

St. Paul: Weekly Devotions

*Devotions on week's readings
for 08.02.15 (Pentecost 10b)*

Day One: 1 Kings 17:7-24

⁷And after a while the brook dried up, because there was no rain in the land. ⁸Then the word of the LORD came to him, ⁹“Arise, go to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and dwell there. Behold, I have commanded a widow there to feed you.”

Last Sunday's sermon reflected on how God provided for Elijah in the wilderness. During years of drought and famine, when it did not rain for three years, God hid Elijah from his enemies and he delivered daily food by the ravens.

Now at last the drought has lasted so long that the stream which had provided the prophet's water has dried up. And so God sends him to a new place – a surprising place.

Where would you go to look for help? If your car was broken down on the road, would you walk up to the tattoo covered biker to ask for a ride to the gas station? If you didn't have money to pay your

light bill, would you go to another country, to people who speak a different language, to ask for help?

God crosses borders. God destroys obstacles. He used a Canaanite woman to care for his prophet, Elijah. When her own food was failing, God crossed the borders of possibilities, turning scarcity into abundance. He did not send a great windfall, but he gave just enough day after day, faithfully. When the widow's son died, God even crossed the boundary of life and death.

Where would you go looking for help? God can bring help to you from any source. Not just your family. Not just from those you know or are comfortable with. God, your Father, crosses all boundaries to love and care for his children. He even crossed the boundary between heaven and earth, sending his Son into an alien land, to an enemy people, to people who would take his life.

And out of death, God brought life forever.

Prayer: *Father, let me not fear the unfamiliar, but let me see your hand at work in this world wherever I turn. Teach me to trust. Amen.*

Day Two: Exodus 16:2-15

In the desert the whole community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. The Israelites said to them, "If only we had died by the Lord's hand in Egypt!" ...Then the Lord said to Moses, "I will rain down bread from heaven..."

Is grumbling bad? We would never say that it's good, but I suspect that few of us think it's really bad. After all, everybody grumbles! But what does it mean for us to grumble at God who has given us all we have – none of which we deserve?

When children grumble about supper, mom might simply take the plates away until we learn gratitude. At least we did that. "You don't like what is served for supper? OK." It took about 2 seconds for the kids to realize that they are not the providers of all that they need.

And when our children were ready to receive their food again, then what did we do? We did just what you'd expect. We provided them with every good thing that they needed to grow healthy and strong!

What did God do for his people when they grumbled? He punished the Israelites (among other things, he let them wander an extra 40 years), but he also generously gave them more of what they needed. He gave them food from heaven (although they had to gather it up). He gave them just enough each day. They could not store extra for a rainy day, but had to trust that tomorrow God would provide once again. He taught them to trust.

What has your heavenly Father done for you?

When you grumbled about what someone else received that you didn't have, what did he do? When you complained about the wealth of others, when you looked at your house or your clothes or your job or your body and wished that you had what others have, what did God do? He still gave to you the most amazing gift. His love that invites you to eternal life.

Prayer: *Father, I'm sorry for my childish complaining. I deserve nothing from you, but you have given me eternal gifts. Teach me to praise you. Amen.*

Day Three: Eph 4:1-16

...speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

Paul talks about the whole Body of Christ growing together and being built up in love. That sounds wonderful, but it doesn't always seem like the way things are.

What do we see when we look at the Church of Jesus in the world? We actually see members of the body fighting against each other! The church is fractured and fragmented. Even among people who are not divided by teaching, those who are members of the same congregation, we see envy and argument. What could be worse? That's like an autoimmune disease in which the body attacks its own tissues.

What keeps us from growing together? In verse 14, Paul says the problem is that we are like infants blown this way and that by different teachings. To grow together in faith, the parts of the body

must all be listening to the Head.

In what area do you need to grow up? Where do you need to be listening more closely to Jesus in order to be united with the rest of the body?

It might be in teaching, learning to follow Jesus' instruction rather than the leading of the world. Or it might be in compassion, learning to show the love that Jesus showed for those who did not love him.

Jesus does not call you to especially love those who love you, your best friends, your family members. Jesus said, "even the pagans do that." But he called you to love those who make themselves your enemies – even, or perhaps especially, if they are your brothers and sisters in faith.

Speaking the truth – and showing love – that is the simplest description of what our Church is supposed to be about. Let's pray for help.

Prayer: *Dear Jesus, let me listen to your voice. And listening, teach me love and patience for the other parts of the body. Let me be a blessing to my church. Amen.*

Day Four: John 6:22-35

[Jesus said,] “Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life.”

What is Jesus talking about? I don't work for food that spoils, do I?

Over the last 20 years and more, many people have worked and saved to build up a solid portfolio. But in a single bad year, not long ago, some lost over 40% of their life savings.

Several years ago there was a massive power outage that lasted for more than 4 days. We tried to keep our food preserved in coolers of ice, but finally we had to throw out everything in the refrigerator. People lost entire freezers full of food. It would have taken weeks to eat that much food, and it took weeks to replace it.

If their investments were only paper, it might still take a very long time to burn that much. But in the space of days, or even moments, our investments can simply disappear. If these material things are the “food that spoils,” how well balanced is the portfolio of your life between will-spoil and won't-spoil?

How much of what you are working for, spending hours of your life to obtain, is something that can be destroyed in a moment? A leaky roof, a loose wire, a burglar, a missed stop light, and you could lose everything you have.

Perhaps you need a new “investment strategy.” Jesus urged his listeners to get hold of the bread of life, namely himself, which would never spoil or fade. What are you investing in your relationship with Jesus?

Didn't you think you needed to invest in Jesus? He has a treasure house of gifts, new and old, good things waiting for you. Take hold of them by searching his word, walking with him in prayer, and dwelling in his Spirit.

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, I spend so much of my time and effort on the wrong things. Point me toward one thing of eternal value that I may cherish today. 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 or our church at stpaulannarbor.org