

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 15 – Read Acts 16:11-15. Lydia’s conversion in Philippi speaks volumes about the ministry of Paul. First, we see Paul and Silas visiting the busy riverside where families gathered their water for drinking and washing. They went to places where the general public were in order to share the message of Christ. Second, Luke reveals Paul’s willingness to not only reach out to gentiles, but also to women in this male-dominated society. Lydia goes on to be the major benefactor and key leader for the church in Philippi. Where does our society gather in large numbers? How can we reach into these gatherings to share the message and love of Christ?

Tuesday, June 16 – Read Acts 16:16-40. Paul and Silas are arrested, beaten and imprisoned. They are released when the authorities realize Paul is a Roman citizen and unjustly accused. Instead of leaving, Paul demands to speak to the authorities. Paul is more concerned with the opportunity to preach to the soldiers and the government leaders. Paul is far more concerned with what God wants him to do than with his own safety. Have you discerned God’s call on your life? What are you doing to fulfill that call? What life concerns are you allowing to stand in the way? Do you believe God can overcome these difficult situations like God did for Paul?

Wednesday, June 17 – Read Acts 17:1-34. Paul and his companions now travel to Thessalonica, Berea and Athens. In each place, they are given the opportunity to preach and teach in the in public places. They convince many of the good news of Christ, and these persons are converted. As these persons are converted, others resist, and with this resistance comes violence against Paul. Each time they are force down the road another new opportunity arises. What resistance are you facing in your faith? How is God providing a new opportunity? Are you paying attention to the new places God is sending you? What is standing in your way?

Thursday, June 18 – Acts 18:1-17. When Paul goes to Corinth, his experience is different. Instead of meeting resistance, Paul gets a word from God that he will be protected. He stays for over a year and a half. In our society, where are the dangerous places to share our faith? In what ways have you experienced the protection of God in your faith?

Friday, June 19 – Read Acts 18:18-28. Luke introduces Pricilla, Aquila and Apollos to us as fellow workers, teachers and preachers with Paul. This is important in that Pricilla and Aquila are women in a male dominated society. Apollos is a Greek converted from a competing religious tradition. The early followers and leaders do not let these differences stand in the way of using them for the sharing of the good news of Christ and the rapid growth in the church. In this passage, we see the early church affirming diversity and differences for the sake of the gospel of Christ. What diversity do you see in our church? How have we affirmed diversity? How so you see the gospel of Jesus Christ eliminating differences and bringing individuals together in our community?



TRIETSCH

STUDY GUIDE & DAILY READINGS

Sunday, June 14, 2009

Down on the Bayou (Week 2 of 4)

Steppin’ In It

2 Corinthians 12:6-10

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

Even if I should choose to boast, I would not be a fool, because I would be speaking the truth. But I refrain, so no one will think more of me than is warranted by what I do or say, or because of these surpassingly great revelations. Therefore, in order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

2 Corinthians 12:6-10

This passage in 2 Corinthians is part of a section that runs from 10:1 to 12:18, where Paul defends his apostolic authority. Paul was not a member of the original disciples and was known (before his conversion) as an ardent prosecutor of Christians. As such, he is called on to defend and justify his leadership and right as an apostle for Christ.

In 12:1-6, he begins by focusing on Christ as our reason to boast. In verses 7-10 Paul points to an unnamed affliction that he calls a “thorn in the flesh.” He identifies this affliction as given to him to keep him from being conceited. Paul uses the theme of boasting to remind his reader that our lives are dependent on the primacy of Jesus. As Paul states, ***“I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties.”***

Details on 2 Corinthians 12:6-10

In writing about his affliction, Paul uses language to indicate that he was inflicted with something that causes constant pain with no hope for relief. Translations include “a stake for the flesh,” “a splinter,” “a sharpened wooden shaft,” or more commonly “a thorn in the flesh.” Given his references to this difficulty in passages like Galatians 1:8, 4:13f, 1 Thessalonians 2:18, the “thorn” was possibly a physical illness, something that may well have repelled people or at least humiliated Paul.

