

Devotions for the Week of May 10, 2015

LARGE-PRINT

Janes United Methodist Church

By Rev. Dr. Drew M. Christian

Sunday, May 10, 2015

Read 1 Peter 2:5.

Today, we celebrate Mother's Day and remember those women in our lives who help make a home for us...who help raise us...who, though perhaps not our biological mother, inspire and encourage us, build us up. We celebrate the women who mold us, teach us, show us the areas we need to work on and walk with us on the journey.

God is ready to build us up as well, protecting us from the wind, rain and storms of life. The question is, "Will we let Him?" Will we let God build us up? Will we let God into our hearts and allow Him to pull out that which is holding us back? Allow God to mold us into the man or woman that God created us to be instead of saying "This is just the way I am"? Will we let God into our relationships, forgetting the foolish notion that we can "fix" things ourselves? Will we let God have control of our lives and allow Him to give us directions for life? Will we allow God to confront us with our addictions, bad habits, selfishness, pride, arrogance, and the many other faults and weaknesses that get in the way of us and our loved ones? Will we look in the mirror?

Take time this week to take a hard look at yourself. *Many times we want to makeover the other person when it is us that needs to get the extreme makeover.* What is it in your life, in your relationships, that you need to give over to God, which you need to allow God to change in you? Pray that God will show you the blemishes that He is ready to glaze over, to remold, and to remove if only you will surrender to Him and let Him "fix" it. Take time just sitting with God tonight and know that He is the potter and we are the clay. Let Him mold you into the likeness of His Son, Jesus Christ...Let Him mold your relationships into the likeness of the relationship between God and Christ, Himself.

Monday, May 11, 2015

Read John 19: 25-26.

Yesterday we celebrated Mother's Day. When the Hallmark cards come out it always makes me think, "Why don't we celebrate Mother's Day everyday...why give one day a year to honor such a noble profession, such an intimate relationship in our lives?" Jesus certainly did not live such an example. For Jesus, relationships were precedence, priority, and every day!

Jesus cared deeply for His mother...we see His love for her from the cross...as disregarding His own pain, He is only concerned with her well-being, giving her over to the "disciple whom he loved," to care for her and to be her son.

There is a tremendous scene in Mel Gibson's "The Passion of the Christ," where Mary runs to hold her son, a grown man, now carrying a cross, fallen on the street, blood pouring from the thorns in his head. As Mary runs to Him, there is a flashback of a small Jesus, a child, falling in the dirt, and Mary, His mother, running and picking Him up, loving on Him.

The love of a mother can be a powerful reminder of God's love. God's love has been described in scripture like a "*mother hen gathering her chicks.*"

For many of us our mothers have played a vital role in our upbringing and faith. John Wesley once said, *“I learned more about Christianity from my mother than from all the theologians of England.”* For many of us, our mother’s love and the love we share with our children, reminds us of the great love God has for us. For some of us, our mothers were not there...may have hurt us...may have neglected us...For us, we must remember that our God in heaven does not hurt or neglect us...our God in heaven offers us love that is beyond any earthly love we have ever experienced...As Paul writes in Romans, *“Nothing can separate us from the love of God...”*

As we think about the love God offers us that is even beyond the greatest of motherly love, it is a time to lift our mothers up in prayer...to lift up the mother of our children up in prayer. It is time to forgive our mothers who were not there for us. It is time to write to the mother we haven’t spoken to in a while. It is time to love like Christ loved...sacrificially and unconditionally, both our mothers and our children. And in loving them, remembering that Christ loved us so much, He gave His life for us...remembering that we are loved with an amazing love indeed! Give God thanks for the love He holds for you that is eternal in the heavens.

Tuesday, May 12, 2015

Read Romans 14:10-19.

When Paul wrote this letter to the church in Rome, there were a few problems. The Jews, who had converted to Christianity, had many food laws and Sabbath laws that they carried over into the Christian faith from their Jewish heritage and traditions. There were certain foods a Jew did not eat and a certain day of the week a Jew did not work. When Jews became Christians, they felt these rules should continue and that Gentiles (those outside the Jewish faith) who came to believe in Christ should abide by these rules. Paul knew that it didn’t really matter what you ate or what day you worshipped; what really mattered was in the heart. So Paul wrote to the church telling them not to *“judge another.”* He also wrote to them about not eating foods that someone else (whether they are wrong or not) believe to be *“unclean.”* In other words, sacrifice what you eat, even though you know God doesn’t care, if it is going to upset your brother or sister. Just think if everyone in the church lived by this principle today. Just think what it would be like if people were willing to give up their personal preferences, agendas, ways of doing things in order to show love and not upset their brother or sister who did things a bit differently.

