

St. Paul:

Weekly Devotions

*Devotions on week's readings,
for 04.26.15 (Easter 4b)*

Day One: Acts 4:32-35

*Now the full number of those who
believed was of one heart and
soul... And with great power the
apostles were giving testimony to the
resurrection of the Lord Jesus...*

Great events have a way of bringing people together and focusing all their minds on one great purpose. After Pearl Harbor the entire nation focused on fighting a war. After a tornado struck in 2012, all of Dexter and many in Ann Arbor were focused on helping our neighbors. When an airliner disappeared over the ocean, everyone watched the news in hope of a rescue. After Jesus rose from the dead, what would his believers be focused on doing together?

Imagine yourself there. Jesus is no longer there with you all day long. His traveling and teaching no longer determine where you will be today. Where would you be? At home? At work?

I suspect you would want to gather with other believers, with others who are at loose

ends, searching for what comes next.

What would you be talking about? Our lives are filled with conversations about the weather, about politics, about sports. But I suspect that the followers of Jesus would be thinking a lot about what it means that Jesus has been killed, and yet even death did not stop him or his teaching! Death was the worst that could happen, and suddenly it is not. What does that mean?

One thing is for sure, each disciple might walk his or her own path, but from now on they were all changed in the same way. They were “of one heart and soul.” And they were focused on following.

Jesus' rising from the dead is still a great and momentous event – a storm that changes the landscape of our life. We are called to be telling others that Jesus is alive among us! But we are often distracted. What can we do to encourage all our family to be “of one heart and soul”?

Prayer: *Dearest Jesus, make us
one like those people long ago.
Make us have one heart, one soul,
one desire, to proclaim your Name.
Amen.*

Day Two: 1 John 1:1:2:2

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life... we proclaim also to you...

I've always wanted to see the Grand Canyon, but I have only looked at pictures. I've always wanted to see Jerusalem, but I can only read about it in books.

Have you ever tried to take pictures of something amazing, like mountains or a storm or a sunset? I remember the first big vacation trip my family ever took. I was about 14. My dad got a bonus. And we all flew down to Orlando for a long weekend at Disney. I had a Kodak Pocket camera, and I went crazy with it. I shot several rolls of film, capturing the plane, the hotel, the palm trees, a lizard, and lots of pictures of Disney rides.

Oddly, when I looked back years later at all those rolls of photos, I valued very few. In fact, I threw most of them away. They were only faded pictures of buildings and things. But pictures of my family, a photo of my father on a park bench, a shot of my

youngest brothers making faces, those had value.

John wants to share his experience with you. We would love to have photos of ancient Jerusalem, or an image of what the cross or the empty tomb really looked like. But John says that he can share something more precious than tourist memories. "That which we... have touched with our hands," the person of Jesus himself is what John shares.

When we read the words of Jesus' apostles, we are hearing from those who saw, heard, and touched our Savior. And they are able to bring us close to him because he lives in them.

How have you seen Jesus' work in your life? When did you hear words that moved you? How have you touched the body of Christ, or how has Christ touched you? And more importantly, how can you proclaim what you have seen and heard to others?

Prayer: *Dearest Savior, thank you for those who shared what they saw and heard and touched. Lord, move me to speak with joy of your work in my life. Amen.*

Day Three: John 20:19-31

On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came...

This text is referring to the day of Easter, when the news about Jesus' rising was still new. The disciples had heard from others that Jesus had risen, but they had not yet seen him themselves.

If they had seen Jesus, do you think they would still have been afraid? If they just seen Jesus, do you think they would still have locked the doors? I think they would have. After all, we know that Jesus rose from the dead, and yet we are still afraid of lots of things, aren't we?

But what did the disciples do when they were afraid? They gathered together. And after they saw Jesus, they continued getting together every single week to encourage each other. They talked about what Jesus had said, about the challenges of following him, and how to be like Jesus in a very difficult world.

Are we like them? We certainly are in our weakness. We're still afraid of lots of things. We're afraid to speak

about Jesus in public. We're afraid of what will happen to our children. We're afraid of crime and change and poverty and sickness and the future. We know that Jesus has risen from the dead, but that doesn't solve our day to day problems.

But being afraid like them, do we gather together like them? Do we want to hang out with others who know the good news so that we can remind each other and encourage each other?

"Christ is risen!" We say that on Easter Sunday, and maybe for a few weeks after, but the first believers said it when it was news! And they kept reminding one another of that truth because Jesus was not visibly with them most of the time.

When we gather and share our fears and struggles, how can we find the same comfort in Jesus resurrection, and how might our conversation be like theirs? We need to say to one another, "He is risen indeed. Alleluia!"

Prayer: *O Savior, sometimes I'm afraid. But I know you will be with me when I gather with your people, just as you promised. Amen.*

Day Four: John 20:21-22

Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you. And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit."

Looking for a story that would help us see the meaning of Easter, I finally tried reading a chapter of "Chicken Soup for the Christian Soul." The stories there are emotionally powerful. (I confess that I had to blow my nose a few times.) But in the section on death and loss there was one thing many of the stories had in common. In almost all of them, the storyteller says that their loved one reached back from the grave or down from heaven to comfort them. A lightning bolt struck, sent by dad. A lost ring appeared, sent by the deceased son. A rainbow was a gift from mom.

These are nice thoughts. I would love to get a message from my father. I often wish I could ask for his advice. But don't you see we have something much better?

It's not our parents who watch over us from heaven. It's not our beloved spouse

who is the presence with us when we are discouraged.

JESUS is the one who has risen from the dead. JESUS is the one who loves us, and who has sacrificed more for us. JESUS is the one who has promised to be with us even to the end of the ages, and who sent his Spirit to live IN us! That is why we say so triumphantly, "Christ is risen!"

It is precious to me to know that my father is with Jesus in heaven. And it is comforting to know that all my family who trust in Jesus will be with me there. But the greatest thing – the really amazing thing – is that we will be with Jesus there. That's why they call it heaven! Because at last we will be face-to-face with him!

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, you are the one, the only source of my comfort and strength. Thank you for my loved ones here, and those who are now with you. But let my heart be filled with you. Only you. Amen.*

These devotions help us to think ahead about the Bible verses we will read in worship next week. They are written weekly by Pastor Don Neuendorf. You can learn more about our worship at stpaulannarbor.org