

DEVOTIONS – for the week of 3/2/20:

Monday, 3-2-20: John 3:16 & 17; John 21: 15-19

As I have shared, Linda and I have just returned from Washington, DC. Linda needed to be in Washington for a series of meetings and our daughter, Kirsten, is attending Graduate School in D.C. ---

Inspired by a walk to the Lincoln Memorial, I realized that my PERSPECTIVE of our country had become a bit distorted ... and in this thought, it occurred to me that likewise, we sometimes become distorted SPIRITUALLY when we EMBRACE the thinking of this world or the thinking to which we are 'naturally prone' THAT MAY THEN DISTORT OUR VIEW OF GOD and HIS LOVE OF US ... there are TIMES WHEN WE NEED TO RESET AND REFRESH our soul and our spirits SO THAT WE MIGHT SEE GOD (and OURSELVES) MORE RIGHTLY ... and MORE CORRECTLY ...

Let me share a paraphrased version of John 3:16-17: *For God so loved the world that he gave us Jesus, SO THAT who so ever believes in Jesus shall not die in spirit but live as was intended from the beginning.* ¹⁷ **For God did not send Jesus into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. John 3:16-17** (slightly paraphrased)

As I have been praying for the church, our church, SHUMC ... the thoughts came to me regarding how many of us are susceptible to embracing feelings of SELF-CONDEMNATION, GUILT and SHAME ... God never intended for us to live under the identity of CONDEMNATION OR GUILT ... John 3:17 reminds us that JESUS DID NOT COME TO EARTH to CONDEMN US, BUT TO RESCUE US FROM CONDEMNATION ---

THIS IS HUGE!!! Too often we consider God's judgment and fail to see that His motivation --- is LOVE --- it is not to hurt us, but to draw us into the position of God's beloved family and God's protective and enabling embrace.

As I pondered our human tendency to EMBRACE & ALLOW guilt and condemnation to mark us and identify us, I imagine what and how Peter must have felt after he betrayed Jesus the night before the day we know as Good Friday ... (Luke 22:47-62; Matthew 26:47-56 & Mark 14:43-50) ... HAVE YOU EVER FELT LIKE PETER MAY HAVE?

In spite of Peter's bold proclamation that he would stand with Jesus through any and all circumstances ... Peter withered when asked whether he was one of Jesus' disciples ... Peter took on the guilt and shame of his denying Jesus.

I believe that Peter was on the verge of taking on the identity that he was no longer worthy of being a disciple of Jesus and that his prospect of ever being used by God was perhaps forever lost.

Yet, we read in John 21 that Jesus extended himself to Peter ... and upon Peter's CONFESSION of his love for Jesus ... Jesus RECOMMISSIONED PETER for Kingdom work that was yet to be done ... to FEED CHRIST'S SHEEP ... TO CARE FOR CHRIST'S CHURCH ... JESUS' FLOCK ...

With our CONFESSION OF LOVE and SEEKING RESTORATION ... Jesus LIFTS the GUILT and SHAME OF THIS WORLD FROM US and OFFERS US a RENEWED & REFRESHED PERSPECTIVE ... and sets us back on track to live for Him ... and to help the Kingdom of God on this earth ... to be the church that God wants us to be ...

Not crippled by self-embraced shame and guilt ... BUT RELEASED BY GOD'S LOVE ... as Jesus extended his love and embrace to PETER ... so to, Jesus extends to you and me --- NOT CONDEMNATION BUT EMBRACE ... and WORK TO DO ... A MISSION TO BE ACCOMPLISHED!

God loves you and has more work for you to do ... WILL YOU EMBRACE & ACCEPT CHRIST'S INVITATION TO YOU TO BE A PART OF HIS VISION & PLAN FOR YOUR LIFE AND FOR SHUMC? Will you OPEN your heart and mind to God's love, care & provision for you?

DEAR GOD, Please accept my CONFESSION that YOU ARE GOD (and I am not) ... as Jesus extended forgiveness and restoration to Peter ... may you extend to me YOUR LOVE & EMBRACE ... HELP ME TO ACCEPT YOUR LOVE AND YOUR COMMISSION TO GO AND TO MAKE DISCIPLES ... BUILDING UP ONE ANOTHER SO THAT WE, THE CHURCH, SHUMC ... MAY BE A HEAVENLY OUTPOST ... A LIGHT ON A HILL ... POINTING PEOPLE TO YOUR DIVINE EMBRACE ... AND A REFRESHED PERSPECTIVE OF WHO WE ARE IN JESUS' LOVE AND EMBRACE. IN JESUS' NAME, AMEN.

