

THE DAILY WALK



Trinity Presbyterian Church
Berwyn, Pennsylvania

October 26 – November 28, 2009

LECTIONARY DEVOTIONAL GUIDE

OCTOBER 26 -- 31, 2009

In each of the lectionary passages this week we are presented with the priority of love over all other values or concerns. We are challenged by the extent to which love must be a choice and an action, not simply a feeling of affection or desire. Choosing to love Naomi means that Ruth leaves the security of her own culture, embraces unfamiliar ways, and endures hostility because she is a "widow" and a "foreigner." Choosing to love and serve God, according to the psalmist, is to show kindness toward the poor and the dispossessed. Choosing to love the living God as Jesus did means loving one's neighbor and constantly having to reevaluate who that is and what that truly means.

MONDAY, October 26: Ruth 1: 1 - 18

Many scholars believe that although her story is set during the time of the Judges, the book of Ruth was written during the reforms of Ezra and Nehemiah as a subtle piece of propaganda in protest against the racist policies of the time. In the face of an edict that all foreign wives were to be sent back to where they came from, the story is clearly ironic. It shows that God's greatest favor (the royal house of David) came to Israel through a mixed marriage and through a "foreign" wife who is as faithful and righteous as any Jew.

TUESDAY, October 27: Ruth 1: 1 - 18

The book of Ruth describes the deep love between two women. It is the story of a Jewish woman, Naomi, who with her husband and two sons, had come to Moab as refugees, fleeing famine in Israel. Despite historical animosities between Moab and Israel, however, Naomi and her family were accepted in Moab, and her two sons married young Moabite women— Orpah and Ruth. Tragically, Naomi's husband and two sons died. Then Naomi heard that the famine in Judah was over and she decided that she wanted to return to her homeland. Her daughters-in-law chose to "accompany" her. Naomi, however, knows how difficult their life would be among the Israelites. After much persuasion, Orpah decides to return home. But Ruth is "determined" to stay with Naomi. She declares her commitment to love Naomi and live with her faithfully among a strange and probably hostile people.

WEDNESDAY, October 28: Psalm 146

Among other things, the psalmist is concerned about widows, orphans, and strangers. It is clear that God judges in favor of them. Those who oppress the poor will end in ruin. Much, however, depends upon our choice and cooperation. We are reminded of the millions of displaced persons in our world today—forced to leave their homes because of poverty or political persecution. All around us there is a desperate need for loving choices.

THURSDAY, October 29: Mark 12:28-34

Jesus' summary of law as the way of wholeness (salvation) is not unique. He simply expresses the heart of his faith and puts together well-known teachings in new ways. His answer combines Deuteronomy 6:5 with Leviticus 19:18. The truly remarkable thing about this story is the way the scribe who asks the question is described. Jesus is often shown to be very critical of the scribes and the Pharisees. Yet here we have a scribe who not only agrees with Jesus, but also goes so far as to look at the deeper implications—"It is more important to obey these two commandments than to offer on the altar animals and other sacrifices to God."

The priority of love could not be more strongly stated by a faithful Jew, and Jesus is joyous in recognizing a kindred spirit. Their exchange is a dramatic illustration of the love of which they speak. They are able to overcome party strife and step away from the "us versus them" categories in order to confess a common faith. Jesus inaugurates a new way, and is open to any who will join him in sharing God's dream.

FRIDAY, October 30: Hebrews 9: 11 - 14

Through the offering of his whole self (life-blood) and by remaining faithful to God, even when it meant death on a cross, Jesus has pioneered a new way of wholeness in connection with God. It is a way based on loving relationship, not upon any requirements of the religious institution. This meant that people in the early church were no longer bound by the demands of cultic purity or blood sacrifice. What might such wholeness in relationship to the living God mean for us today?

SATURDAY, October 31:

Over and over again, God and those who serve God are shown within the Scriptures to be in solidarity with the poor and oppressed people of the world. Sadly, this often causes consternation among church members who do not consider themselves poor or oppressed. It can seem to them that this means that God is against them. They are fearful that God wishes all people to become equally impoverished. Nothing could be further from the truth! God's desire is that all should be blessed out of the abundance of creation. Those of us who are in positions of wealth, power, and privilege in our present world do, however, have a clear responsibility to share these resources in ways that will increase love and justice for all. Perhaps we will discover that choosing to love rather than to fear them is the most creative way we can share in God's dream.

