

Devotions for the Week of February 11, 2018

LARGE-PRINT

North East United Methodist Church

By Rev. Dr. Drew M. Christian

Sunday, February 11, 2018

Read Revelation 3: 7-8; Luke 11:9; Mark 1: 1-8.

We are getting ready to begin the season of Lent, journeying together toward Holy Week & Easter Sunday, the celebration of the Resurrection of Christ. It is a very special time of year, when we remember, *“God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son.”* It is also a time when we prepare for Christ’s return, *“For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.”*

God is about opening doors before us...doors for us to walk through...doors that lead to a deeper relationship with the Creator. Jesus said, *“...knock and the door will be opened to you.”* Lent is a time of self-examination, a time to examine ourselves and walk through the doors God opens before us, going deeper with God and preparing our hearts & lives for the moment we stand before Him.

Over the course of Lent, beginning this Wednesday, Ash Wednesday, February 14th, God will challenge you through His Word. God will show you doors He wants you to walk through if you open your eyes and seek Him. Each of you will have the opportunity, the choice, to enter a new room in your relationship with God, a deeper and more intimate room. But to walk through the door and to receive all God has for us on the other side this Lenten season, we must prepare and open our hearts.

God sent a messenger, in John the Baptist, to tell people to “*prepare*” their hearts for the coming of Christ. John was “*The voice of one crying in the wilderness, ‘Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.’*”

We must prepare to experience Jesus, the resurrection in our own lives, this Easter...to experience God’s instruction and revelation throughout Lent, allowing His Word to transform our lives.

As John Betjeman wrote, “*For now we feel the world spin round On some momentous journey bound. Journey to what? to whom? to where?*” Lent is a time in which we journey together through a season of self-examination, reflection, and repentance, preparing and opening our hearts more fully to God, becoming more like His Son, Jesus, in our actions, speech, and thoughts.

We prepare
for the day we will stand before the Christ.

What are you doing to prepare for all God has to share with you this season of Lent? How are you preparing your heart to receive His Word this Easter season...to experience the resurrection of Christ, allowing that “*good news*” to transform and impact your life? Take time tonight in prayer and begin to prepare to walk through the doors God opens for you this Lenten season.

Monday, February 12, 2018

Read Hosea 10:12; Matthew 13: 1-23.

God speaks through Hosea and calls on the people to “*Sow righteousness for yourselves, reap the fruit of unfailing love, and break up your unplowed ground; for it is time to seek the LORD, until he comes.*”

We have to prepare the soil of our hearts to receive all that God has for each of us...we have to “*break up*” the “*unplowed ground*” allowing God to come in and drop His seeds of truth. This is what the season of Lent is about...and this is hard and difficult work.

What areas of your heart are “*unplowed?*” Is there bitterness in your heart that needs to be “*plowed*” under? Unforgiveness? Are there actions that need to be “*plowed*” under that you might live more Christ-like? Does your heart need to be “*plowed*” and softened so you may trust God more with your finances and be more obedient to His Word? Does your heart need to be “*plowed,*” the things of the world dug up, that a deep desire for His Word and for the things of God may be planted?

Look at the Parable of the Sower. Jesus describes several states a person’s heart may be in...it may be like a “*hard path,*” “*rocky soil,*” or “*thorny ground.*” Our job for Lent and throughout the year is to prepare the soil of our heart...dig up and plow the “*hard path*”...remove the rocks...and tear down the thorns...that our hearts may be “*good soil*” ready to receive God’s message to us...and in receiving God’s message, our lives will produce a “*huge harvest.*”

What is it you need to deal with...what area of your life do you need to wrestle with, to let go of, to tear down, to remove...so that you can hear God’s Word proclaimed, God’s message to you, this Lent & Easter season? Pray that God will show you where you need to allow Him to “*break up your unplowed ground.*”

Tuesday, February 13, 2018

Read Ezra 7: 8-10; Acts 17: 10-15.

“*Ezra had determined to study and obey the law of the Lord.*” And because Ezra was willing to study, to learn, to listen...to “*plow*”

his heart that God might plant His Word, His instruction, His love, “*the gracious hand of his God was on him.*”

Isn't that what each of us wants this Lent & Easter season...what each of us wants throughout the year, “*the gracious hand of [our] God [upon us]?*”

Like Ezra we must be determined to “*study and obey the law of the Lord.*” We must be determined this Lent to listen, to hear (“*Whoever has ears, let them hear*”), to learn, and to be challenged...allowing our hearts to be plowed up...our lives changed...new seeds of faith planted.

