



WHERE LIFE & PURPOSE CONNECT

Grow, Pray, Study for the Week of October 29, 2023

Weekly Prayer

God of all creation, thank you for making me in your image and calling me your beloved. Focus my attention, that I notice the beautiful diversity in everything, and everyone, you have made. Help me to celebrate it and be curious, that as I grow in my understanding and love of your created world, I grow also in love of you. Help me also to be brave and bold, standing always for justice and peace. Make me to see, act, respect, and love others as you have loved. Amen.

Monday, October 30

Scripture: Revelation 7:9-17

After this I looked, and there was a great crowd that no one could number. They were from every nation, tribe, people, and language. They were standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They wore white robes and held palm branches in their hands. They cried out with a loud voice:

“Victory belongs to our God
who sits on the throne,
and to the Lamb.”

All the angels stood in a circle around the throne, and around the elders and the four living creatures. They fell facedown before the throne and worshipped God, saying,

“Amen! Blessing and glory
and wisdom and thanksgiving
and honor and power and might
be to our God forever and always. Amen.”

Then one of the elders said to me, “Who are these people wearing white robes, and where did they come from?” I said to him, “Sir, you know.” Then he said to me, “These people have come out of great hardship. They have washed their robes and made them white in the Lamb’s blood. This is the reason they are before God’s throne. They worship him day and night in his temple, and the one seated on the throne will shelter them. They won’t hunger or thirst anymore. No sun or scorching heat will beat down on them, because the

Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them. He will lead them to the springs of life-giving water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”

Observation

Revelation is a book written to a people in pain and persecution under the cruel reign of Emperor Domitian. It’s written, not to be a “fortune telling” of the end times, as some suggest. Rather, it is written to speak truth to power and comfort people who are suffering. Our hope, even in the midst of any present struggle, is that God will have the final say. God’s kingdom will be a place where we are united as one body, where we no longer hunger or thirst, where we do not die tragically, or endure any oppressions of our current world. Our promised hope is that God will be with us, and bring all of God’s beloveds to a place of peace and unity. The passage today shares a glimpse of that vision.

Application

As you read this passage, what type of diversity do you see present in God’s kingdom vision? As I read this, I picture a crowd gathered at a Presidential Inauguration, or at the 1985 Live Aid concert (*I’m too young to remember it but have seen the photos and movies!*). Do you remember the images of Freddie Mercury performing to a crowd so big, you cannot see its ending? This is the image I have as I read the passage today. A crowd as far as the eye can see, including people of every age, gender, and race. I imagine people of varying nationalities, abilities, political ideologies, and tax brackets coming together to join their collective voices in praise. What is bringing them together in unity? It is praise of our God, who “leads them to springs of life-giving water.” How is this same God guiding you toward unity and nurturing you by the life-giving water?

Prayer

Holy and mighty God, you who set the stars in their courses, and who gave light and life to all people, I know you hear the cries of your people yet today, longing for life-giving water. Help me to be your hands and feet in this world, actively working to bring about your kingdom here on earth. Give me opportunities today to love you by loving those in need, Amen.

Tuesday, October 31

Scripture: 1 Samuel 28:7-20

Translation by Robert Alter, in his work [Ancient Israel: The Former Prophets: Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings:](#)

“Saul said to his servants, “Seek me out a ghostwife, that I may go to her and inquire through her.” And his servants said to him, “There is a ghostwife at Ein-Dor.” Saul disguised himself and put on different clothes, and he went—he together with two men—and they came to the woman by night, and he said, “Conjure me, pray, a ghost, and summon up the one I say to you.”

The woman said to him, "Look, you yourself know that Saul cut off the ghosts and the familiar spirits from the land. Why do you entrap me to have me put to death?" Saul swore to her, saying, "As the LORD lives, no blame will befall you through this thing." And the woman said, "Whom shall I summon up for you?"

He said, "Summon Samuel for me." When the woman saw Samuel, she screamed in a loud voice. The king said to her, "Do not fear. But what do you see?" And the woman said to Saul, "A god do I see rising up from the earth." He said to her, "What does he look like?" She said, "An old man rises up, and he is wrapped in a cloak." Saul knew that it was Samuel, and he bowed to the ground and did obeisance.

Samuel said, "Why have you troubled me?" And Saul said, "I am in dire straits, the Philistines are fighting against me and God has turned away from me and no longer answers me, neither through prophets nor dreams, so I called to you to let me know what I should do."

