

The Daily Walk



***Trinity Presbyterian Church
Berwyn, Pennsylvania***

July 13 – August 8, 2009

Music & Worship Notes Coming Up



Join us at 9:45 A.M. on Sunday mornings as we begin summer worship with “an old fashioned hymn sing.”

Special Music for Worship:

July 19 – Trinity’s Summer Choir sings “Amazing Grace”

July 26 – Trinity’s Praise Band will lead the singing

August 2 – The Divine Dance Ensemble

August 9 – Duet with Helen Hartigan & Paul Vanderslice

August 16 – Summer Choir sings “Lord Jesus, Think on Me”

July- August 2009

Dear Daily Walkers,

With the lazy, hazy days of summer upon us, I invite you to join me in a different approach to our devotional daily walk. Rather than following the suggested passages used by many congregations, I am creating my own lectionary for the next several weeks to focus upon prayer.

This summer's lectionary explores the power of prayer and the models for prayer we find in the Bible. We will pray with major figures in the Old Testament as they seek God's purpose for their lives. I am led in this study by the writings of Walter Brueggemann, Abraham Joshua Heschel, and Eugene Peterson. Quotes from Heschel are in italics.

In Christ,

Jay Wilkins

LECTIONARY DEVOTIONAL GUIDE
July 13 -- 18, 2009

“Life is fashioned by prayer, and prayer is the quintessence of life.”

Monday, July 13: Numbers 14: 11 – 23

Pray . . . what to do when all else seems lost. Talk to God. Ask. Seek. Knock. Bang on the window into God’s heart. Praying is about establishing a bond between the person praying and God. This is what Moses seeks to do – remind God of what God said to him back on the mountain, remind God of our solidarity. Moses prays: “now, therefore, let the power of the Lord be great in the way that you promised when you spoke, saying, ‘The Lord is slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, forgiving iniquity and transgression, but by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the parents upon the children to the third and the fourth generation.’”

Tuesday, July 14: Numbers 14: 13 – 23

Moses is the dominant figure of the Old Testament, second only to Jesus in the whole Bible. Moses is the “man in the middle” – at his birth, he is in the middle between the banks of the river; as a young man, he is the man in the middle between an Egyptian taskmaster and a Hebrew slave; as mature man, he is in the middle between the Lord and Pharaoh; in old age, he is in the middle between the Lord and the people. When have you been the person in the middle? How did you feel? How do you think Moses felt?

Wednesday, July 15: Numbers 14: 13 – 23

“Forgive the iniquity of this people according to the greatness of your steadfast love, just as you have pardoned this people, from Egypt even until now.” The Lord’s frustration must be overwhelming. How does God deal with people? How do we deal with people who frustrate us? Forgiveness is a spiritual challenge, an art to be practiced daily.

Thursday, July 16: Numbers 14: 13 – 23

Moses is bold in praying, standing between the people and the Lord, “in the breach”, seeking to repair the rift between God and God’s people. To be willing to stand in such a position assumes that God can be, will be, impacted by such prayer. Do we have the faith, the courage, to make such an assumption, and face God?

Friday, July 17: Numbers 14: 13 – 23

Such bold prayer grows out of a long, trusting relationship with God. Many are afraid to speak their mind with God in prayer because they have been unwilling and unable to speak their mind to God under any circumstance. Moses comes before God not as a stranger with a new idea, but prays as a well-established colleague, comfortable with such interactions. How much practice praying will we need before we become that comfortable speaking boldly with God?

Saturday, July 18: Numbers 14: 13 – 23

“Now if you kill this people all at one time, then the nations who have heard about you will say, ‘It is because the Lord was not able to bring this people into the land he swore to give them that he has slaughtered them in the wilderness.’”

Moses prays for God’s self interest. He reminds God that the Egyptians will make fun of God if indeed the people do not make it to the land of freedom; God loses respect among the nations if the people perish. What do you perceive to be God’s interests today? Jesus told us to pray for God’s Kingdom. What do we pray for, yearn for, as signs of God’s interest today?

“In prayer we establish a living contact with God, between our concern and God’s will, between despair and promise, want and abundance.”

LECTIONARY DEVOTIONAL GUIDE
July 20 -- 25, 2009

*“To pray is to take notice of the wonder,
to regain a sense of the mystery that animates all beings.”*

Monday, July 20: 1 Samuel 1

We do not read enough of the Bible to understand the power of God at work in the lives of people. Most know only the Hannah of 1 Samuel 2, where she sounds strong and confident, the inspiration for Mary when we get to Luke’s gospel. Yet, in 1 Samuel 1, Hannah is silent, hopeless, and ungifted. Her prayer marks a sharp contrast to chapter 1, because now Hannah is gifted with a son, filled with hope, loud in her praise of God, courageous in her prayer. The contrast between the two chapters may be a study of the way in which the silenced are given voice by the generous gift of God.

