

St. Paul: Weekly Devotions

*Devotions on week's readings,
for 05.17.15 (Easter 7b)*

Day One: Acts 1:1-11

In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen... On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."

This is the beginning of the first history book of the Church. The book we call "The Acts of the Apostles" is really a letter to Luke's friend Theophilus, explaining how the church began. And it all started with this: Jesus told his disciples to wait for a "gift" to arrive.

What's the most powerful gift you have ever been given? A kitchen appliance? A power tool? Maybe even a car? Jesus promised that his disciples would soon be given a special

gift. But it wasn't a package that would show up by UPS. It was a special measure of the Holy Spirit.

God would live in them, and work through them, so that they could speak out and proclaim the good news, and people would come to faith. That's a very powerful gift! It's the kind of gift that not only changes the world, but it would change the person who received it. Once you had the power to speak the truth of the gospel and bring the saving knowledge of Jesus to others, you would not be able to just keep going in your usual way, right?

What would you do if God gave you such a gift? That's an interesting question, because he HAS! You have the same gift that Jesus promised his disciples. You have the same Spirit. And you, no matter how humble or small you are, have the same power to speak the good news. Does that change how you will live today?

Prayer: *Dearest Savior, you sent me the gift of your Spirit too! I have been baptized with your Spirit, and the Spirit lives in me. Lord, help me show it today. Amen.*

Day Two: Ephesians 1:15-23

I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints,¹⁹ and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength,²⁰ which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms,²¹ far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.²² And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church,²³ which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

Those are really complicated sentences, but we could simplify them this way: I pray that you may know God's power, which is much greater than everything in the world now that Jesus rules over all things. Paul prays that you would know the power of God, and the hope that God has for you, and the inheritance that God gives you.

When we were kids we used to debate about which super power would be best to have. Flying? Strength? Being bullet-proof? Laser vision? And if we had them, we imagined being able to take what we want, or play tricks on our friends, or get out of school. But what if you could receive even just one of these gifts of God?

If you had God's power, what would you want to achieve with it? If you had his hope, the certainty of eternal life with him, how would that change you? If you could inherit God's possessions, what would you do with them?

Paul says you already have. Maybe it doesn't seem like it because you would want to use them for silly things just like kids who want super powers. But you have the power to do the incredible things that God desires, to give others eternal life!

Prayer: *Dearest Jesus, why do I fear? Why do I hesitate to bring my needs to you? You are my loving shepherd, and you have all power. Fill me with faith. Amen.*

Day Three: Luke 24:44-53

He told them, "This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day,⁴⁷ and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.⁴⁸ You are witnesses of these things.⁴⁹ I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."

Do you remember what you did during the last week of the school year? As one subject after another is finished, books are turned in, and final tests are taken, the classroom relaxes and there is time to talk about other things.

Jesus has now finished 3 years of training his disciples. He has completed his suffering and death. Now he summarizes the entire lesson, everything that he did, and he points them toward what comes next. Soon the Father will send them out into the world to serve.

When the school year was ending you were excited and eager for the new summer season. We were all happy as each textbook was turned in, and we couldn't wait to do the

next thing. Do you feel the same way about the next step in your Christian faith?

Where are you in your training for God's service? We never wanted to be endlessly in school. We didn't want to become "professional students," constantly learning and never using what we had learned. So why are so many Christians content to keep attending church, sitting like students in a class, but never becoming "witnesses of these things"?

It is Springtime in the Church! Not just on the calendar, but in all our lives, this is now the time that Jesus is sending us out to plant the seed, and nurture those who have heard the word, and to bring in the fruit of the harvest. Are you ready for school to be out?

Prayer: *O Father, you already sent your Holy Spirit to me, just as you did to the disciples. Now give me courage to go out in service. Amen.*

Day Four: Thinking About God's Gifts

Next week we will begin a short series of sermons on stewardship, that is, on how we are called to manage God's gifts. The theme is "Experiencing the Joy of Generosity." It's odd that so many people around us are trying so hard to be happy, and in spite of unprecedented wealth so few are contented. What is the key to being happy?

"Rejoice always, pray without ceasing; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will in Christ Jesus for you."

(1 Thessalonians 5:16-18)

Epicurus, a Greek philosopher in the third century BC said, "If you want to make a man happy, add not to his riches but take away from his desires." When we desire less, we are more content with what we do have.

Coveting puts us in a state of discontentment with an insatiable appetite for more, making contentment impossible. Those who are content enjoy what they have rather than complain about what they don't have. They are joyful for what they have received from God knowing that all of life is a gift.

The apostle Paul writes, "*Now there is great gain in godliness with contentment...*" (1 Timothy 6:6). Our happiness doesn't depend on what we have or what we own. Asaph, the Psalmist had an intimate relationship with God who enabled him to be content with what He had provided. We would do well to meditate on his words, "*Whom have I in heaven but You? And earth has nothing on earth that I desire besides You. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever*" (Ps 73:25-26).

Follow Paul's directive in 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18: "*Rejoice always, pray without ceasing; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will in Christ Jesus for you.*" As you pray, thanking God for all His blessings, especially the gift of His Son and His Word and Sacraments, you will find your heart and mind being filled with more and more reason to give thanks to our wonderful Lord.

Prayer: *Lord, thank You for Your generosity to me. Help me to receive with a thankful heart. 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