Samuel said, "Why do you ask me, when the LORD has turned away from you and become your foe? The LORD has done to you as He spoke through me, and the LORD has torn the kingship from your hand and given it to your fellowman, to David. In as much as you did not heed the voice of the LORD and you did not carry out His burning wrath against Amalek, therefore has the LORD done this thing to you this day! And the LORD shall give Israel, together with you, into the hands of the Philistines. Tomorrow, you and your sons will be with me. The camp of Israel, too, shall the LORD give into the hand of the Philistines." Saul flung himself full length on the ground, as he was very frightened by Samuel's words. ~1 Samuel 28:7-20

Observation

Today is Halloween, so it seems fitting to enjoy a "spooky story" from scripture today. Saul seeks out "the witch of endor" to help him talk to Samuel, who has died. Though Saul himself has forbidden the conjuring of spirits, he is desperate for advice. This witch was unfamiliar with calling anyone back from the dead, so when Samuel appears she screams! Samuel gives Saul advice but ends with a halloween-worthy fright: "tomorrow you and your sons will be with me." And it was true; the next day, Saul dies.

Application

Today we take a slight deviation from our theme for the week, to enjoy a "spooky story" -- and one I can almost guarantee you haven't learned in Sunday School or heard preached on a Sunday morning! Saul has been troubled and feels abandoned by God. He takes matters into his own hands, looks for answers elsewhere.

I wonder, how often do we find ourselves impatient when we wait for God to answer? How often are we tempted to create our own answers, or fall to temptation in listening to voices other than God's? How might this story be different if Saul had waited on God's wisdom to be revealed?

Isn't this something we're all tempted to do -- find our own way, rather than wait and rely on God. I wonder what worries or struggles you have today that require extra patience as you wait on God's wisdom? And what surprising people might God use to reveal your next steps?

Prayer

God, give me patience and endurance today, that I might trust in you with my whole self. Give me wisdom to discern your voice, and courage to follow your word. Help me to stay focused on you, and forgive me when I fail. Amen.

Wednesday, November 1

Scripture: Romans 12: 3-8

Because of the grace that God gave me, I can say to each one of you: don't think of yourself more highly than you ought to think. Instead, be reasonable since God has measured out a portion of faith to each one of you. We have many parts in one body, but the parts don't all have the same function. In the same way, though there are many of us, we are one body in Christ, and individually we belong to each other. We have different gifts that are consistent with God's grace that has been given to us. If your gift is prophecy, you should prophesy in proportion to your faith. If your gift is service, devote yourself to serving. If your gift is teaching, devote yourself to teaching. If your gift is encouragement, devote yourself to encouraging. The one giving should do it with no strings attached. The leader should lead with passion. The one showing mercy should be cheerful.

Observation

The whole of chapter 12, is a beautiful piece of scripture teaching us how to live, and love, as the body of Christ. In these verses, we're reminded of the great variety of gifts that we share. One reason that God has created us in community, is so we can share, develop, and celebrate our gifts with one another. Here, we're reminded that it is our duty to make use of the gifts God has given, and to receive the gifts of others.

Application

What are the gifts God has given you? Is it to teach, or to create, to sing, or to write? How do you share them with the body of Christ? And what gifts do you receive from others, experiencing them only because of the generosity of others? Take time today to thank God for the diversity present within and around us.

Prayer

Great and glorious God, thank you for trusting me with gifts of: _____. Help me to find opportunities to share these gifts with others. Thank you for the diversity present throughout your creation; may we find ways to celebrate and embrace the varied gifts of your beloveds. Amen.

Thursday, November 2

Scripture: Romans 12:9-21

Love should be shown without pretending. Hate evil, and hold on to what is good. Love each other like the members of your family. Be the best at showing honor to each

other. Don't hesitate to be enthusiastic—be on fire in the Spirit as you serve the Lord! Be happy in your hope, stand your ground when you're in trouble, and devote yourselves to prayer. Contribute to the needs of God's people, and welcome strangers into your home. Bless people who harass you—bless and don't curse them. Be happy with those who are happy, and cry with those who are crying. Consider everyone as equal, and don't think that you're better than anyone else. Instead, associate with people who have no status. Don't think that you're so smart. Don't pay back anyone for their evil actions with evil actions, but show respect for what everyone else believes is good. If possible, to the best of your ability, live at peace with all people. Don't try to get revenge for yourselves, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath. It is written, *Revenge belongs to me; I will pay it back, says the Lord.* Instead, *If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink. By doing this, you will pile burning coals of fire upon his head.* Don't be defeated by evil, but defeat evil with good.