Tuesday, July 21: 1 Samuel 2: 1 – 10

Hannah speaks in prayer. Her name is Hebrew for “grace” or “graced.” She is now graced by God with a son who gives her new voice, new power, new dignity, and new presence. Her prayer begins with herself, with first-person references: “my heart . . . my strength . . ., my God . . ., my mouth . . ., my enemies . . ., my victory.” She is now able to claim all that is rightfully hers, no longer remaining mute and invisible. She speaks herself fully, but she prays herself over to the Lord in confidence and trust, in unguarded celebration.

Wednesday, July 22: 1 Samuel 2: 1 – 10

God’s power for life against the barrenness of death changes everything for Hannah. No other god has such power for life, none! It is this God, only this God, who knows and evaluates. There is an enormous temptation by the church, on the basis of Hannah’s powerful prayer, to imagine that the church can make grand theological claims for itself and its place in society. Our God is holy, however. God refuses all our efforts to harness God for our purposes or to domesticate God for our agenda. This God is not only unequalled in power, but uncontrolled in freedom.

Thursday, July 23: 1 Samuel 2: 1 – 10

The heart of Hannah's prayer reminds us of the actions of this holy God. What this God does is to transform social power -- the first become last and the last become first. The weakness of this God is stronger than human strength; the foolishness of this God is wiser than human wisdom. The mighty and the feeble switch places; the full and the hungry change tables; the barren and the fruitful trade destinies. Now, all this talk may seem like religious exaggeration, except that in history, there are mysterious transformations of power and influence on which the weak and poor continue to base their faithful hope. This is the prayer of all those pushed to the edges who continue to affirm that the holiness of the Lord keeps human life open for new possibility.

Friday, July 24: 1 Samuel 2: 1 – 10

This is the God of Easter, who administers and embodies the power for life against the threat of death. This power has real, economic and political consequences. We now see the real concern and agenda of the poem. Hannah is not nearly so interested in God's capacity to do the negative job of sending the full away. Rather the accent is on lifting the poor, raising the needy, and bringing them to well-being.

Saturday, July 25: 1 Samuel 2: 1 – 10

The concluding verses are honest about the possibility of conflict between the faithful and the wicked. God will take sides to be sure that the social conflict is settled rightly. The faithful may seem to be weaker and less competent, but God is the Great Equalizer. In the last verse, the Lord is called "the Most High." The Lord takes the whole of the earth as the arena of activity. The friends of God, and those who oppose God, will be dealt with appropriately as God chooses. No wonder Hannah must pray!

*"Prayer is our humble answer to the inconceivable surprise of living.
It is all we can offer for the mystery by which we live.
It is gratefulness which makes the soul great."*

LECTIONARY DEVOTIONAL GUIDE
July 27 – August 1, 2009

“The purpose of prayer is to be brought to God’s attention, to be listened to, to be understood by God; not to know God, but to be known; not to form judgments about God, but to be judged.”

Monday, July 27: 1 Kings 3: 1 – 15

What do most people want? What do we really pray for? As Solomon consolidated his royal power, but before he finished the palace and the Temple in Jerusalem, the young king made visits outside the city. On one visit to a Gibeon, a "high place" used for local worship, Solomon slept in the sanctuary and had a powerful dream. Solomon dreamed that God asked the king for his heart's desire. "Wisdom" -- the king's answer. What would you say in response to God's question?

Tuesday, July 28: 1 Kings 3: 1 – 15

“The wisdom of Solomon” is a well-known expression. Solomon’s prayer on taking over the throne of David asks that God provide him with wisdom. That request seems to contradict the principles by which Solomon actually ruled. The Solomon who seeks wisdom at the beginning of his reign is the same Solomon who so oppresses his people that many of them rebel immediately following his death. If nothing else, the prayer from 1 Kings 3 reminds us of the frequent distance between God’s hopes for human life and the manner in which we live.

Wednesday, July 29: 1 Kings 3: 1 – 15

This text celebrates one aspect of Solomon’s rule, an aspect of extraordinary beauty and goodness. Under Solomon rule as king, there was a flowering of that cultural and intellectual movement which the ancient writers and modern scholars alike refer to as “wisdom.” This movement involved a growing understanding and role of the state in the administration of justice and in the growth of skills in law, statecraft, and education which a strengthened and centralized system demands. Those are vital for the effectiveness of our country today. Pray for wisdom, not simply for ourselves, but especially for our political leaders.

Thursday, July 30: 1 Kings 3: 1 – 15

The relationship between religion and politics is complex, divisive, and often full of compromises. So, we say never mix politics and religion. But that is precisely what Solomon's prayer does. His story ends with decisions to enter into various marriages for political expediency, including welcoming gods from other countries into his worship of the Lord. This led to a national catastrophe when his son Rehoboam provoked a civil war that ripped the country apart and that only ended with defeat by the global powers Assyria (in 722 BC) and then Babylon (in 586 BC). In Solomon's case, sincerity was no guarantee of political or spiritual wisdom.

