

Devotions for the Week of September 3, 2017
North East United Methodist Church
By Rev. Dr. Drew M. Christian

Sunday, September 3, 2017

Read 2 Corinthians 5: 11-21.

Paul writes, “*Whatever we do, it is because Christ’s love controls us.*” Paul goes on to talk about how he has come to understand who Christ is...how Christ died for everyone “*so that those who receive his new life will no longer live to please themselves. Instead they will live to please Christ, who died and was raised for them.*” Paul finishes up this section of his letter to the church in Corinth saying, “*We are Christ’s ambassadors, and God is using us to speak to you...*”

Paul understands what Christ has done for him...How Christ was willing to sacrifice His life for Paul, for us...so that we might be reconciled and have a relationship with Christ...Because of this great sacrifice on Christ’s behalf, Paul is living his life for Christ...out of gratitude and devotion to the One who gave everything for him.

That is why we keep our commitment...that is why we honor God with our prayers, our presence, our gifts, our service, and our witness. We, too, have recognized who Christ is and what Christ has done for us.

Paul recognizes that we are now “*Christ’s ambassadors,*” having recognized all Christ has done for us. It is now our turn to share with the world what we have discovered...the unbelievable gift of Jesus Christ. It is our time to “STEP ACROSS”.

One of the greatest ways we accomplish this task is with our PRESENCE.

The dictionary explains that an “*ambassador*” represents their country or their country’s head of state; thus, we represent our country’s (heaven) head of state (Jesus). We carry with us the message and beliefs of our leader.

An ambassador is called to be present, sometimes even living in the foreign country, when the leader they represent is unable to be present. When Jesus left, ascended into heaven, He gave His disciples authority to preach and teach, to go among the nations, and represent Him.

We are called to be PRESENT...to represent Christ in the church, in the community, and in the world. Many of us made this commitment when we joined the church; all of us are “called” by God to be present in the world, helping others to see Christ through us.

Your presence is vital to the mission of the church and Jesus Christ. When you miss church on Sunday, or fail to have a presence in the life of your “unchurched” neighbors, co-workers, and friends...When you fail to be present...relationships are not built, ministries are unsuccessful, your faith goes unnoticed...You fail to “STEP ACROSS”...

Our presence is important to the spread of the message, but it is also expected. God calls us to be present. Take time this week to reflect and to pray about how you can be more present in your church, your community, and your world.

Monday, September 4, 2017

Read Acts 2: 41-47.

In the midst of a world of great persecution and oppressiveness, the church grew. The Word says, “*And each day the Lord added to their group those who were being saved.*”

These people coming into the early church did not come because of the great advertising because the church had to meet in secret due to the Roman oppression. These people did not come because of the great music or drama because services had to be “low-keyed” to not draw too much attention from the authorities. These people came because of the Word of God being preached and because of the presence of their friends and neighbors, whom they had seen a “change” in.

It was the PRESENCE of so many believers, week after week, risking their lives in order to hear the message and to worship, which drew thousands more.

Your presence in the church is vital to the church’s success in succeeding in our mission to make disciples of Jesus Christ. Without you...the mission will fail. The church needs many “hands and feet” in order to reach our world, in order to get ministries off the ground, in order to make sure coffee is made on Sunday morning to make our guests feel welcomed and our members awake enough to serve.

All these ministries...from the smallest to the more prominent are vital in creating an atmosphere of hospitality, community, and grace...all these ministries are vital in spreading and sharing the message of Christ.

When one of these ministries falls by the wayside, the whole is affected...and suddenly, as a church, we are not giving our best and we may miss an opportunity to connect with and impact another’s life with the tremendous gift God has given us. We miss the opportunity to “STEP ACROSS” the chasm that exists between us and another, bringing the two together.

The Sunday you are not in the pew may be the Sunday a visitor sits next to where you normally sit and an opportunity is missed to show them Christ’s love.

Our presence in the church is needed, necessary, and sometimes a sacrifice...causing us to “let go” of other things we could be doing...But this sacrifice...this commitment to our PRESENCE...will allow us to reach those who come through our doors with the greatest message ever given humanity...

Pray about how you can be more present in the church...not just on Sunday mornings, but also throughout the week.

Tuesday, September 5, 2017

Read I Thessalonians 2: 1-13.

Paul talks to those in the church at Thessalonica about the time he visited and stayed with them, preaching the Gospel. He reminds them of his hard work, his willingness to sacrifice, and that he would speak his faith boldly in the midst of opposition. He reminds them that “*we treated each of you as a father treats his own children,*” we “*encouraged you.*” Paul took time in Thessalonica to build relationships...to be PRESENT in that community...to let people see his integrity and faithfulness in the everyday...to “STEP ACROSS” whatever barriers would get in the way of others hearing about God’s love.

