

St. Paul: Weekly Devotions

*Devotions on week's readings
for 05.08.16 Easter 7c*

Day One: Acts 1:12-26

Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey away. ¹³ And when they had entered, they went up to the upper room, where they were staying, Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot and Judas the son of James. ¹⁴ All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.

It's great to go to church on Easter Sunday when the attendance is at its peak and the whole church has prepared for the grandest worship of the year. The singing is the loudest. And we feel like we're a part of a winning thing.

That's not what the first church felt like.

In today's reading the disciples (minus Judas) have just seen Jesus ascend to heaven. They have witnessed his power over death. They have seen him in his

resurrection glory. They have watched him ascend into the sky. And they have heard his command to go conquer the world with the good news.

Now what? While they wait for the promised coming of the Holy Spirit, they spend their time praying, eleven disciples, Jesus' mother and brothers, and a small group of women who had seen him at the grave.

This is the first "small group" of the church, and they are not a very bold bunch. And yet, they will be the seed of all the billions who would come to trust in Jesus. It is through this tiny committee of people praying that God would send the good news to every corner of the world.

With whom do you pray? Do you gather with any other believer and pray for God's leading, for strength to carry out the ministry he has given you? Is your life changed by the living Jesus? Or are you content for the world to remain unchanged?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, I know what your disciples knew. Now give me the same Spirit of boldness, to prayerfully go into the world. Amen.*

Day Two: Revelation 22:1-6

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb² through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.³ No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him.⁴ They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads.⁵ And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.⁶ And he said to me, "These words are trustworthy and true. And the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, has sent his angel to show his servants what must soon take place."

God sent his angel, his messenger, to reveal to the Church what must soon take place. And that revelation is the long book of symbolism and imagery that we call The Revelation of St. John. What does it mean?

A lot of people are confused by Revelation. Even frightened by it. Many people

try to decipher it. But the angel said that all these things would "soon" take place, and they did. They still do.

The world has been decimated many times by plague and warfare. It has been repeatedly poisoned with false teaching. The enemies of God have pursued God's Church, symbolized in the book by a woman who flees into the desert and is protected by God. We have even come to the brink of total destruction more than once, and not just since the invention of nuclear weapons.

Bad stuff has happened, but God's word has continued to go out, to be sown, to take root, to grow and to bear fruit. And God's people, even though surrounded by change and decay, have continued to live in the victory of eternal life, the free gift won for them by Jesus.

What does the future hold? This beautiful picture of perfect harmony with God.

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, I have failed to listen. I'm often afraid when I see the evils in the world around us. Reveal to me again, I pray, the end of the story, and the joy that lies ahead. Amen.*

Day Three: John 17:20-26

“I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word,²¹ that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.²² The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one,²³ I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.

²⁴ Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.²⁵ O righteous Father, even though the world does not know you, I know you, and these know that you have sent me.²⁶ I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.”

Sometimes people joke with me, asking me to pray for sunny weather because supposedly I have a special “in” with “the Man Upstairs.” Obviously, you can pray to your Heavenly Father as well as I can. And he will listen.

But in this way that feeble joke is true. Don’t you think that God the Father is sure to answer the prayers of Jesus? And what did Jesus ask here, when he prayed for you?

He prayed that we would be one with each other. So unified, in fact, that we would be like the Father and the Son.

He prayed that the world would see us and know that Jesus was sent by God, and that the world would see God’s love.

He prayed that we would be with him where he is – that we would be in heaven with him. And finally, he promised that he has made God known to us, and he will continue to do so, that God’s love would be in you and me.

Jesus prayed for those things for you, and if we don’t have them it is not because God has not provided them. It can only be because we have turned aside after other things.

Seeing what Jesus prayed for, what do you think you should pray for today?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, I have wanted many things. Help me to desire what you want, and to love whom you love. Amen.*

Day Four: Acts 1:1-11

In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, ² until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen.

³ He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.

⁴ And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, “you heard from me; ⁵ for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”

Tradition says that this book, The Acts of the Apostles, was written by Luke, a companion of Paul. Luke was not a disciple. He was a gentile, and a doctor, who assisted Paul in some of his church planting.

Here we see from the beginning of the book that it is actually a sort of letter, written to a man named Theophilus. Since the name means “Lover of God,” it might not be an actual person. The name could stand for all of those who are catechumens, men and women learning about the teachings of

Jesus before they will be baptized.

But Luke records the work of God. He doesn’t tell us about every committee meeting and every budget of the church. (Yes, they had those then too.) But he tells us about the ways in which he witnessed the Spirit of God working in people’s lives.

You might not write such a long story, but couldn’t you also share how God has worked in your life? Couldn’t you tell how you or others were brought to faith, how you faced crises and doubts, and how God delivered you in times of trial? Could you tell the story of the illness from which God healed you, or how the Spirit kept one whom you love in faith even in the hour of death? Have you seen the miracle of generations of new believers carrying the Church into the world?

Luke told his story, and it has inspired millions. But you too have a story to tell.

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