus to be your Lord and Savior and share what you believe with others.

Do we long to see people come to know the Lord? Are we sharing our faith so that other could know the joy of living in the Lord? People today long for a time of refreshing. Turning away from sin and turning to the Lord is exactly that; refreshing and renewing.

Saturday, April 1

Luke 8:40-42, 49-56

Hearing this, Jesus said to Jairus, "Don't be afraid; just believe, and she will be healed." Luke 8:50

The Already, but Not Yet

If you are familiar with the Gospel of Luke, chapter 8 then I bet you're anticipating a devotional writing about healing.... Believe in God and you will be healed.... It's not really a stretch of the imagination to think that since there are direct references to several sick people being healed; even a child who came back from death.

Instead, I'd like to focus on the less obvious concept of faith which permeates these stories. As a young person I once had someone tell me I ought to "rejoice in the promise now" because an answer was guaranteed. Although I listened intently to those words and even nodded my head in agreement, I kept to myself the fact that I really was unclear about what I was being told. I thought...Hmmm, the answer is guaranteed???? How did my friend know that for sure???...I didn't bother to ask any questions because up until this point I had cultivated such a fine "north jersey girl know-it-all" reputation...and I didn't want to ruin it!

It wasn't until much later in my adult life and spiritual journey, that I finally realized what my friend had been telling me all those years earlier: God's promise to us IS

IN our faith!! Once you gain a resounding and unshakeable faith you know God's promises are kept. So the promise SHOULD be the celebratory component! For the **PROMISE** is the **GLORY** of our faith!!

Gaining faith is a journey which is different for us all. Faith comes from our spiritual relationship with God, **not** from anything that we see, per se. It's different for us all. Faith is hoping in the promise that has yet to be realized; hoping without any proof. Interpreting promise is a matter of time, perspective and perception of the current state of your affairs.

We ask God for many things through prayer...please allow sickness to depart, please make for safe travels, please allow me to find a new job.... the promise from God is to answer your prayers according to His perfect ways. It is *not* the answer in alignment with what you may want or think you want at any particular time. This is where perception and perspective come into play.

The title of this devotional, The Already but Not Yet, speaks directly to this point and to the stories in Luke 8 as well. As Christians, believers, and faithful disciples of God, we should take comfort in knowing His promise to guide us, and to answer our prayers is ALREADY within us, but perhaps not yet realized! In Luke chapter 8, Jesus healed Jairus's only child; a 12 yr. old daughter who was very sick and dying. Jairus approached Jesus in a crowd to beg for His healing hand. As Jesus made His way to her bedside it was announced that she had died. As shock and panic fell over the crowd, Jesus proclaimed "Do not weep for she is not dead but sleeping". While some people laughed at such an outrageous claim, others watched to see this claim fulfilled. Jairus's daughter's spirit returned to her body and she arose from her bed.

The faith and belief in the power of Jesus became blessings for Jairus and his family.

As the glorious time of Easter and the season of spring approach, I ask that you take a minute or two to celebrate in the seeds planted that have yet to bloom in your gardens and in your souls.

Lori Ritz