

Grow, Pray, Study for the Week of June 30, 2024

Weekly Prayer

Everlasting Lord, thank you for your abundant grace. May your joy be my joy. May your peace be my peace. Strengthen and sustain me today, surrounding me with your loving grace. Amen.

Monday, July 1

Scripture: John 3:15-16, 21-22

so that everyone who believes in him will have eternal life. God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him won't perish but will have eternal life.

Whoever does the truth comes to the light so that it can be seen that their actions were done in God."

After this Jesus and his disciples went into Judea, where he spent some time with them and was baptizing.

Observation

"The people were filled with expectation" (v15) and it strikes me that the people are *not* filled with surprise. They are waiting and anticipating God to show up among them, expecting God to be revealed through John the Baptist, Jesus, and the waters of Baptism. The gathered crowds would not have found baptism to be an unfamiliar practice; water is a naturally cleansing element and symbolically used in almost every religion.

Application

For most of us, baptism is not a surprising event either, but is an expected and familiar ritual of the church. And still, God is at work in holy ways through the baptismal waters. How is it that you might wait with eager expectation for God's presence, *even* in the familiar places of your day?

Prayer

Dear Jesus, help me to wait eagerly for your presence to be revealed to me today. Keep me expectant and watchful, so that I see you at work in, around, and through me today. Amen.

Tuesday, July 2

Scripture: Luke 3:1-8

In the fifteenth year of the rule of the emperor Tiberius—when Pontius Pilate was governor over Judea and Herod was ruler over Galilee, his brother Philip was ruler over Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias was ruler over Abilene, during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas—God's word came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. John went throughout the region of the Jordan River, calling for people to be baptized to show that they were changing their hearts and lives and wanted God to forgive their sins. This is just as it was written in the scroll of the words of Isaiah the prophet,

A voice crying out in the wilderness:

*"Prepare the way for the Lord;
make his paths straight.*

*Every valley will be filled,
and every mountain and hill will be leveled.*

*The crooked will be made straight
and the rough places made smooth.
All humanity will see God's salvation."*

Then John said to the crowds who came to be baptized by him, "You children of snakes! Who warned you to escape from the angry judgment that is coming soon? Produce fruit that shows you have changed your hearts and lives. And don't even think about saying to yourselves, Abraham is our father. I tell you that God is able to raise up Abraham's children from these stones.

Observation

Nearly four hundred years had gone by with no clear prophetic voice in Israel, and the people were spiritually hungry and waiting. When John the Baptist entered the scene, he offered a needed prophetic voice that the people had longed to hear for generations. He called them to change their ways, to seek forgiveness, and be transformed by God.

Application

John had a clear vision for how children of God were to live. Do you have a clear vision for the ordering of your days? The ways you follow Jesus? Even as the people longed for the presence and voice of the prophet, accepting his words wasn't always easy! What change or practice might God be calling you into that is challenging to accept? How might you seek God's grace today?

Prayer

Everlasting God, you have spoken through prophets throughout the ages. You have called us to follow you faithfully and be transformed. Help me to accept and embrace your vision for my life. Help me to have courage and willingness to change. Amen.

Wednesday, July 3

Scripture: Matthew 3:11, 13-17

I baptize with water those of you who have changed your hearts and lives. The one who is coming after me is stronger than I am. I'm not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.

At that time Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan River so that John would baptize him. John tried to stop him and said, "I need to be baptized by you, yet you come to me?" Jesus answered, "Allow me to be baptized now. This is necessary to fulfill all righteousness." So John agreed to baptize Jesus. When Jesus was baptized, he immediately came up out of the water. Heaven was opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God coming down like a dove and resting on him. A voice from heaven said, "This is my Son whom I dearly love; I find happiness in him."

Observation

John had been preaching, "The one who is coming after me is stronger than I am. I'm not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire" (3:11). Then Jesus appeared. Instead of saying, "Stand aside, John—the main act is here with strength and fire," Jesus joined the line of people waiting for baptism. "John, of course, is horrified.... Surely if anything he, John, needs to be baptized by Jesus himself?" What can we learn from these four verses?