Worship on November 1 . . . Special Guest: The Rev. Dr. Howard Friend
Chancel Choir sings "Now Thank We All Our God"

LECTIONARY DEVOTIONAL GUIDE

NOVEMBER 2 -- 7, 2009

In both the Hebrew Scripture and the gospel passage we are challenged by stories of faithful women whose actions go far beyond the bounds of duty. Both Ruth and the poor widow of the gospel exemplify the quality known in the Hebrew language as "hesed" or loving kindness. The word refers to the faithfulness or loyal love that binds two parties together in a covenant relationship. There is an "above-and-beyondness" and a "more-than-enoughness" to such love. Hesed is one of the ways in which God is seen to act toward the people of Israel even when they are faithless and disloyal. Finding it in ourselves to act with loving kindness toward all people and in all situations is a powerful way that we can share in God's dream for the world.

MONDAY, November 2: Ruth 3:1 - 5; 4: 13 - 17

The story of Ruth is a protest against an exclusive, restrictive understanding of membership in the People or "House" of God. By challenging the prevailing prejudices of the Israel of their day its main characters take many risks and are portrayed as acting with loving kindness. The word *hesed* occurs three times in the text at very strategic moments. Ruth does *hesed* for Naomi, Boaz does *hesed* for Ruth and at the end of the story, Boaz experiences *hesed* from Ruth (3:10). There is a fairy-tale quality to the story. The author is clearly making a point. All the main characters come across models of faith. The evil they overcome is not personified, but rather lies in the circumstances that surround them.

The story ends with Ruth's marriage to Boaz and the birth of a son whom the community names Obed, which means "servant." We are clearly told that through their love and commitment to each other Ruth, Naomi, and Boaz helped to build the House of David. Imagine the impact of this story upon listeners when they realized that King David's great-grandmother was actually a "despised foreigner." They could not fail to be reminded that God is not subject to the prejudices and rules of shortsighted human beings.

TUESDAY, November 3: Psalm 127

The psalm stresses that purely human effort will not ensure survival, neither for one's family nor for the city in which the family lives. God, the psalmist declares, can give more good gifts during a night's sleep, than human beings could accumulate in a lifetime of anxious toil. Also, like all else in life, children are seen as a blessing from God—an inheritance and a reward for righteousness. Childlessness in that day was seen as a curse and a punishment—especially for women. In our own day, we no longer see

childbearing as the primary purpose of a woman's existence, yet we still share the feeling that families with children are greatly blessed.

WEDNESDAY, November 4: Hebrews 9:24-28

According to the writer of the Letter to the Hebrews, Jesus performs the ultimate act of *hesed* by sacrificing his life for the sake of the truth of God. As in other readings from Hebrews, today's passage presents us with the image of Jesus as the perfect priest who has made the final sacrifice. Sacrifices are therefore no longer required.

THURSDAY, November 5: Mark 12:38 - 44

The gospel reading concerns Jesus' response to two contrasting situations. The first section of the passage describes the greedy, showy, proud religious leaders who "devour the houses of widows." These leaders used their positions of power for their own selfish purposes while cultivating a public image as righteous people who perform great deeds of generosity and loving kindness. However, Jesus was not deceived by their hypocrisy and warned people against their duplicity. In contrast, Jesus holds up a poor widow as an example of true loving kindness.

Widows and children were at the bottom of the social hierarchy in those days because of their lack of power, money, and learning. Yet these vulnerable ones are often portrayed as having the most insight or being the most willing to risk everything for the sake of a greater good. By giving the last coins she had, this widow acted in a way that was far beyond the bounds of reasonable expectation. She put her whole existence at risk for the sake of an opportunity to share in God's dream. In placing this story directly before his passion narrative, some scholars suggest that Mark sees the widow's story as a premonition of what lay ahead for Jesus and what might be required of the disciples in the future. Perhaps the widow's story is a reminder to us as well. Are we ready to offer everything for the sake of the dream that God has placed in our hearts?

FRIDAY, November 6: Matthew 26: 6 - 13

For Mary hospitality meant giving more attention to the guest himself than to the needs he might have. She would rather talk than cook. She was more interested in her guest's words than in the cleanliness of her home or the timeliness of her meals. She let her older sister Martha take care of those details. Mary's approach to events shows her to be mainly a "responder." She did little preparation-her role was participation. We first meet Mary during a visit Jesus paid to her home. She simply set at his feet and listened. When Martha became irritated at her sister's lack of help, Jesus stated that Mary's choice to enjoy his company was the most appropriate response at the time. Our last glimpse of

Mary shows her to have become a woman of thoughtful and worshipful action. Again she was at Jesus' feet washing them with perfume and wiping them with her hair. She seemed to understand better even than the disciples, why Jesus was going to die. Jesus said her act of worship would be told everywhere, along with the gospel as an example of costly service.

