

Daily Readings

Please note: This week we continue our study of the book of Acts. Read and reread each passage to get a sense of the total dependence these early followers gave to the Holy Spirit.

Monday, June 8 – Read Acts 14:1-20. This passage begins a major section including the ministry and travels of Paul and Barnabas. It begins with their ministry in Iconium and Lystra. In each place, they go first to the synagogue to preach and teach. The message of Jesus as Lord and Messiah is accepted, and individuals are converted to Christ. When the Jewish leaders hear of it, they come out to confront Paul and Barnabas, eventually running them out of town. In Lystra, the ministry is so successful, Paul and Barnabas are thought to be gods. They immediately rebuke the people and give the credit to God. How are you giving credit to God for your life?

Tuesday, June 9 – Read Acts 14:21-27. This short passage is a transition paragraph as Paul and Barnabas complete their journey. The most interesting verse is verse 22 which includes these words, **“It is through many persecutions that we must enter the kingdom of God.”** These early disciples and followers were not afraid of persecution. They feared only God. Who do you fear?

Wednesday, June 10 – Read Acts 15:1-35. The Jerusalem Council was the most important gathering for the early church. The decision made at this council was not to require circumcision from converts. With this decision, the early church fully embraced the new covenant of Christ. No longer did they require ritual or sacrifice, but now it was the sacrifice of the heart for Christ. What have you sacrificed in your life? For God or for the world?

Thursday, June 11 – Acts 15:36-41. Paul now begins the second missionary journey. With this journey, Paul and Barnabas part ways. Barnabas wants to take a new follower named John Mark. Paul wants to keep the group small. So Paul joins up with Silas, and Barnabas joins with John Mark. Two things happen here in the way God uses what happened between Paul and Barnabas. First, they double their work, going to two places instead of one, and second, John Mark becomes the author of the second book of the New Testament (Mark). How is God using your difficulties for good? How have you been a Barnabas for someone?

Friday, June 12 – Read Acts 16:1-10. These 10 verses include the selection of Timothy and Paul’s call to Macedonia. Additionally we know Timothy by the letters Paul send to Timothy for instruction. As Paul begins his training with Timothy, he has him circumcised. This seems to be a contradiction to Paul’s beliefs. Paul has just argued that circumcision is not necessary with faith in Jesus Christ. But what we see happening here is Paul compromising in a small way in order to reach this Jewish community. In what ways is God leading the church to change in order to reach our society?



TRIETSCH

STUDY GUIDE & DAILY READINGS

Sunday, June 7, 2009

Down on the Bayou (Week 1 of 4)

Goin’ Off Road

Matthew 7:13-14

The Word from the Bible (Today’s New International Version)

Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life and only a few find it.

Matthew 7:13-14

The contrast of the wide and the narrow gates is paralleled in first-century Judaism, where there was a highly developed tradition of the two ways or paths open to an individual — one leading to a joyous life with God and the other to destruction. This brief saying goes with the proverb of building a house on the rock instead of the sand. This proverb points to the difficult yet rewarding nature of following God’s lead in life.

Rome was known for the building a system of highways. These highways sped up the travel and transfer of goods and soldiers. As these highways became widely used and therefore crowded, they also became dangerous. There were often bands of thieves, pickpockets, and con artists who would try to take advantage of the travelers. The presence of soldiers was also a danger to the non-Roman citizen because it was legal for the soldiers to take “what they needed” in order to complete their assignment. These highways took the Jewish faithful off the local roads and paths and mixed them with others from pagan cultures. In the first century Jewish community this “mixing” was forbidden.

With this in mind, we can see that Jesus is referring to the ease associated with the ways and practice of the world – especially the Roman world where gluttony, drunkenness, prostitution and the worship of many gods was not only acceptable, but encouraged. The narrow way is more difficult, but it leads to the places where real life is happening. The narrow way leads to the uncorrupted balance of nature and the stillness of finding God.

In one of the rather rare pessimistic notes in the Jesus tradition, it is here declared that those who choose the way that leads to life are few in number.

Making Decisions for God

Peter Marshall said, “We are like people all suited out in deep-sea diving gear marching bravely to pull out plugs in bath tubs.”

Life is made up of decisions, and decisions reveal the inner nature of a person. We make decisions out of the inner conditioning that is determined by goals and priorities. Setting goals and establishing priorities are

our responsibility.

For the disciple, the most crucial decision was made when he became a disciple of Jesus Christ. But that is not the final decision; we must keep making decisions that are consistent with this commitment to discipleship. Conversion to Christ is a change of direction from our way to God’s way, but following conversion or change of direction, we still need to decide at which level we will live our lives. We will live either at a level of fullness or emptiness.

There are three very significant contrasts which Jesus presents in the last part of the Sermon on the Mount. They are (1) the broad and narrow way, (2) bad and good fruit, and (3) doing and failing to do the will of God. The first, the narrow way and the broad way, is a contrast between the abundant life, which Jesus offers, and the way of selfishness, which has no restraints. Jesus said, **“I am come that (you) might have life, and... have it more abundantly.”** (John 10:10, KJV). But the abundant life is not without sacrifice and challenges. We only achieve abundance by the hard work associated with becoming a follower of Jesus.

To have the ability to play the piano, you must go through the hard work of practice. You do not necessarily have the ability to do a something just because no one is telling you that you cannot. Ability and excellence come through practice. As such, we are called to make decisions and set priorities, because while you are doing one thing, you can’t be doing another. When we say yes to Christ, we must also say no to other things so we can be true to the yes.

The gate is narrow in that it is demanding — it requires faith, discipline and integrity. The resulting character is the expression of “willing one will,” of recognizing one’s Master, of having an “eye that is single,” of walking with Jesus as his disciple. The broad road, in contrast, has no demands of loyalty, integrity, discipline or character.

Questions to Consider during Today’s Sermon

Life is a journey.

What road are you following?

Who is your guide on this journey?

What map are you using?

Pay attention to the details.

What dangers do you see?

Are you catching all that God is offering you?

Do you hear what God is saying to you and where God is leading?

Are you willing to take the risk of leaving the main road to follow Jesus?

Prayer Focus

Trietsch is a praying church. This morning, as you worship, one of our prayer volunteers is praying for everyone in each section of our worship center. We believe prayer changes lives and hearts for good and for God.

We invite you to join these volunteers by praying for the people around you. Feel free to pull out your cell phone to Twitter, Facebook or text friends and neighbors not attending this service. In addition to sharing your ideas and impressions of the worship service to friends outside worship, we believe these prayers will have an immediate impact on those for whom you are praying.

This morning during Holy Communion, each of us will have extra time to spend in prayer. In addition, we have some of our pastors at the altar to pray with you. If you would like for one of our pastors to pray with you, just open you hands and this will be the signal for the desire for prayer.

This morning, let the spirit of God lead you in your prayers. Some prayers will come immediately to mind because of a known need. Let other names come to mind, pray for these persons even if you do not know why God is leading you to pray for them. Spend time counting your blessings and giving thanks to God for all God’s good gifts. If there is a difficult situation in your life right now, we invite you to release it to God during this worship service. It will be there after the benediction.

Please consider making the following part of your prayers this morning:

Our nation and its leaders as it struggles to find its way economically and socially

Our world torn by war and strife

Our community and the challenges each household faces

Our Church –

Pray God will continue to provide adult volunteers and the leadership they will provide

Pray God will continue to provide adult volunteers for the children’s Sunday school

Pray God will bless and lead our church leaders, pastors, and staff

Pray God will lead every participant into a deeper walk with Jesus

Notes
