

St. Paul:

Weekly Devotions

*Devotions on week's readings,
for 06.07.15 (Pentecost 2b)*

Day One: Genesis 3:8-15

Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. ⁹ But the Lord God called to the man, "Where are you?" ¹⁰ He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid." ¹¹ And he said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?" ¹² The man said, "The woman you put here with me — she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it." ¹³ Then the Lord God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."

Sin divides. Just look at its immediate effects.

Adam blames Eve. The perfect couple, who had literally been made for each other, are blaming one another for the sin. Eve blames the serpent. God's people and God's creation are at odds with one another.

Most sadly, Adam and Eve are divided from God. Where they had once enjoyed walking with him, they now hide from him. Where they had been able to confide in God, now they speak defensively, deceptively, and they are driven from the garden.

Our sin separates us from God, and from one another. But what happens when they are driven from the garden? ... God goes with them.

Adam and Eve kicked themselves out of God's house. But God kicked himself out with them. The rest of the Bible is the record of God going through all of their trials and the terrible consequences of mankind's awful rebellions. And finally, God comes in the flesh to suffer the full measure of their sin.

It began here with sin. It ends on Easter with salvation.

Prayer: *O Almighty God, you are righteous and fearful, but I am unafraid. How could I fear you, Lord? For "perfect love casts out fear." My love for you is tiny and flickering, but your love is perfect. Amen.*

Day Two: 2 Cor 4:13-5:1

¹⁶ Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. ¹⁷ For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. ¹⁸ So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal. ^{5:1} Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands.

“I feel scared. I’ve been over here since 1989 and I have never, ever felt this unsafe in this neighborhood.” (from Fox News Detroit in March)

“32 people murdered over 15 day period in Detroit,” Fox2 News. “It’s sad. It makes you scared to go outside.”

“Ex-Inkster cop to face trial in motorist beating.” “Ex-middle school coach charged with seeking sex with a 6-year-old.” “Police Chief Craig: I wouldn’t gas up in the city late at night unless I had to.”

“So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen.” We all know what is seen, and not just in Detroit. There is wonderful beauty all

around us, but there is also terrible corruption, violence, and fear. We don’t have to look at headlines to see the results of sin. The brokenness of our own lives and families, loneliness, sickness, anger, hurt, division, and death are all a part of our lives.

But Paul says “we do not lose hope.” Outwardly, in the things that we can see, we are all “wasting away.” But inwardly, in the things that can’t be seen, we are being renewed Every. Single. Day.

Each day our Lord renews us, forgives us, washes us, guides us and provides for us. Each day he gives us a new beginning. And so we fix our eyes on what is unseen – on the grace and love of our Savior that is invisible, and invincible.

“Our earthly tent,” our bodies grow old. Each of us experiences that differently and yet each of us faces it. But we have a home in heaven that never fades.

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, my eyes are often pulled toward the evil around me. Let me see you today in my world, in my neighbors, even in tragedy. Let me see and follow. Amen.*

Day Three: Mark 3:20-35

²² *And the teachers of the law who came down from Jerusalem said, "He is possessed by Beelzebul," and "by the prince of demons he casts out demons."* ²³ *And he called them to him and said to them in parables, "How can Satan cast out Satan?"* ²⁴ *If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand."*

It was on June 16th in 1858 that Abraham Lincoln, while campaigning to be Senator from Illinois, referred to this Bible verse. "A house divided against itself cannot stand. I believe this government cannot endure, permanently, half slave and half free. I do not expect the Union to be dissolved... It will become all one thing or all the other."

For a time it looked as if our nation would become all slave. Instead, more than 620,000 deaths later, our nation was united again, no longer half slave and half free.

It appears our nation is divided today. This month the Supreme Court is expected to rule on a controversial case about the nature of marriage. But you could read this devotion in any year, any decade, and it would be the same. Our nation is deeply

divided in many ways between those who struggle to follow God's will and those who struggle to free themselves from God's law.

Can we unite our nation again? Can we fight some sort of great battle to unite the nation under one idea? No. Not even the Civil War, with its terrible cost, was able to achieve that. It could force people to obey the predominant law, but it could not change hearts.

Increasingly, as we try to live in a way that is pleasing to God, we will find that we are divided from the world. But we are not called to force others to follow God's will. We may be divided from everyone around us, but we are united with Jesus Christ.

This was Jesus' parable, those who live in his love will no longer have to fight against themselves. They will be one with him and at peace.

Prayer: *Dearest Jesus, I wish that I could be at one with my friends and neighbors. But do not let me be divided from you to follow the world. Instead, lead others to be one with us in eternal joy. Amen.*

Day Four: Psalm 103

Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name! Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, who satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

What do you remember from the first days of summer? I remember hot classrooms that smelled like baloney sandwiches, stacks of books and empty desks. I remember a bee in the classroom, and extra recesses. I remember carrying home a bag of papers on the last half day, and being so happy to be OUT OF SCHOOL. I remember waking up early the next day, too excited to sleep in.

I remember saying, "I'm bored. There's nothing to do."

How long do our blessings last? We were all looking forward to warmer weather, but I already hear complaints about the heat. Perhaps it is because we fail to receive all these things with prayer. We may say a quick word of prayer before meals, but we receive the gift of an evening's

rest, a morning to sleep in, a weekend, a family game night, a hot sunny afternoon, a car ride with the kids, an hour or two alone – we receive all these things and more without prayer - without recognizing what God has done. Perhaps today, just for once, we can change that.

Take just 10 minutes of this summer day to look about you for reasons to thank God. Then, seeing how richly you have been blessed, why not take a little more time to pray for others to receive the same gifts you have been given. And, finally, pray for a new heart that responds in gratitude to your heavenly Father.

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, give me a grateful heart. Not just for the first hour after I receive your gifts, but forever. 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