What kind of hospitality does Jesus receive in your life? Are you so busy planning and running your life that you neglect precious time with him? Or do you respond to him by listening to his Word, then finding ways to worship him with your life? It is that the kind of hospitality He longs for from each of us.

SATURDAY, November 7: Luke 8: 43 - 48

Many people surrounded Jesus as he made his way toward Jairus's house. It was virtually impossible to get through the multitude, but one woman fought her way desperately through the crowd in order to touch Jesus. As soon as she did so, she was healed. What a difference there is between the crowds that are curious about Jesus and the few who reach out to touch him! Today many people are vaguely familiar with Jesus, but nothing in their lives is changed or bettered by this passing acquaintance. It is only faith that releases God's healing power. Are you just curious about God or do you reach out to him in faith, knowing that his mercy will bring healing to your body, soul, and spirit?

In Worship on November 8 . . . The Youth Choir returns to sing &

Chancel Choir sings "Surely the Lord is in This Place"

on November 15 . . . The Children sing "All Things Bright & Beautiful"

Chancel Choir sings "Doxology of Praise"

LECTIONARY DEVOTIONAL GUIDE NOVEMBER 9 – 14, 2009

Monday, November 9: 1 Samuel 1:4-20 (I)

The NIV Study Bible points out that “1 and 2 Samuel are named after the person God used to establish kingship in Israel.” Samuel, as God’s representative to the people of Israel, had an importance similar to that of Moses in guiding them through an important transition. In this case, the transition is from that of a tribal society ruled guided by judges, to a kingdom ruled by kings who pass their authority from father to son.

Both Moses and Samuel struggled to keep the people of Israel following God. Throughout his life, Samuel admonished the people of Israel to forsake their idols and foreign gods and to serve the one true God of Israel. Would today’s prophets admonish us any differently?

Tuesday, November 10: 1 Samuel 1:4-20 (II)

In these verses, we read about the anguished prayers of Hannah for a son. God answered her prayer and her son, Samuel, was born.

Hannah named her son Samuel, saying, “Because I asked the Lord for him.” In our world, the accepted belief seems to be that women are fulfilled by having careers out of the home, not by caring for children. We tend to see a society in which a woman is defined by the children she bears as backward. Perhaps there is room for some balance here, and for a position in which no person’s worth is defined either by his or her career, or by offspring, but by that person’s character. At the same time, it is good to remember that children are a blessing – and that our character can be shaped by what we give as we help to shape the character of children, both our own and those of others.

Wednesday, November 11: 1 Samuel 2:1-10

According to the text notes, most Biblical scholars feel that the military theme of this hymn suggests a later date than that of Hannah’s time. Still, we know from this week’s earlier readings that Hannah suffered from the taunting of her husband’s other wife for her barrenness. Her feeling of vindication when her son is born might have been similar to the feeling of an army victorious in battle.

This prayer or song of praise to God is reminiscent of Mary’s song when she was told that she was to bear a son, Jesus. Hannah praises God for the son whom she has promised to give back to God; and in fact, as soon as her son is weaned, she takes him to live with the high priest, Eli. In the case of Mary, she offers her song of praise at the

moment when she has been told that she will bear a son – out of wedlock – and that her son will fulfill a great destiny. For both women, the song of praise must have been bittersweet.

Thursday, November 12: Hebrews 10: 11-14 (15-18)

This passage reminds us that, while the Levitical priest's work of atoning was never finished, the atoning sacrifice of Jesus is complete. Verses 15 and 16 add, "This is the covenant I will make with them/after that time, says the Lord./I will put my laws in their hearts,/ and I will write them on their minds." (NIV) Do we truly have the law of God in our hearts? How fortunate we are that, even when we continue to act outside of God's laws, we have the promise of forgiveness.

Friday, November 13: Hebrews 10: 19-25

These admonitions remind us to draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith...to consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good works...and to not give up meeting together, but to encourage one another. This is what our community of faith is about.

