

St. Paul: Weekly Devotions

*Devotions on week's readings
for 08.09.15 (Pentecost 11b)*

Day One: 1 Kings 18:17-40

And Elijah came near to all the people and said, "How long will you go limping between two different opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him." And the people did not answer him a word. Then Elijah said to the people, "I, even I only, am left a prophet of the Lord, but Baal's prophets are 450 men.

A large crowd has climbed all the way up the rounded slopes of Mt. Carmel, overlooking the sea. Gathered around Elijah and the 400 prophets of Baal, they are waiting to see what happens. It's a sort of worship duel. The two sides will each pray and see which God responds, whether Baal or Yahweh. Which part would we play if we had been there?

Hopefully, you don't see yourself in the place of King Ahab or Queen Jezebel, or envision yourself as one of the prophets of Baal. (Although, if you have, you should know that God sought to bring them back to faith also. See 1 Kings 21:27-29.)

More likely you imagine that you are a believer hidden in the crowd. But why was the crowd silent when Elijah challenged them? Some things never change. It's hard to take a public stand in the midst of a crowd. And it would be easy for us to condemn these people for their silence. But God does not condemn them.

God wants to bring them back to himself. That's why Elijah builds his altar with 12 stones representing all of the tribes of Israel, even those who were "lost."

Even if you have drifted away from your heavenly Father, he desires to lead you back. He still has your stone. He still wants to build you up as a part of his Temple, his Body, his Kingdom.

When God revealed his power on the mountain, many turned back to him – at least for a time. Our faith is weak. But God's love is not weak. God's grace is always ready to welcome us back.

Prayer: *Father, I too have hesitated between turning to you and returning to the world and its idols. Lord, restore me again and again. Bring me home and let me find my joy in you. Amen.*

Day Two: Eph 4:17-5:2

So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking... Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more.

I asked a friend of mine who was a hog farmer how he could stand the smell. After all, their house was right next to a building with hundreds of pigs! He said, “That’s the smell of money!”

The truth is, he and his family simply did not smell what the rest of us smelled. It’s a helpful aspect of our sense of smell that, when we’re exposed to a strong odor over a period of time our nerves adjust so that the smell becomes less offensive.

Our minds may be the same way. If you watch TV shows from the 70s that were once considered daring, you will probably find them quite mild. The “7 words you can’t say on TV” are now common. Is it possible that our sense of right and wrong might be slowly changed?

Christians in Paul’s time could become desensitized to

immorality because they were surrounded by prostitution and drunkenness and lewd language and behavior. Paul warned them against being too much like the world.

Instead of campaigning against the evil of others, how could Christian believers show by their own speech and actions that they are different from the world?

Are we an example of love for the poor? Do we help guide the misguided children? Do we offer an alternative for those who are trapped in addictions, or do we expect them to save themselves?

If we “no longer live as the Gentiles do” then it should not just be because of things we DON’T do, but it should also be because of the things we DO. If we no longer live as the Gentiles do, then how do we live? What is different about believers in Jesus that others should be able to see?

Prayer: *Dear Jesus, I am a different person in you. I am no longer a slave to sin. Let me live differently today, so that everyone can see what you are like! Amen.*

Day Three: John 6:35-51

“I am the bread of life. Your forefathers ate the manna in the desert, yet they died. Here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which a man may eat and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever.”

Often, when I am trying to tell a non-believer about Jesus, I try to use inoffensive language. I try to avoid religious or “churchy” language because I don’t want to sound weird. I don’t want to make statements that seem too bold or aggressive. I won’t talk about Judgment Day. I may even avoid mentioning heaven or hell, because I worry that they sound mythical to someone who does not believe.

And yet, what did Jesus do? He spoke out quite plainly, even bluntly, about what it meant to believe in him. “I am the bread of life... If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever.”

That’s a pretty bold claim to make. He suggests that people ought to “eat” him. Surely everyone knew that he didn’t mean that literally, and yet the image was very offensive. And even more

challenging, Jesus was not shy about pointing to himself as the only source of life, and making claims about eternal life.

What bold statement should you be making? Perhaps you should have your own “I am” statements.

“I am forgiven.” “I know that I have eternal life because Jesus died for my sins.” “I used to be hungry, but now I am content because I have eaten the Bread of Life.”

Perhaps those words would seem strange to your friends. But they are the simple truth. You have been changed because Jesus is in you.

Some people took offense, at Jesus, but others listened because of his clear words. Where do you need to speak more clearly? Where have you failed to speak at all?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, you told the truth. You spoke the truth about sin, and the truth about your love and grace and salvation you brought. Give me a spirit of truth. Amen.*

Day Four: 1 Kings 18:1-16

And Ahab called Obadiah, who was over the household. (Now Obadiah feared the Lord greatly, and when Jezebel cut off the prophets of the Lord, Obadiah took a hundred prophets and hid them by fifties in a cave and fed them with bread and water.”

In this part of the story of Elijah nothing exciting happens. Ahab calls his servant to help him. They need to find grass for the horses to keep them from dying in the midst of the drought. So Ahab goes one way with half the horses, and Obadiah goes another way. And the servant meets Elijah.

Obadiah is a good person for you to get to know. For several years he has been the head of King Ahab’s household. He keeps the budget and directs the other servants.

It’s a house in which the worship of Baal and Asherah is common. There were probably even some who had practiced human sacrifice. (16:34) The Bible says that 850 prophets “ate at Jezebel’s table.” That is, they were fed from the household of the king. That means that

Obadiah was in charge of caring for 850 false prophets, and yet he was hiding 100 prophets of Yahweh, men whom his employer, Jezebel, wanted to put to death. And if he was feeding them, it was probably with Ahab’s food!

Many believers today live in the midst of false teachers. Some of them are wonderful people, and some are angry, or immoral. A few may even be criminal, or doing things that we know are wrong.

We live in the world, but like Obadiah we are called to care for the people around us, even if they were prophets of Baal. And through the worldly tools that God entrusts to us, like the king’s food, we also care for the people of God.

God cared for Obadiah in the very house of his enemy. He can care for you.

Prayer: *Father, you love the people around me, even if they reject you. Lord, help me to love them as you do. 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