Observation

Living in faithful community is not easy. With our varied gifts, experiences, and ideas, any relationship or community is bound to experience disagreement. As Wesley reminded us, we are not called to *think* alike, but to love alike. This passage teaches us what it is to love one another. Among other things, it says: love is sincere, seeking goodness. It is hopeful, patient, and prayerful. Love practices hospitality.

Application

Let's practice a reading called "lectio divina". Read through the passage slowly. What word or phrase stood out to you? Meditate on that phrase. Read the passage again. What word or phrase stood out to you? Was it the same or different? Read it a third time. And again: what stands out? Perhaps these words or phrases can be comfort to a weary heart, guidance for your day, or encouragement in your loving. Write them down and carry them with you today.

Prayer

God of love, you are patient and kind, you are merciful and the definition of love. Guide me to be more loving today. Help me learn from you, revealing to me what is mine to do, and mine to learn. Amen.

Friday, November 3

Scripture: Luke 14:7-14

When Jesus noticed how the guests sought out the best seats at the table, he told them a parable. "When someone invites you to a wedding celebration, don't take your seat in the place of honor. Someone more highly regarded than you could have been invited by your host. The host who invited both of you will come and say to you, 'Give your seat to this other person.' Embarrassed, you will take your seat in the least important place. Instead, when you receive an invitation, go and sit in the least important place. When your host approaches you, he will say, 'Friend, move up here to a better seat.' Then you will be

honored in the presence of all your fellow guests. All who lift themselves up will be brought low, and those who make themselves low will be lifted up.” Then Jesus said to the person who had invited him, “When you host a lunch or dinner, don’t invite your friends, your brothers and sisters, your relatives, or rich neighbors. If you do, they will invite you in return and that will be your reward. Instead, when you give a banquet, invite the poor, crippled, lame, and blind. And you will be blessed because they can’t repay you. Instead, you will be repaid when the just are resurrected.”

Observation

Today Jesus is telling us a parable about a great banquet, a wedding feast. He challenges us, in planning this event, not to invite friends or colleagues, not to invite people of status – but instead, to invite those who cannot repay you: the poor, the marginalized, the forgotten.

Application

Again and again, Jesus invites us to extend the table, so that there is room for all people. How might you practice this today: can you smile and say hello, can you help, or consider someone who is “unlike” you and perhaps feels forgotten? How might you remind them that they are worthy and valued guests of honor at God’s table?

Prayer

Holy Christ, you have set a table and invited me to your banquet feast. When I feel discouraged, remind me that you love and see *all of me*. And help me to live in such a way that my words and actions help make wide your table, inviting, seeing, and loving those around me. Amen.

Saturday, November 4

Scripture: Isaiah 43:9-13

All the nations are gathered together;
the peoples are assembled.

Which of them announced this?

Who predicted to us the past events?

Let them bring their witnesses as a defense;
let them hear and say, “It’s true!”

You are my witnesses, says the LORD,
my servant, whom I chose,
so that you would know and believe me
and understand that I am the one.

Before me no god was formed;
after me there has been no other.

I, I am the LORD,
and there is no savior besides me.

I announced, I saved, I proclaimed,

not some stranger among you.
You are my witnesses, says the LORD,
and I am God.
From the dawn of time, I am the one.
No one can escape my power.
I act, and who can undo it?

Observation

We end the week near where we begin: “all nations are gathered together; the peoples are assembled” (v9). And again, the voices of the crowds bring praise to God. Who in turn, reminds us that our God is everlasting, strong, and faithful. And still, God chose *you* to be one with whom God partners to bring about the kingdom. “You are my witnesses, says the LORD, my servant, whom I chose, so that you would know and believe me and understand that I am the one” (v10).

Application

How incredible is it that *our God*, who created and redeemed the whole universe, chooses *you* to be God’s partner and witness? You get to know God’s love intimately, and you have been explicitly invited to share it with others. Can you feel the weight and power, the care and trust in this? Rest today, knowing that you are God’s beloved. God not only takes great delight in *you*, but thinks you are the perfect witness to God’s love in the world.

Prayer

God of all time, the magnitude of your power and love is beyond my understanding. And yet, you have chosen to love, redeem, and invite me to follow in the steps of your Son. Thank you, dear God. Amen.