Saturday, November 14: Mark 13:1-8

Is it by chance that the verses for this week begin with Hannah's fervent prayer for the birth of a son, and then end with Jesus' statement that the turmoil in the world is the beginning of birth pains? Are these birth pains the sign of a new kingdom? Jesus was speaking to his disciples to encourage them and exhort them to stand firm in the face of growing opposition. Mark, the writer of this gospel record, was writing to a church which was likewise facing persecution and a struggle to survive. These words no doubt encouraged those people. They can encourage us to stand firm and to persevere in our faith even when we can't see clearly how God's kingdom on Earth can come to fruition in this age.

Lord, help us to remember why we gather. Keep us together and teach us how to encourage one another.



Upper Main Line Community
Thanksgiving Worship Service

Wednesday, November 25, 2009

St. Monica Church

7:00 P.M.

LECTIONARY DEVOTIONAL GUIDE

NOVEMBER 16 -- 21, 2009

This Sunday is Reign of Christ/ Christ the King Sunday—the last Sunday of the Christian year. It is a transitional Sunday that leads us directly into the Season of Advent. Our readings focus on the unique qualities of God's realm and of those who are its faithful dreamers and witnesses. In the gospel passage, we hear a story of a different understanding of power than either the great King David or Pilate had. We hear the story of an unarmed man who stood before the might of the Roman Empire and lived his truth—his vision of God's dream for the world. It is the story of a way that is still emerging—a dream that is coming true!

MONDAY, November 16: 2 Samuel 23:1-7

First we read the "last words" of King David. After a long, troubled, but successful reign, David passes on to his people a distillation of the wisdom he has gained through his experience as king of Israel. Some commentators suggest this was actually a psalm written in David's youth, and inserted here because it summarized his reign. With the Spirit of the Lord speaking through him, David passes on the covenant with the reminder that a good ruler must rule with justice and have reverence for God. The passage reflects the "interwovenness" of faith and politics, and the importance of the integrity and principles of the people who govern us.

TUESDAY, November 17: Psalm 132

This psalm was probably sung during the New Year's ritual of enthronement when the ark was carried in procession into the temple. This annual festival celebrated the anniversary of the coronation of the king as well as the enthronement of God as sovereign of the universe. The psalm proclaims that where God dwells there is joy and abundance; there is no hunger. Verse 12, however, contains a condition upon God's promise of the permanence of David's dynasty—"if your offspring are true to my covenant, and to the commands I give them..." Some scholars think this condition may have been inserted into the tradition after Israel experienced a succession of wicked and ungodly rulers and it became apparent that the dynasty was unlikely to continue. Christian interpreters see Jesus as the royal son and successor to the throne of Zion—the earthly locus of God's presence and power.

WEDNESDAY, November 18: John 18:33-37

Today's gospel reading is central to our recognition of how different God's realm is

from what the world views as important. In this encounter, Jesus uses the same words as Pilate ("king," "realm," "truth"), but they are not speaking of the same things. Like people from two different worlds, they use words common to both but having opposite meanings within their particular context. One can almost pity Pilate who had to judge a man he could not come close to understanding. Jesus, recognizing the futility of trying to explain something so vastly different in a short time, responds calmly with a simple assertion. The reign of Christ is not like Pilate's world of power, domination, control, and judgment!

THURSDAY, November 19: John 18:33-37

Pilate is portrayed as both a tragic and a comical figure, running back and forth between the Jews outside and Jesus inside. He shouts his authority, but acts in fear and confusion. He says he is in charge, but it's obvious that he is not. True power does not lie with Caesar, it lies with the prisoner who stands quietly in front of him.

FRIDAY, November 20: Revelation 1: 4 - 8

This passage reminds us that the one whom the world scorned (Jesus) is the one who is a faithful witness to the true nature of God's realm. John is writing to churches under severe persecution. This letter is intended to support and strengthen their faith. Jesus is called "the faithful witness" who, like the Christians in these churches, once had to stand before the Roman authorities as the embodiment of God's realm and who also experienced violence and ridicule because of it. The title "first-born of the dead" reminded Christians under persecution of a future beyond death, and "ruler of kings" attributes to Jesus a title claimed only by the Roman Caesars. We are reminded that Christ's faithful witness to God's realm through his death and resurrection has freed us to join him as co-leaders in God's service. Praise be to God—Alpha and Omega—who stands at the beginning and end of time!

SATURDAY, November 21:

God's dream is both exciting and challenging: exciting because of the promise it hold for us, or a new day, of justice and shalom, of new life for all people; challenging because we are called to embody that dream, to bring it to life. Reign of Christ Sunday closes off this season (and the Christian year) by reminding us of both the excitement and the challenge. There are those who would see the inevitability of God's dream and thus would gladly sit and wait for it to happen. Yet there are also others who hear the call to help make that dream a reality in our present, hurting world.

