

Devotions for the Week of April 15, 2018
3rd Sunday Of Easter
North East United Methodist Church
Rev. Dr. Drew M. Christian

Sunday, April 15, 2018

Read John 21:1-14

Jesus appears to the disciples a third time. This time it is along the Sea of Tiberius. The disciples are fishing and Jesus appears on the shore. The disciples are having no luck catching fish so Jesus tells them to cast their net on the other side of the boat. Suddenly their net is full with 153 fish and they recognize that the one on the shoreline is Jesus, Himself. Soon they are sitting with Jesus, breaking bread and having a meal together.

There are many messages throughout these verses. God's Word is full of wisdom. I think about how often we continue to cast our nets on our side of the boat, do things our way, expecting things to change. Yet, if we would only follow Jesus and be willing to do things differently, follow Him and cast our nets on the opposite side of the boat from which we are used to casting, even if it may be uncomfortable, we will experience extraordinary blessings. I think about how quick Peter jumped out of the boat and swam to Jesus once He recognized Him and I wonder do I jump for Jesus? Do I jump when Jesus says "GO" or do I argue, rationalize, pause, debate, and question? I think about how it is Jesus that feeds us for our mission, for the tasks that we have ahead of us. Am I feeding on the Lord, on His Word, on the banquet that He has set out on the shoreline of our lives?

Just take time to reflect on this scripture and on many of the thoughts and questions above. Jump in and swim to the One

who waits for you upon the shore. Sit and eat with Him. Talk but also listen.

Monday, April 16, 2018

Read John 21:1-14

John makes sure to point out in verse 7 that Peter was naked. Most likely Peter had on a loin cloth but in many translations, John uses the word "*naked*." Now Peter puts on "*his outer garment*" before jumping into the sea and swimming to Jesus. It was Jewish law that to offer greeting was a religious act and to carry out a religious act a man must be clothed. Therefore, before greeting Jesus Peter put on "*his outer garment*." But it is interesting that John uses the word "*naked*."

If we go back to Genesis 3, we find Adam and Eve after they eat of the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden that God forbade them to touch. Their eyes have been opened and they have discovered that they are naked. They have covered themselves with fig leaves sewn together, probably similar in size and covering to a loin cloth. When God appears, Adam and Eve hide. They hide for they are filled with shame and cannot stand before God.

Contrast this to Peter, the one who denied Christ three times. If any disciple, anyone, had reason to be filled with shame, to not be able to stand before God, before the Christ, it was Peter. When Christ appears in this natural setting along the Sea of Tiberius, rather than hide Peter jumps and runs to Christ. The power of sin...the power of guilt...the power of shame...has been broken. We can now run to Christ, no matter what we have done, and experience His forgiveness and be welcomed into His arms.

Have you ever found yourself like Adam and Eve hiding from God, staying home from church, feeling unworthy to worship or to pray? Stop it. Like Peter, jump out of the boat and swim to Jesus, confess your sins, and experience His grace. The power of shame, the power of sin, has been broken. The tomb is empty! He is risen! Give God thanks for His forgiveness and grace.

Tuesday, April 17, 2018

Read Isaiah 6:1-8 & 1 John 1:9

The prophet Isaiah has a vision of God seated on His throne and heavenly creatures surrounding the throne singing, "*Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty.*" Isaiah is afraid. He has come face-to-face with God and he quickly recognizes his sin, his unworthiness, that he is unclean. He is afraid because of his sin to come before a Holy and Perfect God.

Isaiah confesses his sin and God sends a seraph (or heavenly creature) down to touch his mouth and burn away Isaiah's shame and guilt. It is then Isaiah is able to stand before God and accept the call to go where God needs him.

Are you not coming before God because you are afraid? Are you afraid to stand before God, to go to Him, to come to His church, because of some past sin, some shame you are carrying? I John 1:9 says, "*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.*" Like Isaiah, simply confess your shame...confess your guilt...confess your sin...and instead of judgment...you will find forgiveness and compassion. Talk to God right now...make no more excuses...lift up all that you are carrying to Him. All of it!

