

Thursday, July 16

Reading: Matthew 11:29 *"Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me,"*

Thought: I have written before of how it is common practise to yoke the experienced with the naïve, which not only teaches, but removes fear and uncertainty. Today I am contemplating how we are called to TAKE the yoke. This is one of the overarching themes of the Bible, that God never imposes his presence or help. We must ask for and accept it. This can be a difficult thing. Our society values independence and looks down upon this who need help. Admitting need can take humility and courage. Do you find it difficult to accept help, even from God? Are you willing to accept that help?

Prayer: Companion Jesus - I willingly accept your help and guidance. Give me understanding to know I need your help, humility to accept it and courage to follow it.

Friday, July 17

Reading: Genesis 25:32 *"I am about to die, of what use is a birthright?"*

Thought: I was recently introduced to the concept that sin is a symptom of something in your character that needs to be addressed. In a way, exaggeration is lying, and so it is technically a sin, and sin – even small ones - can have disastrous consequences. Esau wasn't really going to die of hunger at that moment in time. So, as we think about this verse, we may consider - what issue does this sin of exaggeration point to? It could be frustration, impatience, or simply just a reaction to low blood sugar. The consequence was that Esau gave away his total inheritance. So, the lesson today is to consider the root of any temptation you have to sin and to be aware that even a sin as small as exaggeration can lead to catastrophe. When have you been tempted to sin? What do you think the root of that was?

Prayer: Holy Spirit – help me to seek out and understand the source of my temptation to sin and to take steps to prevent it from influencing my reactions.

Saturday, July 18

Reading: Psalm 119:105 *"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path."*

Thought: I do have a special love for scripture passages that give me a clear visual interpretation, and this is one of the best. When I read this verse, I have such a clear picture of a handheld lantern casting a halo of light on a gravel path. It's interesting to me that this halo of light is limited in what it shows. It seems that being on a spiritual journey has an element of mystery associated with it. I can not see the whole path; I can only see just a few steps ahead and must trust that the rest of the journey will unfold as God plans. What do you see in your mind's eye when you read this verse? Do you see your faith as a journey that needs light?

Prayer: Jesus – you are the light of the world, the word made incarnate, my true companion and the light to my path. Thank you for being all those things!

Sunday July 19

Reading: Isaiah 55:12 *"For you shall go out in joy and be led back in peace, the mountains, and the hills before you shall burst into song and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands."*

Thought: This passage from the prophet Isaiah reads almost like Psalm – lyrical and vast in its promise! It's important to understand that this is a continuation of 55:10&11, where Isaiah

tells us that the words spoken by God will not “return empty but shall accomplish...and succeed in the thing for which it has been sent.” These are the words of the prophet – one who hears the word of God and has the courage to speak them aloud to the multitudes across the ages. Be a prophet with me and say these words out loud – “the word of God will prevail, and I will go out in joy and be led back in peace!” Did you say those words out loud? How did it feel?

Prayer: Everlasting and eternal God – your voice rings through the ages. Thank you for your prophets who speak your words out loud.

Monday, July 20

Reading: Psalm 65:12-13 *“the hills gird themselves with joy, the meadows clothe themselves with flocks, the valleys deck themselves with grain, they shout and sing together for joy*

Thought: Yesterday we read a verse from Isaiah that I said read like a psalm and today we have one of those beautiful verses in the psalms that brings us such a visual image of how God blesses us. We currently live in the country, and I love to look out over the valley to the hills to south and admire the canola crops that are lush and green in spring and turn that amazing, eye-popping yellow full summer. When we move, I will miss this and pray that our new home will have some kind of beautiful outlook nearby! No matter where I am, I realize we live in a beautiful world and I today I am joining in with the hills, the meadows, and the valleys to shout and sing for joy! Do you have a place to go to where you can admire the view? What makes you shout and sing for joy?

Prayer: Creator God – you have given us such a wonderful world. Help us to be good stewards and to find the joy that the gift of your earth can bring.

Tuesday, July 21

Reading: Romans 8:2 *“For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death”*

Thought: When I read this verse, my body gave out a huge sigh. This is a sign of how much my mind and soul need to hear these words. We are all sinners. That’s what it means to be human, yet we have this great opportunity to truly live, in this life and the next. The guilt of doing wrong, of being a sinful human being, can weigh us down and prevent us from living that life of joy and satisfaction that can be ours if we only accept the love and forgiveness that was bought for us on the cross. That sacrifice of Jesus on the cross - in some mysterious, miraculous way - also gave us the opportunity to conquer death and live forever. We only need to give a sigh of relief and accept that gift. What was your reaction to this verse? Are you living a life of freedom from sin and death?

Prayer: Holy Jesus – you died on the cross to bring me forever forgiveness and eternal life. Thank you.

Wednesday, July 22

Reading: Matthew 13:(3-7) and 8 The Parable of the Sower – A Sower went out to sow. Some seed was eaten by birds, some had no depth of soil, some were choked out by thorns *“Other seed fell on fertile ground and brought forth grain, some a hundred-fold, some sixty, some thirty.”*

Thought: The parable of the Sower is usually interpreted as how the word of God is received by different people. Later in Matthew Jesus even tells us this is what this parable means.

Personally, I think it is perfectly fine to find more meaning in the teachings of Jesus, so long as these other meanings are consistent with what Jesus taught. For me, this parable can also be interpreted as to how different ideas are received by ourselves. When presented with something that is new or different, we may have different responses. That idea may be offered to deaf ears or closed heart. Or, we may be interested or even intrigued by it, but fail to pursue it. Sometimes that new idea gets choked out by the opinions of others or circumstance or our own busy-ness. But sometimes – that new or different thing may be heard, taken into an open heart, and pursued to fulfillment despite challenges. That is when that tiny seed of an idea bears great fruit. What other meanings can you find in this parable? In what “fertile ground” do you need to be fruitful?

Prayer: Holy Spirit – help me to discern what seeds you sow in my heart and give me strength and courage to bring them to fruition.

Thursday, July 23

Reading: Matthew 13:18-22 and 23 The explanation of the Parable of the Sower *But for as what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty and in another thirty.*

Thought: It is interesting that Matthew thought the parable of the Sower was important enough to include it in his gospel twice. This one explains the parable so there is no question as to its meaning. As we read the Bible it is important to look deeply into the scripture – to meditate on them and take time to digest and investigate them. Here, I am wondering why Jesus thought this parable so important that he explained the meaning of it. Was it because he was worried the disciples would become discouraged if their message wasn’t universally embraced and followed? Was it because he wanted them to know that it didn’t matter how much success their efforts brought? Was it because Jesus wanted them to understand that he was calling them to hear his words and understand them? So many questions! What questions come to mind when you read the explanation of this parable?

Prayer: Teacher Jesus – thank you for providing explanations to your words of wisdom. Help me to seek out and find the meaning you intend for me.