Friday, July 31: 1 Kings 3: 1 – 15

"I give you also what you have not asked, both riches and honor all your life; no other king shall compare with you. If you will walk in my ways, keeping my statutes and my commandments, as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your life." The utter generosity of God is balanced by the uncompromising requirement of being in covenant relationship with God. The two can never be separated. Mature prayer has the ability to engage a relationship with the God who both gives and calls.

Saturday, August 1: 1 Kings 3: 1 – 15

What shall we pray for? Solomon found himself in a new situation, and prayed. What new situations do we find ourselves in? What kinds of wisdom do we need from God to live fully and faithfully? How do we balance our faith and our politics? What "worldly wisdom" is from God? What generosity from God are we willing to receive?

*"Prayer teaches us what to aspire for.
So often we do not know what to cling to.
Prayer implants in us the ideals we ought to cherish."*

LECTIONARY DEVOTIONAL GUIDE
August 3 -- 8, 2009

“Prayer is no panacea, no substitute for action. It is, rather, like a beam thrown from a flashlight before us into the darkness.”

Monday, August 3: Jeremiah 32: 16 – 25

What do you know about Jeremiah? He is considered one of the “major” prophets since we have so many of his words and life story – the benefit of a good secretary named Baruch. Jeremiah has a reputation as a bringer of words of doom. Time and again the prophet announced God’s intention to judge sinful Judah and, though he often paid a heavy price for his honesty (Jer. 32:2), he did not soften his message (27:1–11). So, when we hear from the lips of this outspoken individual words hope, not of gloom, we have all the more reason to be attentive.

Tuesday, August 4: Jeremiah 32: 16 – 25

Why is a prayer of hope so astounding? A little history might help: In 588 B.C. the armies of Nebuchadnezzar surrounded Jerusalem to starve the people and government to oblivion. For the second time in a decade the King revolted against Babylonian authority. The king expected that help would soon arrive from Egypt, Babylon’s enemy, and that independence would come. It was a false hope, as it turned out, and the same army that had forced the submission of Jerusalem in 597 had ringed the city once again. The first defeat of the city had been followed by mild treatment of the rebels. Everyone knew that the punishment this time would be severe. Judah must be taught a lesson.

Wednesday, August 5: Jeremiah 32: 16 – 25

What is all this about the land? A Biblical law of redemption said that should anything or any person that belongs to a family fall into jeopardy of being lost, it is the duty of the most senior male family member to do what is necessary to claim for the family that person or thing. Jeremiah’s cousin Hanamel visits the imprisoned prophet one day. The family’s land at Anathoth was probably occupied by the Babylonian army. Since he can not farm his land, Hanamel is broke. So, the poor man asks Jeremiah to buy the plot. It will bring no benefit to the prophet. Even if he were not in prison, Jeremiah could not work the land any more than could Hanamel. Jeremiah could not sell the land unless he could find someone else in the family to take it off his hands. So Jeremiah does what many would have considered unthinkable: he gives good money for worthless land! No wonder he must pray.

Thursday, August 6: Jeremiah 32: 16 – 25

The real beauty in this story lies in what happens next. With his companion Baruch and a few friends, Jeremiah conducts the transfer of ownership in a very conspicuous fashion. The exchange of money and the execution of the legal documents must be highly visible. Jeremiah asks Baruch to store the documents in a place where they will be safe indefinitely: “For thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Houses and fields and vineyards shall again be bought in this land.” The city is soon to fall. But judgment is not the final word. Beyond judgment, beyond destruction, beyond the justice of God, there is restoration, mercy, salvation! The faithlessness of the people and God’s response to that sin will not prevail. The one thing that will prevail is God’s compassion.

Friday, August 7: Jeremiah 32: 16 – 25

Is anything impossible for God? What impossible things is God doing now in our midst? How often are we cowards in our prayer, daring to pray for only that which the world thinks is possible? Jeremiah call us to pray with a hope that looks beyond the present circumstances, to be open to God doing a new exodus, a new creation, a new life out of death. Pray with Jeremiah for the gift of wisdom and understanding from God.

Saturday, August 8: Jeremiah 32: 16 – 25

Buying that field was an amazing and calculated act of hope. All such hopeful acts are open to being ridiculed because they seem so impractical, so out of touch with reality. Yet, from a faith perspective, they are the reality that is being created by God but not yet visible to all. It is much easier to wallow in despair than to live in hope; if we live in despair, then we do not have to do anything or risk anything. Hope commits us to actions that connect with God’s promises and the new life God will create.

“Prayer makes visible the right, and reveals the false. In its radiance we behold the worth of our efforts, the range of our hopes, and the meaning of our deeds.”

