

St. Paul: Weekly Devotions

*Devotions on week's readings
for 11.22.15 End of Church Yr.*

Day One: Isaiah 51:4-6

My salvation is on its way... Lift up your eyes to the heavens, look at the earth beneath; the heavens will vanish like smoke, the earth will wear out like a garment and its inhabitants die like flies. But my salvation will last forever, my righteousness will never fail.

I had a student who wanted to use this as his confirmation verse, "the earth will wear out like a garment and its inhabitants die like flies." He had an odd sense of humor, but a good sense of Gospel. He knew this is good news!

Wait. How can it be good news for things to wear out? We pull our favorite sweater out of the closet and discover that there is a hole in it! We drive our faithful car, the one that we've been bragging to our friends about because it has such high mileage and "it's going to go on forever!" And suddenly there is a loud noise and it's gone.

Even more sadly, our beloved pet who been a comfort and companion for

many years begins to slow down, and we see the end coming. Worst of all, we watch our parents or our spouse or our good friend begin to change. They aren't themselves. And one day they are gone.

"The earth will wear out like a garment and its inhabitants die like flies," and this is good news? Yes, because of the contrast that Isaiah makes. All these things may pass away, but our salvation will not. My righteousness, that God has declared me holy in his sight, will not pass an expiration date. My Lord is not growing old or weak. And his promise will not fail. My body will fail and die, but I will live forever!

When God tells us to "lift up your eyes" he is telling us to look forward to his coming. Lift up your eyes. What do you see that is wearing out? Use that to remind yourself that God's promise will be new again today.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, all my things are old. Even my body is wearing out. But you will come and make all things new. Come quickly, Lord, with your salvation! Amen.*

Day Two: Jude 20-25

Be merciful to those who doubt; snatch others from the fire and save them; to others show mercy, mixed with fear – hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh.

There is an old saying, "hate the sin but love the sinner." Lately, many people have begun to oppose that saying, believing that if we "hate" someone's sin (or their lifestyle), then we must hate them as well.

Jude goes even further than that. He says that we should hate everything associated with sin, even the clothing that is stained with sin! Here is a challenge: look closely at the order of verses 21 and 22.

1. We are to keep ourselves in the love of God. That is, we are to keep from getting entangled in sin.

2. We are to wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that will lead us to eternal life. That is, we are to receive mercy for our own sins.

And then 3. We are to have mercy on those who doubt. Be patient with those who are weak or who struggle in faith. And 4. Save those

who are in danger. And 5. We should show mercy (again!) mixed with fear. That is, come as close as we can to the fire without endangering ourselves so that we may save others.

That's a lot of mercy! Mercy for us – mercy for doubters – mercy even for those who are almost lost!

Sadly, we seem to get it exactly backwards. Instead of hating the things stained with sin and loving the people who are caught in sin – we tend to love the things associated with temptation, skimpy clothing, violent entertainment, money, and all the things the world loves, but we often feel superior to those who get entangled with the world.

How can you reverse that pattern in some part of your life? What corrupted things should you be throwing away – and what corrupted people should you be loving more, just as you have been loved?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, I love things, but you love people. Fill me with your Spirit so that I would despise the things of this world, stained by sin, and love your sheep whose sins you have forgiven. Amen.*

Day Three: Mark 13:24-37

“Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that it is near, right at the door.

Signs of the end, that's what Jesus is talking about. Wars and earthquakes and disease and false prophets all remind us that the end is near. Is that a bad thing or a good thing?

Most people think of "the end" as a very bad thing, even a frightening thing. Movies are made of this. Giant waves crush cities. The earth opens up and swallows skyscrapers. People run screaming as fire falls from the sky.

That's great for a movie, but Jesus says the end days are more like the approach of summer after a long cold winter. Do you remember what that feels like?

At this time of the year it's the other way around. We see the days getting shorter, the nights darker and colder. The beauty and warmth of summer fades behind us and we look ahead expecting the first snowfall and the first icy roads. We see bad things

coming – but God sees good things ahead.

In the darkest months of winter, we will celebrate the birth of Jesus, the Light who came into the darkness. When the earth is frozen and hard, we will begin the season of Lent and turn out faces with Jesus toward his sacrifice. And then, just as we are wondering if the snow will ever melt, we will celebrate Easter and be reminded that new life is not just a promise, it is a reality that Jesus has already won for us.

Remember what it felt like when school finally let out for the summer? Like children who look forward to the end of school, to summer vacation and freedom, we see that the end of the world will be our release from the burden of sin and the beginning of eternal rest and joy with Jesus.

Prayer: *Dear Jesus, school will soon be out for us. Our work will soon be over. Teach me to see the signs of trouble in this world as signs of promise, reminders that our rest is coming soon! Amen.*

Day Four

“We Sing for All the

Unsung Saints” (LSB #678)

We sing for all the unsung saints,
That countless, nameless throng,
Who kept the faith and passed it on
With home steadfast and strong
Through all the daily griefs and joys
No chronicles record,
Forgetful of their lack of fame,
But mindful of their Lord.

We recently celebrated the Reformation, remembering that 498 years ago Martin Luther preached the gospel. We followed that with the feast of All Saints, recalling our family and friends who have gone ahead of us to heaven. This last week was Veterans Day in which we gave thanks for people who risked or gave their lives for others. And soon we'll gather for Thanksgiving, offering our gratitude for the gifts God has given us in his people.

Who are all these people? Are they really “saints” as we say? I have a collection of pictorial directories from the congregations I have served. It's interesting to look through them and remember the stories behind each face.

You would not know the names. (I forget some too.) But their stories are familiar – stories of sickness suffered, of

sadness endured, of burdens shouldered, of enemies forgiven, of divisions mended, of marriages healed or of blessings found even in failure, of death defied. These are weak people. None of them are famous people, but even if a few of them have some local notoriety it is fleeting. A year after their death the community has moved on.

And yet, these are the saints, the Body of Christ, the frail and fractured yet redeemed and resplendent people of God. The Father created them. Jesus bought them. The Spirit filled them. God used them.

These are those who have passed through the valley of the shadow of death, but God has washed their robes and made them white.

Prayer: *O Almighty God, even if no one here remembers my name, I know that you will not forget.
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