In Acts, Paul and Silas travel to Thessalonica to preach the “*Good News*” about Jesus Christ...but the Thessalonians are unwilling to listen...unwilling to hear...there was jealousy...a blind adherence to tradition...but in Berea, the people were “*more open-minded than those in Thessalonica, and they listened eagerly to Paul's message. They searched the Scriptures day after day to check up on Paul and Silas, to see if they were really teaching the truth. As a result, many Jews believed, as did some of the prominent Greek women and many men.*”

Ask God to help you be “*open-minded*” and “*ready*” to hear His Word. Be determined this Lent & Easter season to be blessed, to experience God, to grow in your relationship with Christ...and do the necessary work to prepare the fields that God's Word may take root in your life.

Wednesday, February 14, 2018 – ASH WED SERVICE 7 PM**Read Luke 18: 10-14.**

Eminent theologian John Cobb confessed the following:
“When I engage in self-examination in the presence of other persons, I cannot free myself from concern as to what they think of me or of what the consequences of my confession may be. In church when I join with others in confessing my sins, those sins are too generally stated to force me to more careful self-awareness. It is when I am alone what I can bring all these things together and go beyond them...It is only when I think of myself as being alone before God that traditional Christian self-examination, confession, and repentance make sense to me.”

Prayer is about recognizing our sin, our lives, before God. It is standing before the throne of God, the Creator of the Universe and Jesus Christ, His Son, as imperfect as we are. It is a time when the light of Christ shines into the dark areas of our lives that we would rather ignore or not deal with. It is a time when we see our dirtiness and God’s glory, we recognize His grace and love for us regardless, and we are overwhelmed with gratitude and thankfulness.

Spend time with God in self-examination. Ask God to help you become aware of actions or attitudes, hurtful relationships, estrangements you need to confess.

Maxie Dunnam writes, *“Confession is the way we clarify the vision of who we are before God by acknowledging our destructive habits and seeking the realignment of our energies in more constructive directions.”* We openly share our shortcomings with God and allow Him to show us our sin. We then turn away from that sin by repenting, being genuinely sorry for what we have done. We ask God to not only forgive us but

give us direction for changing our behavior and becoming more like Jesus.

Go beneath the surface tonight and open yourself up to God. After putting everything on the table before God and asking Him to help you, read I John 1:9. Give Him thanks.

Thursday, February 15, 2018

Read James 1: 17-27.

James gives us instruction on preparing our hearts...for doing all we can so that we might receive God's blessing and come face to face with Him.

First, James tells us to be "*swift to hear.*" We have to want to hear what God has got to say to us...we have to "*listen.*" We have to be slow to respond with our opinions and slow to get angry when God's Word challenges us and causes us to rethink how we have lived our lives.

Secondly, we need to lay aside sin. James writes, "*If you don't obey, you are only fooling yourself.*" If we are living in sin...if we are carrying unforgiveness in our hearts...if we are looking at things we should not...if we are gossiping about our neighbor...if we are hoarding our money...if we are failing to trust God and failing to love our neighbor...how will we ever be able to hear and receive what God has for us? To experience the blessings of this season, we must fight with the sinful areas of our lives.

Lastly, James says that we must allow the message to be planted, "*looking steadily into God's perfect law...the law that sets you free...and if you do what it says and don't forget what you heard...then God will bless you for doing it.*"

How are we to experience the many blessings God has for us this season of Lent & Easter? We must be ready to listen, lay aside sin, and be faithful to how God tells us to live.

Friday, February 16, 2018

Read Matthew 6: 5-8.

Dunnam writes, *“In our aloneness with God, Jesus says, ‘Don’t rattle off long prayers like the pagans.’ In the world that Jesus knew, the gods of the people were remote, unpredictable, far removed from the affairs of the earth. Prayer for the most part, in much of the religious practice of that day, was the effort on the part of an individual to win attention. So one made a lot of noise, rattled on and on. Such is not necessary; in fact, Jesus said it’s repulsive to God. God is as near as breathing. God hears our longings even before we put them into words. God knows your needs before you ask. So, we come to God regularly, not to ‘rattle off long prayers’ but to spend time in reflection, simply to be alone with God and to gain perspectives for living.”*

Spend time in prayer with God tonight. Use this time, not only to speak to Him, but use this time to reflect on what God wants for your life, to reflect on where you are letting God down, to reflect on what it means to put God first in your family, your workplace, your daily time. Use your prayer time not only to talk to God but to listen and to be challenged by God’s word and purpose for your life.

Saturday, February 17, 2018

Read through some of the Scriptures for this Ash Wednesday and First Week of Lent from the Revised Common

Lectionary...Look for themes of self-examination, repentance, confession, forgiveness, growing deeper in Christ.

**Joel 2:1-2, 12-17; Psalm 51:1-17;
2 Corinthians 5:20-6:10; Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21;
Genesis 9:8-17; Psalm 25:1-10;
I Peter 3:18-22; Mark 1:9-15.**

Spend time with God in prayer tonight.

Don't forget to invite someone to church tomorrow.

