

Devotions for the Week of March 31, 2019

4th Sunday of Lent

LARGE-PRINT

North East United Methodist Church

By Rev. Dr. Drew M. Christian

Sunday, March 31, 2019

Read John 3: 1-21; Luke 11: 9-13.

Within these verses lie the most quoted scripture in the Bible, *“For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him may not perish but may have eternal life.”* God certainly does give good gifts...God gave His only Son...and now everyone who believes in Him may have eternal life. Wow!

God loves us like a Father, like a friend...but we must choose to accept His love. One must make a choice. As W. Hulitt Gloer writes, *“To believe is to be saved. To refuse to believe is to stand condemned ‘already.’ By the decision we make we pronounce our own judgment...The coming of Jesus results in a crisis that demands a decision. Neutrality is not a possibility. In love, God sent Jesus to save the world, but each person must decide whether to believe/obey and live in the light or disobey and continue to live in the darkness. Our decision about Jesus determines our eternal destiny. Not to decide is to decide.”*

Lent is a time to reflect on our response to this amazing gift from God, the gift of His Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus makes it clear that believing, accepting the gift of God’s Son and eternal life, is more than simply affirming that Jesus is the Son of God and that He was raised from the dead. “Believe” is an action verb. It is something you do. Gloer writes, *“For John, the opposite of belief is not unbelief but disobedience. To believe, therefore, is to obey.”* Jesus makes this clear as He describes to Nicodemus how those whose *“deeds were evil...”* loved *“...darkness rather than light.”* Jesus says, *“For all who do evil hate the light...but those who do what is true come to the light.”* Clearly, for Jesus, one’s obedience, one’s actions, are directly

related to one's belief, whether or not one has put their faith in Christ, whether or not one has "*come to the light.*"

Do we believe? Is our life a life of obedience, showing that belief, showing that we have "*come to the light*" and have shunned the darkness? In what areas of our lives, the life of our church, is God calling us to obedience? Is our life a gifting back to God for the tremendous gift God has bestowed upon us? Take time to pray and reflect on such questions during this season of Lent..."*For God so loved YOU that He gave His only Son, so that [if YOU] believe in Him [YOU] may not perish but [YOU] may have eternal life.*"

Monday, April 1, 2019

Read the Lyrics to "Me & God" by Josh Turner.

*There ain't nothing that can't be done...By me and God
Ain't nobody GONNA come in between me and God
One day we'll live together...Where the angels trod...
Me and God*

*Early in the morning talking it over...Me and God
Late at night talking it over...Me and God
You could say we're like two peas in a pod...
Me and God*

*He's my Father...He's my friend
The beginning....And the end
He rules the world...With a staff and a rod
We're a team...Me and God*

*I am weak and he is strong...Me and God
He forgives me when I'm wrong...Me and God
He's the one I lean on...When life gets hard...Me and God*

*He's my Father...He's my friend
The beginning....And the end*

*He rules the world...With a staff and a rod
We're a team...Me and God*

Turner sings, *"There ain't nothing that can't be done By me and God...I am weak and he is strong...He's the one I lean on...When life gets hard...He's my friend."* How awesome is it to know we have someone to lean on, someone to talk to "night" and "day," someone to walk with us when life gets hard, someone to call "friend" when all others have deserted us.

This is what Jesus tells his disciples and us in John 15: 15-16, *"I no longer call you servants, because a master doesn't confide in his servants. Now you are my friends, since I have told you everything the Father told me. You didn't choose me. I chose you."* Think about that for a moment. God chose you to be His friend. Christ chose to call you friend.

I Peter 2: 9 reads, *"But you are a CHOSEN people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light."*

As God's "chosen people," as God's "friends," we can be assured that we are not alone in our trials and tribulations, in our life's journey. Romans 8: 31-32 states, *"What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all – how will he not also along with him, graciously give us all things?"*

Have you accepted His friendship? Do you know how it feels to be a "friend" of God? Do you know how it feels to know you are not alone? Do you know how it feels to know that you can talk to Him day or night?

Tuesday, April 2, 2019

Read Genesis 12: 1-9.

Let's take time this week to meet one who was considered a "friend" of God...Abraham. In Genesis, we read Abraham's story. When we first meet Abraham, his name is Abram. We discover that Abram was

born in the country of Chaldea, which is currently the country of Iraq. God speaks, telling Abram to go to another country.

In Genesis 12:1, God says to Abram, *“Leave your country, your people, and your father’s household and go to the land I will show you.”* Abram obeys God, packs up his things, and leaves...trusting in God’s promise to *“make [Abram] into a great nation.”* God planned to make of Abram a **new nation** from which the prophets of God would arise, and ultimately, the Savior of the world Himself. Thus, when God calls Abram, God is moving forward with **His plan** to bring the Redeemer into the world. That is why God said to Abram, *“You will be a blessing...and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”* (Gen. 12:2,3)

God offers Abram His hand of friendship and Abram accepts it...packing his bags and following God’s direction. Because Abram obeyed, he was called a friend of God.

James 2:23 reads, *“And the scripture was fulfilled that says, ‘Abraham **believed** God, and it was credited to him as righteousness, and he was called God’s friend.’”*

What does it mean to believe God? Obedience. The Old Testament was written in the Hebrew language. In Hebrew, the word for **"believe"** is **"AMAN"** from which we get our word **Amen**. When you say "Amen" you are simply saying, "Yes! It is true!" or "Yes, I agree!" This is what it means to believe. When God made a promise to Abram, Abram's heart response was: "Amen! Yes! It is true! I believe your words!" **Based on that simple "Amen" to the word of God, God counted Abram as righteous.** Abram believed God would keep His promise. He showed God He believed by being obedient. He packed his bags, grabbed his family, and left to the land God would show him.