Application

Jesus' baptism signals a few things for us: (1) it reminds us that *all* people are invited to be baptized (not only Gentiles, but all followers), (2) and it is a modeling to us of the kind of servant leadership Jesus will offer. He stands among us and in solidarity with us. Christ knows the human experience fully, and promises to be with us, redeeming us, through it all.

Prayer

Loving Christ, your world-changing impact came to us through small acts of love. Just as you welcome all people and stand among us, help me to offer the same to all those I meet. Open my heart to love others more deeply. Remove from me any sense of fear or judgement, and fill me with grace. Amen.

Thursday, July 4

Scripture: Matthew 28:16-20

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus told them to go. When they saw him, they worshipped him, but some doubted. Jesus came near and spoke to them, "I've received all authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything that I've commanded you. Look, I myself will be with you every day until the end of this present age."

Observation

Jesus' resurrection was not the end of his story. It launched a new chapter in establishing his eternal kingdom. As people who believe Jesus is alive, we don't just sit idly and watch God search for others. Jesus' "marching orders" to his followers were that we be his witnesses, making disciples, baptizing and teaching, active partners in God's work of calling humans back to God. God would empower them for their mission. It's still our mission, and Jesus promised to be with us every day.

Application

In what ways does believing that Jesus rose from the dead change your heart and life? In what ways are you gifted to help carry out Jesus' command?

Prayer

Redeeming God, you have saved and transformed me by water and the word. So inspire me, that my whole life be transformed by your grace. Guide me today, that I might follow your invitation to make disciples and follow you. Amen.

Friday, July 5

Scripture: Acts 2:38-41, 10:45-48

The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles. They heard them speaking in other languages and praising God. Peter asked, "These people have received the Holy Spirit just as we have. Surely no one can stop them from being baptized with water, can they?" He directed that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they invited Peter to stay for several days.

Observation

Jesus commissioned his followers to "make disciples, baptizing them." The book of Acts is full of

stories of how seriously they took that commission. Baptism developed from only a personal act into an expression of identity with the church, the body of God's people.

Application

Baptism is a public ritual that celebrates that you are part of God's family. It also includes a public commitment to follow Jesus and be part of a faith community. When an infant is baptized, others make these promises on their behalf. And we're reminded that God's grace guides all we do (this infant is part of God's family because of God's loving grace, not their own initiation!) When older children or adults are baptized (or affirm their baptismal promises at confirmation), they take their baptismal vows themselves – but continue to do so in the presence of a faith community, a reminder that we are connected to one another.

As a refresher, here are the baptismal vows of the United Methodist Church:

- On behalf of the whole Church, I ask you: Do you renounce the spiritual forces of wickedness, reject the evil powers of this world, and repent of your sin? I do.
- Do you accept the freedom and power God gives you to resist evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves? I do.
- Do you confess Jesus Christ as your Savior, put your whole trust in his grace, and promise to serve him as your Lord, in union with the Church which Christ has opened to people of all ages, nations, and races? I do.
- According to the grace given to you, will you remain faithful members of Christ's holy Church and serve as Christ's representatives in the world? I will.

Prayer

Jesus, thank you for the waters of baptism and making me part of God's family. Help me today to follow the promises of baptism through my prayers, presence, gifts, service, and witness. Amen.

Saturday, July 6

Scripture: Romans 6:1-4

So what are we going to say? Should we continue sinning so grace will multiply? Absolutely not! All of us died to sin. How can we still live in it? Or don't you know that all who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore, we were buried together with him through baptism into his death, so that just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too can walk in newness of life.

Observation

Baptism not only celebrates that we are part of God's family, it intimately connects us to the death and resurrection of Jesus as well. This makes us not only recipients of his redeeming grace, but makes us partners with Christ to share this transforming love with the world. Paul saw baptism is much more than simply a ritual. The waters of baptism mark a change within us – and the way we move and act in the world should be markedly changed as well.

Application

How is it that Jesus has made a difference in your life? How is it that the gift of baptism encourages and guides you? (If you have never been baptized, and are interested – please email me and let's chat!).

Prayer

Jesus, you have seen me and you know me. Guide me today to experience fully the gift of new life in you, Amen.