

Hello – and happy summer! As you know, I have been writing devotional prayer guides for several years now, and once again I am following the lectionary used by the United Church of Canada as my guide for this summer series. A lectionary is a list of Bible readings or references to be read from Scripture on certain days of the year. Historically, a lectionary took one year to go through. The United Church, as well as many churches around the world, uses the Revised Common Lectionary, which is three-year cycle of readings. This year is “Year A” until Advent, which is the beginning of the church year and when we move into “Year B.”

As always, these guides are intended to help you explore some of emotions and thoughts you may experience by providing a Bible reference, a reflection starter, and a prayer. If you only have a few minutes, simply read the reference, and carry the thought with you during your day. If you have more time, you may want to open the Bible translation of your choice and prayerfully read more of the reference passage. Allow the prayer to be a starting point for your own prayer time.

If you miss a day or more, don’t feel guilty or think that you need to catch up. You can if you want, but if you don’t have time or energy, simply carry on from the current day.

Wednesday, July 1

Reading: Genesis 1:1 *“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth”*

Thought: I think this is a particularly appropriate verse to begin our devotional series, as the beginning of everything is God’s creation. On July 1 we celebrate the creation of our country. Canada became a nation on July 1, 1867, and what a wonderful country we are. Mountains, plains, muskeg, lakes, rivers, and polar ice - we have a topography to match anywhere in the world. We are a people who believe in being polite. We have policies that support equality and justice. Genesis tells to be good stewards of all creation and so we are called to pursue reconciliation with the original stewards of this land. How do you feel most blessed by the country you live in? How are you pursuing reconciliation?

Prayer: Creator God – I give you praise and thanks for this beautiful land. Help me to preserve it and to make the most of this blessing you have bestowed upon me.

Thursday, July 2

Reading: Genesis 22:1 *“Some time later, God tested Abraham. He said to him, “Abraham!” “Here I am” he replied.*

Thought: The story in Genesis 22 is the story of God asking Abraham to sacrifice Isaac – Abraham’s only son, an unexpected miracle and blessing of birth. When God calls – and God calls us all – we are expected to respond in obedience. In my experience, we will all be called to sacrifice something we value – our pride, the way we like things to be done, our independence or perhaps our need for vengeance. The story ends with another miracle. God provides a ram to be sacrificed in Isaac’s stead. God provides whatever is needed when we are obedient. Is there something God is calling you to sacrifice? Are you being obedient?

Prayer: Holy Spirit – guide me in the Way, help me to recognize your call and to understand whatever it is I am called to do or to not do.

Friday, July 3

Reading: Psalm 13:3 *"Look on me and answer, Lord my God. Give light to my eyes."*

Thought: I think we all seek answers that only God can provide, at least some of the time. So often it seems God is silent. We ask, even plead for answers, and they do not come. Rest assured, there is a holy reason for that. It may be that the right time to be given that answer is yet to come. It may be we are not ready to understand the answer and need to grow in some way. It may be that we are not going to like the answer, and in that dislike reject it as too difficult to achieve or even contemplate. If God seems to be ignoring your questions, perhaps you need to contemplate why that may be. What answers are you searching for? Is there a reason God may be delaying the answer?

Prayer: **All-knowing God – I trust you to give the answers I truly need when it is best for me. Help be to be patient, open minded and courageous.**

Saturday, July 4

Reading: Jeremiah 28:9 *"...when the word of that prophet comes true, then it will be known that the Lord has truly sent the prophet."*

Thought: Another way to say what this Bible verse tells us is "the proof is in the pudding," that is, the value of something can only be determined by trying it. Pudding comes in many flavors – my personal favorite is salted caramel. The best test of a pudding is to eat it, and here we are told the best test of a prophet is to see if what they prophesize becomes reality. Over our lifetime we will have many people who will try to influence and tell us what to do. It takes discernment to choose who we will believe, whose advice we will follow. One way to determine if a person's advice is creditable is to take it in small things and see if it is worthwhile before you follow it in larger things. Do you have people in your life whose advice you value? Are there people you are careful about listening to their advice?

Prayer: **Holy Spirit – guide me to those people whose words of advice are worth listening to and following.**

Sunday July 5

Reading: Psalm 89: 1 *I will sing of your steadfast love, O God, forever, with my mouth I will proclaim your faithfulness to all generations."*

Thought: Here's a point to ponder – how do we proclaim God's steadfast love to children when they no longer attend Sunday School? It is no secret that church attendance is dropping off dramatically and very few children are in attendance these days. It is unlikely this situation will change and so we are called to do things in a new way! I believe the answer lies in a personal commitment to proclaim God's love. This can be as easy as saying, "And God loves you too!" when you tell your grandchild you love them or as intimidating (at least to me) to smiling at a child in the grocery line up and saying the same thing. We all have children in our lives, even if we don't have a personal relationship with them, and it is up to us to find ways to proclaim God's love to everyone. Have you told a child God loves them? Have you told an adult God loves them?

Prayer: Jesus – you are the friend of little children. We are all God’s children. Help me to be a friend to all and to proclaim your love to them.

Monday, July 6

Reading: Psalm 89:15 *“Happy are the people who know the festal shout.”*

Thought: Sometimes the words in the Bible can be a little hard to understand. You may wonder what exactly is “the festal shout.” Are there specific words that make a shout festal? And what exactly does festal mean anyway? Looking at different translations may be a help when we have questions like this. The verse above is from the New Revised Standard Version. My New International Version translates the same verse as “Blessed are those who have learned to acclaim you.” Ah...now I understand! And yes, I feel happy and blessed when I sing the praises of God. Do you read different translations of the Bible? If so, which one is your favorite?

Prayer: Holy Spirit – I give you joy and thanks for the feeling of blessedness that arises when I praise you.

Tuesday, July 7

Reading: Romans 6:14 *“Sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law, but under grace.”*

Thought: Yesterday we learned how a word in a verse can trip us up. Today we are looking at a whole verse and how it can be misinterpreted. We could take this verse to mean we have no need to follow laws, as sin has no hold over us. Hmmmm....sometimes we need to take another look at a verse, contemplate it, and seek the underlying meaning and the lessons that are being provided. Here we are being told we are ruled by the grace and love of God, rather than man-made rules. Man-made laws do not prevent sin, they only condemn and punish you when you do something wrong, and that only happens if you are found out. If you think about it, man-made laws are based on fear. God’s laws are a little different. Yes, they may prevent us from doing wrong as we are called to obey. We may also suffer consequences as a result of our disobedience. But – we strive to obey because of the love we have for God, and we take comfort in the promise of forgiveness when we fail and confess our sin. What interpretation do you have for this verse? Why do you follow God’s laws?

Prayer: Heavenly Father – release me from the guilt of my sin and forgive me. Give me ears to hear your will and courage to follow you.

Wednesday, July 8

Reading: Matthew 10:42 *“whoever gives so much as a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple – truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward.”*

Thought: Little acts of service and kindness are important – and we need to perform them – for this is one way to live a Christian lifestyle. Yes, it is important to attend worship and to engage in prayer and Bible study but acts of kindness and service are also important and so easy to overlook. Remember to ask others if they want a cup of coffee when you serve yourself. Let others ahead of you in the checkout line if they only have a few items. Allow others to do

things they way they like rather than the way you would like something done. All of these little things are ways we can be kind and serve others. What little act of kindness did you perform today? What little acts of kindness can you think of?

Prayer: Jesus – you are the perfect example of the kind of servant I am called to be. Help me to find ways to act in your likeness.