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.” Jeremiah 29:11-13

A week ago Sunday, I had the joy of being in Washington, DC. The weather was spectacular – a beautiful, sunny and comfortable spring day... Linda was in meetings ... Kirsten, who is in the Graduate MBA program at Georgetown, was studying for mid-terms and finals...I had several hours to myself ... so, I began to walk ... I walked along 23rd Street until I came to the LINCOLN MEMORIAL.

Whoaaa ... the LINCOLN MEMORIAL is a remarkably oversized and majestic monument that looks down upon the Washington Monument.

I had forgotten how big it is in its grandeur as it presides over the Mall & the Reflecting Pool towards the Washington Monument and then beyond to the Capital. Everything paled in size and comparison.

I climbed the steps and gazed upon Lincoln perched in what seemed like a mighty throne ... I took a deep breath ... and my spirit calmed ... so much contentiousness and seeming disarray immates from our nation’s capital ... yet, when you’re there ... when you walk the streets of Georgetown --- the oldest of the DC neighborhoods --- having survived so much history ... and then to experience the Lincoln Memorial ... well, I regained a perspective that our country ... our nation ... is more than I often remember ... and that it has survived and thrived in the midst of soooo much.

And this is true of our faith ... the wonder and grandeur of the Kingdom of heaven is so much more than ANY capital in this world ... AND we need to remember that as Christian Believers --- we are CITIZENS OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD --- BOTH IN THIS WORLD AND EVEN MORE, IN THE WORLD TO COME.

PERSPECTIVE MATTERS --- and last Sunday, my PERSPECTIVE was RESET --- no longer centered upon me and my feelings and my perspectives ... BUT UPON THE PERSPECTIVE of our country’s roots ... our country’s heritage ... and our country’s history ...

My spirit was calmed – both in terms of our country, BUT EVEN MORE, in terms of the KINGDOM OF GOD, The KINGDOM OF HEAVEN. How much more is the Kingdom of God than any of the kingdoms of this world ... how much more can we find strength for the day in remembering the things of God ...

- a. **in God’s nature and God’s purposes** ...
- b. **in God’s love for his children** ... and
- c. **in God’s desire for us to know and enjoy Him** -- to live in the fullness and abundance of His care and His provisions for us.

I began to think about the ‘Rat Race of Our Lives’ and all that robs us of the PROPER PERSPECTIVE of GOD and HIS PURPOSES and HIS WAYS ...

As I prayed and thought ... my heart turned towards some of our ‘joy robbers’ ... things that steal God’s joy & confidence from us And I thought of things **that we embrace and that we allow to color our PERSPECTIVE** ... such as:

- + SHAME & GUILT
- + CONDEMNATION – both SELF-CONDEMNATION & the CONDEMNATION IMPUTED UPON US BY OTHERS

TOO OFTEN, we feel condemned by our own expectations and by the judgments of others ... we lose sight of GOD’S LOVE and GOD’S NATURE ... HOW WE ARE IN GOD’S PERSPECTIVE ... Consider these Scripture references from the Bible:

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.” Jeremiah 29:11-13

- God DID NOT CREATE ALL OF CREATION (including you and me) for ANYTHING LESS than GOD's BEST!
- God's PLAN was for us to CARE FOR & ENJOY His created planet that we call earth ... and for us to care for one another

God's plan was for us to KNOW GOD, ENJOY GOD ... and to WALK WITH HIM as Adam and Eve walked with Him in the Garden.

I WOULD LIKE TO ENCOURAGE YOU TODAY ... Close your eyes and imagine a spiritual equivalent of my walk to the Lincoln Memorial. **Re-read Jeremiah 29:11-13.**

GOD loves you and has plans for you...not to harm you but to see you be and become His beloved children. You are not condemned but made free by the love and work of Jesus the Christ. All you need to do is OPEN YOUR HEART and MIND to the message of Jeremiah 29:11-13 ...

DO YOU ACCEPT GOD's PLAN FOR YOU?

ARE YOU WILLING TO SET ASIDE YOUR MIS-PERCEPTIONS OF YOURSELF and OF GOD?