What Paul does with this experience is very interesting. Paul calls his thorn a “messenger (angel) of Satan.” That is, he sees it as having demonic origin, not something sent by God. But Paul does not stop by

giving Satan authority or some special power over him. Instead, Paul turns his attention to the power of God to use all things for good (Romans 8:28). Although Satan does his thing, God is still in control and uses this evil for ultimate good, Heb.12:10.

In verses 8 and 9, Paul tells us that three times he pleaded with the Lord that the “thorn” be taken away from him. He continues by sharing the revelation that this affliction was transformed into a triumph of grace and vindication of the Lord’s gracious power. Jesus responds, **“My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.”** In this affliction, Paul realizes that God’s gift of eternal sovereign grace transcends adversity. God’s powerful grace is most clearly seen when viewed from human inadequacy, particularly when that inadequacy seemingly undermines gospel ministry. As far as Paul was concerned, the power of God can not be undermined by anything human or demonic. Eventually, God will prevail, even in our weakness and our troubles.

Paul welcomes inadequacy or trouble, for it is in our weakness that Christ’s power is most readily evident. So as far as Paul is concerned, it’s “bring on the weakness.” God’s sovereign grace is most evident in the life of his people when they are inadequate, rather than strong. In weakness, the indwelling Spirit can operate. In weakness, we are more likely to rely on God than we would in good times. For this reason, Paul “boast all the more gladly” about his weakness.

As Chrysostom put it, “How great is the advantage of affliction, for now..... we have filled the church with countless evils, but when we are persecuted we are more sober minded and more earnest and more ready for church attendance and for hearing.” There is strength in weakness, for when we are weak, then are we more aware of God’s all-powerful grace.

Weak – Right where Jesus can use us

Churches throughout the world seem powerless in the face of the city. How do we compete with the powerful institutions of wealth and influence? What can we do in the face of such overwhelming need? Too often we are so besieged that we close our doors to preserve what we have instead of taking the transform- ing risky action of Christ in the community.

In the face of our weakness, the Lord’s word to us is this, **“when we are weak, then we are strong.”** When we are beaten low, it is then we can recognize and be the full powerful presence of Christ. Weakness, failure, trouble, doubt, fear... all the things that seem to confine our individual Christian lives and the life of our Christian community, is the stuff that lays bare the power of Christ presence.

The assault of circumstance will never frustrate the dawning of the God’s Kingdom. The greater the weakness or trouble, the more evident is Christ’s power. The Evil One rants and rages and does his worst and yet within this strife there operates the mighty kindness of our God. God’s grace is sufficient for us for his power is fulfilled in weakness.

If we are weak, small or seemingly insignificant, this is where Jesus can use us. We should boast in our weakness. In fact, the more we look like failures in worldly terms, the greater opportunity there is for us to be successful in spiritual terms. When everything is well for us, we rely on our strength. When things are down, we depend of Christ.

Our approach then should be to do the best we can within the circumstances we face. As for our weak- nesses, troubles, difficulties and hardships - delight in them. When we are weak – celebrate – for this is when Jesus can use us for great things.

Questions to Consider during Today’s Sermon

Dealing with the everyday frustrations of life.

Where is God in your situation?

How can these obstacles become opportunities?

When facing tomorrow seems impossible.

What does the Bible say about these things?

Can we find hope when things seem so hopeless?

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 shar- ing 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, 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:

Lord, there’s been lots of bad news lately. People killed in bombings, people losing money and jobs, people alienated by politics, people hurt in natural disasters—it’s a long list. More quietly, perhaps with those closest to us, there is personal pain—rifts with children or parents, strains on marriages, workplace tensions, auto repairs. Thank you that you are always with us, no matter what happens. 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

In Jesus’ name, Amen.