Paul is not saying to compromise your faith...we are to stand firm on our faith in Jesus Christ. But Paul is saying that we are to be willing to give up our traditions, habits, and desires for another, just like, many times, our earthly mothers and fathers sacrifice for us. In your relationships, are you willing to give up your desires and lifestyle for another? For example, what if you really like to drink on the weekends but your best friend has struggled with alcohol...are you willing to give it up for the relationship? What if you really feel you need to watch that television show each week...it de-stresses you after work...but your spouse or children could really use your time then...are you willing to give it up? Perhaps you have a hobby that interferes with your relationships...could you let that hobby go? What are you willing to sacrifice for your relationships? As Paul says, *“Let us aim for harmony in [our relationships] and try to build each other up.”*

Take time to pray tonight. Is there anything you need to give up...even though it may be nothing wrong with it...to make your relationships stronger and more of a priority? Ask God for guidance.

Wednesday, May 13, 2015

Read I Samuel 1-4.

David and Jonathan had a very close relationship, one of the closest in the Bible. They were best friends and as we read in I Samuel, Jonathan made a “*special vow to be David’s friend.*” In an age when 50% of marriage ends in divorce, an age where promises are easily broken, such a vow, like the one Jonathan made, is seldom seen. In today’s society the “vow” has lost some of its power. As Christians we are called to hold to our vows. When we accept Christ, we are making a vow to follow Him, even when it is inconvenient. When we make a vow to our spouse, we are making a promise to be there through the darkest of times, to not give up. When we make a vow to a friend, we are to stand behind it. We make a vow to our children to be there for them through good and difficult times. We must be intentional about our relationships.

Dee Brestin, in *The Friendships of Women*, writes, “*The model we have in the New Testament is continued prayer, letter writing, and if possible, occasional visits to those who have been our cherished friends...we need to assess our real connections and then **remain true.***” We are to keep our vows. We are to build our friendships, being very intentional about keeping our relationships going. We are to put time into those relationships...writing letters, making phone calls, getting together, sacrificing our wants and time...Remember Jonathan gave up “*a robe, tunic, sword, bow, & belt*” to show how serious he was about his friendship with David.

We must focus on making our relationships work...it just doesn’t happen. Are you being intentional in keeping your relationships going...in making time with your spouse...in being with your children...in reaching out to the stranger? Pray that God will help you keep at the forefront of your mind your relationships every day...that God will help you reach out, keeping your vows, doing all you can to “remain true” to the “real connections” in your life.

Thursday, May 14, 2015

Read Mark 8:1-10.

Lynn Anderson, in *The Jesus Touch*, writes, “*Jesus was available to people; Jesus was sensitive to people; and Jesus was helpful to people...*” These are Three Basic “people principles” that need to frame our relationships. Anderson writes, “*These are...tools found in the Master’s tool chest for building relationships with people.*” In the story of Jesus feeding the thousands, we see how He had made Himself available to the people, He was sensitive to their needs for nourishment, and He was helpful in providing not just spiritual food, but physical food.

Jesus taught by example. Are you making yourself available to the people in your life? Are you being sensitive to their needs, their hurts, their hearts? Are you being helpful, reaching out to them, building them up? The best thing you can do in order to make yourself available, be sensitive, and help the people in your life and the people you cross paths with each day is to listen.

Jesus often said before teaching the crowds anything, *“He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.”* James 1:19 reads, *“My dear brothers and sisters, be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry.”* Bruce Larsen wrote, *“One of the best ways to demonstrate God’s love [in our relationships] is to listen to people.”* Walter Colton wrote, *“Man has been given two ears and only one tongue that he might listen twice as much as he speaks.”* Are you listening to your spouse? Are you listening to your children? Are you listening to your parents, your sibling, your friend? Are you truly listening to their hearts, their needs, their hurt, their joy? Are you listening or are you always talking, always trying to fix things, always trying to solve the problem? Are you listening or simply talking, sharing your problems, your needs, your issues...not being concerned about theirs? Just listen.

