

# St. Paul:

## Weekly Devotions

*Devotions on week's readings,  
for 06.14.15 (Pentecost 3b)*

### **Day One: Ezekiel 17:22-24**

*I myself will take a shoot from the  
very top of a cedar and plant it...*

*On the mountain heights of Israel I  
will plant it; it will produce  
branches and bear fruit and become  
a splendid cedar.*

A few paragraphs before this lesson, God told Ezekiel a parable that was very similar to this one. It was about an eagle (King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon) who took the top of the tree (the King of Israel) and planted him in Babylon.

Although this king was an enemy, and even though the Babylonians were a pagan people, God used them to bless his people. So the king of Babylon carried the Israelites into exile, but he “planted” them in a place where they could flourish, and he was generous to them.

Even in a far away country, even in a place that was not the “promised land” that God wanted for his people, God made his people grow and he was able to bless them. Sadly, the Israelites tried

to rebel against God’s plan for their exile, and they suffered for it.

But now “I myself will take a shoot from the very top of a cedar and plant it.” God says that he will be like the eagle in his first parable, but he will carry his people back to where they belong and bless them in their homeland. And of course, God kept his promise.

Are you in your “promised land,” the place that you would most like to be in your life? Most people still have some goal, some dream of what lies ahead. We often wonder why God allows us to stay in this place, sickness, or loneliness, or poverty.

But God can bless us even through our enemies, and even in a far away place. Maybe we should not try to escape from where we are, but instead to seek for God’s blessing here.

What do you think of as your “homeland?”

**Prayer:** *O Almighty God, you brought my family here and you have caused me to take root and grow. Lord, help me trust in your for rain and sun and every blessing, and plant me at last in your own home. Amen.*

## Day Two: 2 Cor 5:1-17

*Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house not built by human hands. Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling...*

I love to go camping to get away from civilization. The first time I ever tried back country camping, I went all by myself, and I hiked 10 miles through the forest in the Porcupine Mountains and set up my campsite just 20 feet from Lake Superior. It was beautiful.

But when you sleep in a tent you can hear every single crack, pop, creak, sniff, whisper, and step in the forest around you. And that part of the lakeshore was all rocks which, with the action of the waves, made funny knocking noises. It sounded a lot like footsteps!

How would that make you feel... in the dark... in the forest... at night... where there are bears!? WHAT'S OUT THERE?!? Camping is fun, but sometimes it's spooky.

How is your life like a camping trip? Are there many things around, like stinging

bugs, snakes, raccoons, and bears that may worry you? Is living in a tent something that gets gradually more and more uncomfortable?

Now imagine leaving your tent and entering the air conditioned lodge. A hot shower, a soft bed, and strong walls and roof help us rest. Think of how it would feel to sleep in a soft bed after days on the hard ground.

What will heaven feel like? When we think about the end of our life, we may be willing to go to heaven if our earthly life is painful – if our “quality of life” is low. But even if your life here is wonderful, how much better will life be in God’s house – out of the tent at last?

**Prayer:** *Father thank you for the tent in which I live. My body is a wonderful thing even if it is often not as comfortable as I would like. Thank you even more for the home you have made ready for me. Take me there in your time... when my camping days are done. Amen.*

### **Day Three: Mark 4:26-34**

*He also said, "This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground.<sup>27</sup> Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how."<sup>28</sup> All by itself the soil produces grain—first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head.<sup>29</sup> As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come."*

Politicians are campaigning, trying to convince us that they and their policies can change our world. Some of them even seem to believe that if we only adopt their policies we will be able to overcome all social ills, hunger, poverty, racism and hatred. Believe it or not, some people even suggest that we will soon conquer old age and illness, and extend our life's span will into the second hundred years!

Perhaps they can do these things, in some small ways. But nothing we do can create a heaven on earth. All our efforts seem to bring about unintended consequences that are as bad as the problems we thought we were solving.

No, the kingdom of God will not come because of

science or politics or wealth or power. Although we are called to exert ourselves to care for others, the kingdom of God still comes entirely without our effort. The only real changes in peoples' hearts come by the work of God's Spirit.

Just as we cannot make it rain or make the sun shine or force the seed to grow, we cannot make people spiritually alive or cause them to believe in Jesus. And make no mistake, this is what people really need. More than a job, more than an education, they need to know their heavenly Father through Jesus, their Savior.

We cannot do this, but God can. And when his Holy Spirit awakens the seed of faith in us, then our lives are changed. Even our world is changed. We bear the fruit of faith, the signs of God's love for us in our love for others, and God's love changes our world.

**Prayer:** *Dearest Jesus, let me grow and flourish today. Send rain or sun, whatever I need so that I may joyfully bear fruit. Bless all farmers and others who provide food. And grant that our nation may be blessed with spiritual nourishment. Amen.*

## Day Four: 2 Cor. 5:1-19

<sup>16</sup> *So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view.*

*Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer.*

<sup>17</sup> *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!* <sup>18</sup> *All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: <sup>19</sup> that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.*

We see the world changing around us. In our country, even as we would think that racism should have decreased, we see more riots and more anger about racial issues. We see the moral values of our country changing, so that what used to be commonly accepted as right and wrong are no longer so certain. We see our nation more deeply divided socially, politically, economically, morally, and spiritually. And we begin to wonder where it will all end.

What is your response to all this? For some people it would be migration – move

away and find a better place. But where would that be?

For some of us it is hibernation. We just roll over in our sleep and try to pretend it's not happening.

For some it is capitulation. Perhaps if we go along with some of the world's changes we won't feel like aliens.

For some the answer is altercation. We need to fight back, argue, condemn the changes around us!

But God calls us to a "ministry of reconciliation." Our whole purpose in life is to bring the divided back together – not by compromise, but by comfort. We bring the gospel of forgiveness to the world, so that we can be one in Jesus!

**Prayer:** *Lord Jesus, you have called me to be your ambassador. Equip me not to announce war, but to promote peace. Not to surrender your word, but to proclaim your love. 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](http://stpaulannarbor.org)