ARE YOU WILLING TO LIVE INTO THE PLAN THAT GOD HAS FOR YOU? TO HELP YOU AND TO GIVE YOU A HOPE AND A FUTURE?

Dear God, please help me not only to BELIEVE but to ACCEPT & EMBRACE YOUR DIVINE PLAN FOR MY LIFE. HELP ME TO LET GO OF THE PERSPECTIVES OF THIS WORLD AND HELP ME TO EMBRACE AND ACCEPT YOUR PLANS FOR MY LIFE. IN JESUS' NAME, AMEN.

Wednesday, March 4 Isaiah 43:1-2

But now, this is what the Lord says:

“Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; & you are mine.

When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and

When you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you.

When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned;

the flames will not set you ablaze.” **Isaiah 43:1-2**

I pray that you will be encouraged today to know that GOD is wild about you!

God has done everything needed for us to KNOW HIM and to EXPERIENCE HIS PRESENCE & PROTECTION IN OUR LIVES.

These words from Isaiah remind us that GOD HAS REDEEMED US and that GOD IS WITH US.

As I have written, we were in Washington, DC last week.

I have always relied upon and used a ‘paper map’ to help navigate my way from ‘point A’ to ‘point B’. This trip, however, with Linda’s encouragement, we used and relied upon GOOGLE EARTH.

What a wonderful innovation and gift! It talked to us. It corrected us. It put us on the right path, even when we deviated from the original plan. I love GOOGLE EARTH!

And it occurred to me ... for all these years that I have been avoiding and even resisting on-line navigation help ... I have come to know and experience GPS in an all new way! THANK YOU, GOD!

As Christians, I want you to have the spiritual equivalent of my experience with GOOGLE EARTH.

GOD IS WITH US ... GOD WILL HELP US ... GOD WILL PROTECT US ... GOD WILL BE AND DO ALL THAT WE NEED TO HELP US GET TO THE PLACE WHERE GOD WANTS US TO BE!!!!

ALL WE NEED TO DO IS:

1. TUNE IN
2. LISTEN
3. RESPOND ACCORDING TO THE DIRECTIONS

ISN'T it the same with GOD ... all we need to do is:

1. TUNE IN
2. LISTEN
3. RESPOND to the DIRECTIONS – TO ACT ACCORDINGLY

(and if we do not --- God will then give us new directions to get back on track!)

Dear God, THANK YOU for redeeming us and for getting us ‘back on track’ ... and then for being with us each step of the way .. caring for us, helping us and getting through everything that swirls around us. THANK YOU, GOD. Amen.

THURSDAY, March 5 Zephaniah 3:17

One of my favorite and most encouraging verses from the Bible are the words from the prophet Zephaniah:

*The Lord your God is with you,
the Mighty Warrior who saves.
He will take great delight in you;
in his love he will not rebuke you,
but will rejoice over you with singing."*

Zephaniah 3:17

IMAGINE:

GOD IS WITH YOU
GOD TAKES GREAT DELIGHT IN YOU
GOD SINGS CELEBRATIONS & BLESSINGS OVER YOU

JESUS CAME TO REMOVE THE CONDEMNATIONS THAT WE SEEM SO QUICK TO EMBRACE AS OUR IDENTITY ... RATHER THAN CONFESSING OUR HUMANNESS & MAKING PEACE WITH GOD ... WE ASSUME THE GUILT & SHAME OF THIS WORLD ... RATHER THAN THE EMBRACE OF GOD ...

As I regained a REFRESHED PERSPECTIVE in my walk to the grandeur of the Lincoln Memorial ... I encourage each of us **to CHOOSE TO BE REFRESHED** in our PERSPECTIVE OF GOD as we REFLECT upon GOD ALMIGHTY ... His love and care for us, as His beloved children, and the words of the Living Word of God, the Bible, that have been shared today.

A SPIRITUAL PRACTICE to DAILY RENEWING OUR SPIRITUAL LIFE IS TO BREATHE SPIRITUALLY.

KEY = **SPIRITUAL BREATHING** ---- TO BREATHE OUT OUR CONFESSIONS and THEN to BREATHE IN THE GOODNESS'S OF GOD i.e. TO CONFESS OUR SINS & foolish embraces & indulgences AND THEN to BREATHE IN THE RESTORING SPIRIT OF GOD'S LOVE & CARE (**1 John 1:9**)

I encourage you to ask God for help to remember WHAT YOU MAY NEED TO "BREATHE OUT" ... and then, to take a deep breath and BREATHE IN the LIFE-GIVING and LIFE-RESTORING help that God intends for us ...

