

St. Paul: Weekly Devotions

*Devotions on week's readings
for 05.01.16 Easter 6c*

Day One: Acts 16:9-15

And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing there, urging him and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." ¹⁰ And when Paul had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

"From the President of the United States, Greetings: You are hereby ordered for induction into the Armed Forces of the United States..."

That's how a draft notice read in 1970. The draft lottery was first held in 1969, and birthdates were drawn to see who would be called up. The "winner" was September 14th. All men between the ages of 19 and 25 who were born on September 14 were at the top of the list for being called to military service, probably in Vietnam.

Have you ever faced that sort of possibility? Have you been suddenly called into service that was, perhaps, not

entirely welcome? When Paul saw a vision of a man from Macedonia, he immediately left to go there. He didn't know the man. He didn't know anyone there. But he knew that God's good news was needed there, and that God wanted him to bring it.

Some people who got a draft notice fled to Canada. Jonah jumped on board a ship to sail the opposite direction from God's call. You might run away too, if God called you to go to Macedonia or Africa or someplace strange to you.

But haven't you ever had a "vision" of the people in your neighborhood, or people where you work, or people in your family who languish without the good news? Like the man in Paul's vision, they are dying without hope of eternal life.

Because Paul was drafted, gentiles found life in Jesus – probably including your ancestors. Whose life will we influence for eternity?

Prayer: *Lord, you called Paul, and as a result the good news of life came to me many years later. Do you have a call for me? Will you help me bear it? Amen.*

Day Two: Rev 21:9-14, 21-27

*"Come, I will show you the bride,
the wife of the Lamb."*

There is an old custom that says a bride and groom should not see one another until the bride is walking down the aisle. Allegedly, that tradition comes from the days when marriages were arranged and parents didn't want the groom to have a chance to back out after seeing the bride. (No one seems to suggest that the bride might feel the same way.)

In the Bible it is very different. The groom has already seen the bride. In fact, the groom (Jesus) has seen us at our very worst. He knew us even before we were born, and he loved us and called us to be his own. He came to find us when we were lost, and he brought us home at last.

In the Bible the bride, which is all of those who believe in Jesus, is dirty and grubby, stained with sin and diseased. She bears on her body the marks of her slavery to sin. But Jesus, our bridegroom, has bought her back from slavery. He paid a great price for her. He has washed her in the blood of his sacrifice. And he has clothed

her, not with a wedding dress, but with the simple pure white robe of his own perfect sinlessness.

When we attend weddings we often remark on how beautiful the bride is. But at our own wedding to the Lamb of God, we will be the beautiful bride, made beautiful by him. And he will be the one who takes our wounds and sins and stains on himself.

Wash something today. Wash a window – wash a load of clothes – wash the car. Perhaps clean and polish a pair of shoes, making them shine as much as you can.

And when you do, if you get dirty or scratched while you do it, if you get tired or sweaty, remember what Jesus has done for you. Paul says that Jesus was “made sin” for us. Isaiah says he took our sin upon himself. Remember how the bridegroom suffered and was made dirty so that you could be clean and fresh and new.

Prayer: Dear Jesus, I don't feel like a beautiful bride. But help me to see myself through your loving eyes. And help me to see others in the same way. Amen.

Day Three: Mark 1:28-35

That evening at sundown they brought to him all who were sick or oppressed by demons. ³³And the whole city was gathered together at the door. ³⁴And he healed many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons. And he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him.

³⁵And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed.

A young friend of mine posted to Facebook that she feels sleepy every day at 2 p.m.

What's going on???

Well, we know that's not so unusual. Many of us stay up late in order to enjoy movies or company or a good book. And some of us get up early in order to commute to work. That's why many people love Saturdays and, sadly, Sundays as a time to sleep in. We run out of energy.

Jesus worked late too. He worked late caring for people and healing people. There were many who wanted to talk to him, and there was only one Jesus for them to see. Surely we could expect that Jesus would cherish his chances to rest. But in our gospel lesson

Jesus rises early. He gets up before everyone else, so that he can go out by himself to pray.

Get up early in order to pray???

Why would anyone do that? And especially why would Jesus need to pray? Wouldn't he already be close to the Father?

We know that our bodies need sleep. God knows it too. That's why he taught us to set aside an entire day of rest every week (a command we generally ignore). But even more important than rest, God knows that we need fellowship with him.

When we are apart from those we love, we feel a strong need to talk to them. We call – we text – we contact them on Facebook or Skype – we arrange times to “hang out” because time with those we love is good for us.

If Jesus needed to pray, then you also need time in prayer. It doesn't have to follow someone else's plan or pattern, but you need to find a time and a plan for devotion.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, teach me to pray. Make me long for time with you. Help me find a way. Amen.

Day Four:

We have a lot to say to each other. In 2000, there were 4 trillion emails sent globally. In 2007, that number hit 35 trillion. Today, in the time it takes you to read this sentence, 20 million emails will be written.

And yet, people seem more alienated from their friends and family than ever before. “You know those pregnant pauses you have on elevators? That’s a great time to pull out a Blackberry and get some work done,” says Raul Fernandez, CEO of a data firm.

We are exchanging more messages than at any time in history, and yet we are more alone. As a result, people experience more anxiety, more fear, and they are quicker to argue, quicker to judge, quicker to end friendships. Our society communicates more than ever before – but listens less, and is more divided than ever before.

If we are losing the gift of communication – and the blessing of relationship – how much more likely is it that we are losing the experience of prayer?

We are still able to recite prayers, but are we able to stop – to listen – to take time – to rest – to converse with God – to meditate on his word? Meditate is a slow word. You can receive a devotion by email in a second, but you cannot meditate in a moment. Jesus knew that it took time – silent time – to be with God, or indeed to be with anyone we really love.

Look at your life and ask, “do I have time for anyone but myself? Do I have time for my Savior?” Of all the hours of this day, which will you spend with Jesus?

When Jesus had spent time with his father, then he was ready to spend real time with others, listening and caring. When you’ve taken time with Jesus, then who will you visit just to listen?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, I can't slow down the world. Help me to slow down myself, and to spend time with you. 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