Because of Paul’s presence in Thessalonica, the people came to trust him and believe in him... and therefore, were open to his message about Jesus.

What kind of presence do you have in your community? In your neighborhood? At your workplace? Certainly, people are watching you...watching to see what you will do, how you will act, what is important to you...Are you having a positive presence on those who surround you? Are they seeing Christ in the way you live and act and speak?

Also, very often as Christians we surround ourselves with other Christians and fail to build relationships, fail to have a presence, with those outside the church. Are you involved in community activities...events and activities outside the church...where you can have a presence among those who may not know Christ, who may not have a church family? Are you building relationships with people that are “un-churched”? Are you “STEPPING ACROSS” and reaching people who are different than you?

Take time tonight to pray about how you might have a greater presence in your community, with your neighbors, at your workplace? Ask God to lay names on your heart of people whom you might begin to build a relationship with.

Wednesday, September 6, 2017

Read Matthew 28: 16-20 & John 17: 1-26.

Jesus commissioned us to go into all the world and make disciples. Our presence was to be felt well-beyond our own church walls and our own communities. Jesus prays in the garden of Gethsemane, “*I’m not asking you to take them out of the world, but to keep them safe from the evil one.*”

Jesus prayed that we would be protected as we went INTO the world...but not that we would be taken OUT of this world. In the world but not of the world...this is a great struggle for the Christian. But Christ was clear that we are called to “STEP ACROSS,” to reach out, to touch lives, throughout our globe...We are not to hide in our churches and keep the message to ourselves. Jesus prayed that we would be protected as we took the message into the world.

I see that having a presence in our world requires a two-fold approach. One way that we have a presence in our world is through missions...opportunities like supporting a missionary to Africa, helping provide money for a well in the Sudan, supporting a ministry which rescues child soldiers in South America. North East UMC gives to missions continuing to make your PRESENCE felt around the world. Some of you may even be “called” to go yourself to another country, sharing the gift of Christ in your own words and actions.

A second way that we have a presence in our world is to PRESENT the message of Jesus Christ in a way the surrounding culture will understand. Christian films, books, music, virtual worlds, websites, contemporary message series, videos, and downloads are all examples of the church, Christians, having a presence in the world.

How might you contribute to a mission...carrying your presence, your faith, across the oceans? Do you have ideas to share on how we might be more present in the surrounding culture or an idea for a series that will speak to today’s creating radio spots, crafting video for worship that will allow the message to be heard more clearly?

Pray about how you might help the church have more of a PRESENCE in the world, allowing us to “STEP ACROSS” the chasms that exist between culture, generations and the experiences each person brings.

Thursday, September 7, 2017

Read The Book of Esther.

The Jews were deported from their home country a century before and many of them are now living in Persia. Esther, a Jew, is taken into the palace and King Xerxes is so delighted with her, he crowns her queen. Meanwhile, Haman, who hated the Jews, tricked the King into signing a decree that on a certain day of the year all the Jews would be destroyed.

Esther runs to her older cousin, Mordecai, who tells Esther that even though she doesn’t want to be PRESENT for this... “*What’s more, who can say but that you have been elevated to the palace for just such a time as this?*”

Esther is a wonderful story that shows how sometimes our PRESENCE can have ramifications on thousands of people...our presence can affect the future. Perhaps you are at North East UMC, living in this community, born into this time in the world, for "*just such a time as this.*"

God is ready to use you to make a difference, to serve a greater purpose...Pray that God will help you see that purpose and give you the encouragement to take the "NEXT STEP"...whatever that may be.

Friday, September 8, 2017

Read Philippians 2: 1-18.

Paul writes, "*You are to live clean, innocent lives as children of God in a dark world full of crooked and perverse people.*" There aren't many other places in scripture where our mission as Christians is stated so succinct and direct.

We are to have a presence in our world...we are to be a light in the darkness. Take time tonight to continue to pray about how you can have a greater presence for Christ in this world, helping others "STEP ACROSS" the chasm that exists between the darkness in this world and the light of Christ.

Saturday, September 9, 2017

Take time today to simply be in prayer, to crawl up in the lap of the Creator. Pray for North East UMC, for your pastor, the leadership, your church family. Pray for the church that we might follow God's leadings and directions, that we might be bold in "STEPPING ACROSS" and sharing the Gospel to a hurting world.

Don't forget to invite someone to church tomorrow!