Do you believe God will keep His promise to you? Do you believe God will keep the promises contained in the scriptures? Are you ready to shout “Amen,” “Yes, it is true!” and trust God with your life, going forth in obedience?

Wednesday, April 3, 2019

Read Luke 13: 34 and Luke 15:11-32.

Jesus cries out in Luke 13, *“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing.”*

Jesus says that His desire is to bring the children of Israel together...God says His desire is to bless Abram’s descendents, making them *“as numerous as the stars,”* building them into a *“great nation.”* Abram was willing to follow. Jesus states in Luke 13 that Israel has not been willing.

Jesus makes it clear that Israel and us have choice. We can choose to allow God to gather us together or to be out on our own. We can accept the gift of friendship that God offers, that Josh Tuner sings about, or not.

When someone offers us their hand, we must reach out and grab hold of it. Abram does this and because of it we are told that *“it was credited to him as righteousness and he was called God’s friend.”*

Isn’t this what Jesus shows us in the story of the Prodigal Son? The Prodigal Son was lost, off in a far away country, far from his father and any friendship with his father. The young man had to decide, had to make the choice, to return home to his father. His father ran to him when he saw him walking down the road, returning home, and offered him a robe, a ring, and the fatted calf. The young man had to accept these things and in accepting them became, once again, friends with his father...the relationship was reestablished.

Have you made the choice? Have you accepted God’s hand reaching out to you in friendship? Have you allowed God to gather you under His wings? Have you returned home?

Take the step...invite Christ, God’s very own Son, into your heart...Pray...and tell God you want His friendship...Tell Him that you will try to listen and follow...Ask Him for forgiveness, lifting up your mistakes...Believe.

Thursday, April 4, 2019

Read Genesis 12: 1-9; Titus 3: 4-7; and Revelation 21.

What is Abram promised if he listens, if he obeys, if he believes. God says to Abram, in Genesis 15: 18-20, *“To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates – the land of the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaites, Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites, and Jebusites.”* God tells Abram, *“I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you”* (Gen 12: 2).

Doesn't God also promise us a land...if we will go...if we will walk with Him? In Titus 3: 7, it is written, *“He declared us not guilty because of his great kindness. And now we know that we will inherit eternal life.”* Josh Turner sings, *“Ain't nobody GONNA come in between me and God... One day we'll live together... Where the angels trod... Me and God.”* Revelation 21 describes this land.

What a promise! And just like God kept His promise with Abraham...God will keep His promise with us. Take time tonight just to reflect on God's promise of a far-away land...God's promise of eternal life for those who believe.

Friday, April 5, 2019

**Read Gen. 12: 10-20; Gen. 16: 1-16; Gen. 20: 1-11;
& Gen. 17: 1-8.**

Abraham chose to listen and obey God...he believed that God was speaking truth...he believed that God was God...and he left his country and traveled to the land promised. But Abraham was not perfect. Twice he attempted to pass off his wife as his sister and he also agreed to try and hurry up the birth of his son by sleeping with his wife's maidservant, Hagar. In all three of these cases, he showed a lack of trust in God to provide & keep His promise of an heir.

Yet, in Genesis 17: 1-8, God says, *“I am God Almighty; walk before me and be blameless. I will confirm my covenant...and will greatly increase your numbers.”* How could Abram be BLAMELESS before God? He certainly wasn't perfect.

We must distinguish between “faultless” and “blameless.” No human being can live faultlessly – without sin (except Jesus Christ; see Hebrews 4:15). However, those who repent and believe are credited with righteousness. Romans 4: 1-3 tells us that Abraham was not accepted by God because of his deeds; in fact, the Bible says, “*Abraham believed God, and God declared him to be righteous.*” It wasn’t Abraham’s deeds but it was Abraham’s faith.

Paul explained this in Romans 3: 23-26, “*For all have sinned; all fall short of God’s glorious standard. Yet now God in his gracious kindness declares us not guilty. He has done this through Christ Jesus, who has freed us by taking away our sins. For God sent Jesus to take the punishment for our sins and to satisfy God’s anger against us. We are made right with God when we believe that Jesus shed his blood, sacrificing his life for us. God was being entirely fair and just when he did not punish those who sinned in former time...he is entirely fair and just in this present time when he declares sinners to be right in his sight because they believe in Jesus.*”

Even after accepting God’s friendship, Abraham fell, messed up and so will each of us, but there is forgiveness and grace. Turner sings, “*I am weak and he is strong Me and God...He forgives me when I’m wrong...*” Accept the relationship God is offering...believe in His Son...and when you mess up...immediately come to Him and repent...confess...seek forgiveness and reconciliation...God’s forgiveness is real and through Jesus and His sacrifice, we too can be “blameless” in God’s sight.

Saturday, April 6, 2019

Read 2 Corinthians 6:18 & Galatians 4:4.

God has adopted us as His very own children. As Turner sings, “*He’s my Father...He’s my Friend.*” What a gift! Me & God. Take time to simply give thanks and to talk to Him.

Remember to invite someone to church tomorrow.