Wednesday, April 18, 2018

Read Hosea 5

In Hosea 5, God speaks through the prophet to Israel and her people. The people of Israel have sinned against God... "*a spirit of prostitution in their heart; they do not acknowledge the Lord.*" God says through the prophet Hosea that Israel will be punished for their sin. There will be judgment. In verse 15, God says, "*Then I will return to my place until they admit their guilt and turn to me.*" God simply pulls back and waits. God waits until the people of Israel are ready to admit their guilt, to admit that they have turned against God. Corrie Ten Boom said, "*The purpose of being guilty is to bring us to Jesus. Once we are there then its purpose is finished.*"

God pulls back until the people recognize their guilt, their shame, and in recognizing it, understanding what they have done, they turn back to God. Have you admitted your guilt? Have you admitted your need for forgiveness? Have you gone to God and told Him you were sorry? Read Psalm 32.

God is simply waiting for you to turn to Him. Remember God made the first move. He sent His son, Jesus Christ, to die for you and to be raised from the dead, to offer you the gift of eternal life, to offer you the gift of God's love and adoption as His child. Now it's your turn. If you have strayed, simply turn back and God will be waiting with open arms to forgive and receive you.

Thursday, April 19, 2018

Read Luke 7:36-50

For today's devotion I thought I would share a story I heard a few years back. Read it and just take time to pray and reflect over Jenny's story.

Jenny was 13 and wild. Everyone agreed that she got wilder each passing month. Taller and more physically mature than many of her friends, she found it easy to attract older guys by merely tossing back her long, strawberry-blond hair and giving a faint smile. By the time she hit junior high school, she was experienced in all the vices the world could dangle before her.

Considering her home life, it would have been amazing if she would have turned out any other way. Her father, long out of the picture, had left her with her drug-using mother, who, in a warped attempt at bonding, actually provided drugs to Jenny so they could get high together.

Somehow, in spite of the blur of sex, drugs, and alcohol abuse, Jenny agreed to go with a friend to a junior high game night put on by a local church. Even though she didn't return in the following weeks, something in the youth pastor's short message found its way into her mind. He told a story about a prostitute, so sorry about the way she was living, that she cried at the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet dry with her hair.

Several years passed. Jenny grew more out of control, "raging" night after night.

At two one morning, a very stoned Jenny and her small clutch of girlfriends roamed the back roads of their little town after a party, when God began to break through to Jenny.

Suddenly the guilt, self-loathing, and despair that had been pressed down and layered with numbing narcotics for so long exploded in her mind. She was sick of her life, ashamed of her behavior, and desperately wanted God.

“Perhaps a church could help,” she reasoned, not considering that at two in the morning no one would likely be there who could help her. Breaking from her group of friends, Jenny made her way to the nearest church, a magnificent Catholic church set in finely manicured grounds.

Then she saw him. It was Jesus. He was standing on top of a concrete pad in a small garden next to the parking lot. His arms were outstretched. Jenny went to him.

Jenny dropped on her knees in front of this life-sized statue of Jesus and began to weep. Then the story she had heard years ago came to her. With tears of repentance she washed the feet of the statue, and with her long hair she dried off the immovable feet.

For a few moments the act of a broken heart made the feet of the statue as real as if they had been the very feet of the Savior himself.

The arms of Jesus are also outstretched for you. If you come to him, he will forgive you for your sins, release you from your guilt, and give you eternal life. He is not a statue in a garden but a living, risen Savior who wants to be your constant friend and companion.

Friday, April 20, 2018

Read James 5:16

We are not called to "*go it alone*." We are called to "*confess*" our sins to others, to have someone, a small group, another Christian to hold us accountable.

Who are you sharing your struggles with? Are you part of a small group? Do you have a Christian friend you can trust with your shame, your struggles? Don't deal with your shame alone, your struggles alone. Let us struggle together as we journey in the faith.

And remember there are so many people out there without Christ, without a church family. Begin a relationship with a stranger at church, with a neighbor you don't know. Be there for someone else who needs support and encouragement. Pray that God will lead you to someone you can trust with your struggles and lead someone to you who can begin to share their struggles with you.

Saturday, April 21, 2018

Read and reflect on the following scriptures from the Revised Common Lectionary for the coming week, the 4th Sunday of Easter. The scriptures for this coming week April 22nd are:

*Acts 4:5-12

*Psalm 23

*I John 3:16-24

*John 10:11-18

And don't forget to invite someone to church, to pick them up and bring them, so they may hear the Word of God, be part of a family of faith, and come to know Jesus!