As we move into Advent, let us ask ourselves: are we *waiting for* the reign of Christ, or are we *preparing for* it?

LECTIONARY DEVOTIONAL GUIDE

NOVEMBER 23 -- 28, 2009

Sunday, Nov. 29, is the First Sunday of Advent, the beginning of a new worship year in the life of the church. Advent has two faces, two orientations. It looks to the past in the sense that it is a recapitulation of the longing with which women and men of faith living in a bygone era anticipated the coming of God's Messiah. But Advent also looks to the future in an attitude of expectancy over what God has yet to do in the life of humankind. Advent's face toward the past is usually the one we seek. How very wonderful that a gracious God broke in upon the life of humankind through the birth of Jesus, God's very own Son! But Advent's face to the future is one that also deserves our attention. The coming of the Babe to Bethlehem, for all of its miraculous grace, is but hint and suggestion of the Second Advent when this same Jesus, now Risen Lord and Savior, will return to claim the world that is his.

MONDAY, November 23: Jeremiah 33:14–16

The coming of Advent jolts the church out of its “ordinary time” with the good news that God’s grace is just round the corner—that it is about to present fresh possibilities for deliverance and wholeness. Understandably, those who receive this word are joyfully curious as to just what God is about, and we strain to know the shape and dimensions of God’s new initiatives in human life. The texts satisfy our hunger for knowledge of God’s ways only partially, in that while we are given the larger form and direction of God’s intentions, we are left wanting more of the details.

TUESDAY, November 24: Jeremiah 33:14–16

In the prophets’ hands that which was understood in the past to be a time of great suffering is now transformed into an occasion of redemption and joy. “The days are surely coming . . .” are the words that begin our passage, and one cannot possibly miss the point: that which was intended for judgment is now purposed by God to be a moment of salvation. “In those days . . .,” v. 15 reminds the reader. “In those days . . .,” echoes v. 16. The joyous thing that is to transpire in the coming time is nothing less than the fulfillment of Yahweh’s promise to revive the house of David.

WEDNESDAY, November 25: Psalm 25:1–10

Psalm 25 is an acrostic poem. This form, in which each line starts with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet, is often accused of being rigid and artificial; however, it artistically conveys the concept of completeness. In this regard, it is revealing that the very middle letter in the acrostic pattern begins v. 10 with a word that itself

conveys comprehensiveness: “All the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness.” While Psalm 25 is a prayer, it is also a source of instruction about God, whose character it is to be faithful and steadfastly loving toward sinful humanity.

THURSDAY, November 26: 1 Thessalonians 3:9–13

The text is a particular expression of delight and gratitude for the progress of the believers at Thessalonica and a petition to God in their behalf for their continued growth. What gives the passage an appropriate “Advent” setting is the sensitivity that everything the actors in the story do is done in anticipation of “the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints”. The plot has a projected closure, and the closure gives meaning to all the events that occur along the way. The return of Jesus is not posed as a threat to keep the troops in line, but as a conclusion to the human story, when the faithful life of the believers will come to light.

FRIDAY, November 27: Luke 21:25–36

What possible connection can there be between the anticipated birth of one tiny infant and the “roaring of the sea” or the shaking of the “powers of the heavens”? How can this advent be said to “come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth”? For the reader acquainted with Scripture, this passage may not appear all that odd: Joel 2:30 refers to “portents in the heavens and on the earth.” Isaiah 24:19 says, “The earth is violently shaken.” Psalm 46:6 comments on the “uproar” of the nations and Ps. 89:9 on the “raging of the sea.” The passage is a patchwork quilt of phrases from the Old Testament. For the reader acquainted with Scripture, this passage leads to expecting divine intervention into the way the world is, not a specific event that can be predicted and described. Apocalyptic language is larger than life; it uses unimaginably large language to anticipate unimaginably important events.

SATURDAY, November 28: Luke 21:25–36

Waiting and watching are not easy, precisely because other things do interfere. If not all Christians are overcome by “dissipation and drunkenness,” most do find themselves threatened by “the worries of this life.” Provisions for family, difficulties related to work, concerns about the affairs of government, clamoring after power and status—both things worthy and things trivial have a way of clouding the vision so that the impending kingdom of God remains somehow just out of sight. One way of summarizing this passage might be to say that “things are not necessarily what they appear to be.” To look only at things that seem to be close at hand is to miss the larger picture.

Come, Lord Jesus, come!