And remember:

*The Lord your God is with you,
the Mighty Warrior who saves.
He will take great delight in you;
in his love he will not rebuke you,
but will rejoice over you with singing."*

Zephaniah 3:17

PRAYER: Gracious & loving God, YOU ARE the God of new beginnings. You created us to be whole, unique, abundant-living children. Too often we allow too many things to DISCONNECT US FROM YOU, including the crippling feelings of condemnation, guilt and shame. May we be REFRESHED IN OUR PERSPECTIVE OF YOU AND as we walk this journey of life, PLEASE HELP US to LET GO of all that we cling to, even though we know better, and HELP US to GRAB HOLD of all that You offer to us ... Your POWER, YOUR STRENGTH, YOUR VISION, YOUR HEART for a BETTER WORLD ... Please TEACH US & help us to LEARN YOUR ways... without guilt or shame or condemnation ... lifted up with wings like eagles. THANK YOU GOD in the precious & mighty name of Jesus. AMEN

FRIDAY, MARCH 6, 2020 1 Timothy 4:7 & 8

REMINDER: Be sure to change your clocks one hour forward Saturday evening ☺

Whew! The week is flying by! I am sure that you can relate --- and it is not really the 'normal stuff' but rather, it is the UNEXPECTED or the EXTRA stuff that seems to steal time from us --- extra things with the kids – with the parents --- with work ---- doctor appointments or car repairs --- the 'extra things' interrupt our delicately balanced schedules and threaten the time we need to do all the important things with our families, work, and community Whew!

SO, I encourage you to take a deep breath --- breathe in and breathe out --- and pray, "Dear God, please settle my heart and mind so that I may reflect on your Word – the Bible for a few moments. I open myself to the Holy Spirit and look forward to some practical help and encouragement. Amen"

Today's text: ***"Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives' tales; rather, train yourself to be godly. For physical TRAINING is of some value, but godliness has value for ALL THINGS, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come."*** 1 Timothy 4:7-8

On Sunday we'll be ending our sermon series titled "Managing the Rat Race of Life." Each week we've been reminding ourselves of affirming Scriptures that remind us of God's care for us AND we've been working to RESET the focus and compulsions of our lives to center more on God, balance, wholeness & wellness.

We've included SPIRITUAL PRACTICES each week. Remember we interviewed some of our baseball 'Little Leaguers' when we began the series? They shared with us the importance of PRACTICE to their success on and off the field. Good coaching and PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE is critical for a baseball team to be successful!!!!

Likewise, we began to present each week a list of SPIRITUAL practices that if practiced over time will help to TRAIN our body, minds, and spirits to be more balanced and more responsive to God's presence in our lives.

So, I wanted to end this week's devotions in part to remind us that we must DECIDE and CHOOSE to submit ourselves to the COACH'S directions and instructions AND THEN remind us that we must TRAIN ourselves SO THAT we may know and experience the life that God intended for us from the beginning --- for us to have the capacity and capability to respond and react to life's stuff --- planned or unplanned --- in a way that does not derail our focus or our psyche.

TRAINING is so very vital to developing the skills and abilities to MANAGE the RAT RACE of our lives.

These words from 1 Timothy 4:7-8 reminds us that we must not allow ourselves to be distracted by things that do not matter BUT RATHER to RESET our LIVES FOCUSED ON OUR COACH --- JESUS THE CHRIST --- AND TO DEVELOP SPIRITUAL PRACTICES that will help us to live more balanced, less frustrated lives.

I have not yet decided the specific sermon for Sunday, but I believe that I will either draw from 1 Timothy 4:1-10 or the familiar and powerful conversation between Nicodemus and Jesus in John 3:1-21 SO IF ABLE, YOU MAY WANT TO READ BOTH TEXTS as YOU PRAY AND PREPARE FOR SUNDAY WORSHIP.

Dear God, please bless the people of SHUMC and help each us to discipline and train ourselves so that we may better live lives of BALANCE and WELLNESS --- in our bodies, minds, and spirits. In Jesus' Name, AMEN.