

Friday, August 28

Reading: Exodus 1:17&21 *But the midwives feared God, they did not do as the king of Egypt commanded and let the boys live....So God dealt well with the midwives and the people multiplied and became strong."*

Thought: Here is an example of doing as God intends even when it is in conflict with those in authority. Last week we read in Isaiah that we are called to maintain justice and do what is right. I wonder if Isaiah was thinking about this episode in the history of the Hebrews when he said that. Jesus told us what we are supposed to do – love God with all our heart and soul and mind and to love others. It is up to us to do just that, even when it is “against the rules” or not valued or supported by others. Of course, we must ensure that our actions really do express love and follow what God intends and are not just what we would like to do. As well, we have to be prepared to face the consequences of our actions just as the Hebrew midwives were willing to disobey the king of Egypt in order to follow God. And as an aside – here is another story that speaks to the strength of women and counters the concept that the Bible is “male centered.” Have you ever done something that others disapproved of because you knew it was the righteous thing to do? How did that feel?

Prayer: Holy Spirit – be with me and guide me to do what is right at all times.

Saturday, August 29

Reading: Isaiah 51:3 *“God will comfort all our waste places and will make them like Eden, the deserts like the gardens of God; joy and gladness will be found, thanksgiving and the voice of song”*

Thought: I’m sure you all know by now that I am a gardener, and verses that bring to mind gardens are especially appealing to me. As you know, I am leaving my current garden behind and am looking forward to working with God to make a new place of joy and gladness. I have had “waste places” in all my previous gardens which God and I slowly transformed into something beautiful. When one of those places was finished, I certainly felt joy and gladness and thanksgiving – so much so that I almost wept. We have waste places in our lives as well. They are those areas that are barren and lacking in love and beauty. Perhaps you are lonely or estranged from your family. Perhaps you have health issues or struggle with envy or jealousy or forgiveness or anger. We all have waste places. I encourage you to welcome God into those waste places and think of how much joy and gladness will be experienced when they are transformed into places that bloom like the garden of Eden. Do you have a waste place or a desert that needs to bloom? Will you ask God to help transform it?

Prayer: God of Gardens – be with me in all my waste places and help me to transform them into places of joy and thanksgiving.

Sunday August 30

Reading: Matthew 16:16 *“Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”*

Thought: This piece of scripture is usually focussed on Peter’s declaration that Jesus is the Messiah, but what I noticed when I read this verse was Peter calling Jesus “the son of the LIVING God.” Today, let’s think about the idea that all other “gods” are nothing but dead idols. There are so many things we may fall into the trap of believing they are so important to pursue

that they cross over the line into idols, and in some ways those idols may seem to be alive. There are things we may be tempted to “worship” such as money and possessions. Some things we turn into idols such as our family, health, and reputation, are good things taken too far. Many of them fulfill the technical definition of living things, as they have the capacity for growth, reproduction, functional activity, and continual change. The difference between these idols and our living God is that those dead idols rely on us to give them life. Those other things may be important and worthy of respect, but only God is truly alive and worthy of worship. What are the important things in your life? Is there something in your life that might be considered an idol?

Prayer: Holy God – you are the only living God. Help me to understand the difference between respect and worship.

Monday, August 31

Reading: Matthew 16:18 *“And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it.”*

Thought: The name Peter comes from the word “petra,” which means rock, so this verse contains a play on words. To me, this rather indicates Jesus had a sense of humor as well as the ability to use language in a unique way to illustrate a point. Jesus was in the process of building a different kind of church, not one of bricks and mortar but of people. Jesus is the cornerstone of our faith, and you and I are called, just like Peter was, to be the building blocks of the church of Christ. Each of us has a distinct role to play and gifts to use in the formation of this church. When we are truly the church of Christ nothing will prevail against us! How are you being a building block in your church? How will you express that?

Prayer: Jesus – I recognize I am part of the structure of your church. Help me to build up my faith and to serve you.

This is the last of our devotions until Advent. I hope you will continue to read and contemplate scripture, to pursue Christ, and to serve God and your congregation as you are called until we meet again in this group. Always, my blessing and love goes with you - Jan