Pray to God that He will share with you someone you need to call up this weekend and simply listen to...someone you need to ask, “How is it going, really?” and then listen. Pray that God will teach you how to have more of a listening ear in your relationships.

Friday, May 15, 2015

Read James 5:16.

One of the most important characteristics of a good relationship is vulnerability. There must be an openness to sharing what is truly on our hearts...we must be willing to become transparent...to really share our innermost needs and hurts. In our relationships, we must not put on “airs” but instead be ourselves, “warts and all.” C.S. Lewis wrote, “Eros will have naked bodies; Friendship will have naked personalities.”

Read John 5:44.

Do you work to impress others...to not let others in? Can you imagine Jesus hiding His emotions to impress the crowds? Jesus was authentic and honest in His relationships...speaking the truth...often candid...no charades. We are often so worried about rejection we put on a façade. Be yourself...open your heart to the people in your life...get real with your spouse, your children, your friends, your siblings, your co-workers, the stranger. Let them know you are hurting just like them...that you need them as they need you....share your stories with one another.

Saturday, May 16, 2015

Read Luke 13:34; Deuteronomy 32:11-12; Deuteronomy 32:18; Isaiah 66:13; & Hosea 13:8.

I am often in awe of my wife and the tremendous mom she is to our boys. She loves them, prays for them, challenges them, and is always there for them. If anyone says something hurtful to them her “mother bear” will come out. The Bible does not only describe God as “Our Father” but also describes God as a comforting and protective mother, watching over her children. For some of us our earthly mothers were not always there...but our God in heaven will never hurt or neglect us. God’s love is perfect. We are God’s children. God gathers us together, hovers over us, and catches us when we fall. God molds and creates us, comforts us, and protects us. Give God thanks tonight for His love, His “motherly” care and devotion, for adopting us as His children and holding us to His bosom. What a blessing! What a privilege! What a comfort!

Read Revelation 22:1-5.

Of course, this week and every week I think of my mother. I miss her a great deal. I miss the times I traveled to Michigan and just sat with her, talking about books, watching

movies, sharing with her what Nate and Matthew were doing. She would always fix me her famous beef stew and when my brother would come over we would tease her, make her laugh.

My mom and dad were soulmates. After my dad died, my mom was never the same. She missed him so much. My mom was a gifted and published poet. In one of her poems written a few years after my dad's death she wrote, *"Oh, how primal is grief. The heart tin-foil bending. The chest a cabinet falling from its hinges. Years now and I talk with you every night. Tell our sons to release my ashes to the same ground and air where you linger, wait for the girl who first walked with you beneath the baring sycamores."*

And that is what my brother and I did...we drove to Harpers Ferry, WV and released her ashes *"to the same ground and air"* where my Dad's ashes were released...at a very special place held in both their hearts...overlooking God's amazing mountains and rivers...filled with living creatures...the sky filled with the many birds Mom loved to watch...God's creation which Mom and Dad loved so much...

But I know that is not where she is...I remember the day at Gethsemane Church, when I offered an invitation to accept Christ, to open one's heart, choosing to believe, that Christ was much more than a man, that He was the Son of God...I talked about how the scriptures call on us to make a public confession of our faith...Romans 10:9, *"If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."*

Only one person came to the altar that day...my mom...she hobbled up the aisle with her cane...in front of every watching eye...I am sure it was extremely difficult for her...she was extremely introverted...yet, she walked up the aisle and she knelt at the altar and invited Christ into her life...I know a place has been prepared for her.

John describes his vision of heaven in Revelation 22: 1-5. He writes, *"Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever."*

Some of you reading this may have also lost your moms as I have lost mine. They have left this world, this life. But as someone once wrote, *"Death is not extinguishing the light; it is putting out the lamp because the Dawn has come."* The scriptures tells us that God has created a place where *"Death will be no more, mourning and crying and pain will be no more..,"* a place where *"God will wipe every tear from the eyes."* A place where Jesus Christ *"will take these mortal bodies of ours and change them into glorious bodies like his own"* and where we will claim our citizenship as a child of God. As one of Mom's favorite writers, CS Lewis, described it, *"The term is over: the holidays have begun. The dream is ended: this is the morning."*

I miss my mom but I will see her again.

Don't forget invite someone to church tomorrow.