

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 22 – Read Acts 19:1-10. Paul is on his third missionary journey. In this passage, we see further development in his strategy for spreading the gospel of Christ. In the first seven verses, Paul deals with some of the disciples of John the Baptist. After hearing the gospel of Christ, they are quickly converted to Christ; receive the Holy Spirit and exhibit signs and wonders of the faith. Then in verses 8-12, we see Paul not only preaching in the synagogue but also in a public assembly hall. How do you see the outreach of our church developing and growing? What places do we need to go to proclaim the message of Christ? How can you be a voice for God?

Tuesday, June 23 – Read Acts 19:11-22. The handkerchiefs or aprons were sweat rags that Paul tied around his head and waist while working at his trade. Healing and exorcisms resulted from placing them on the afflicted; they remind us of Jesus' miracle of a woman who touched the fringe of Jesus cloak (Mark 5:25-34). Notice how Luke puts the emphasis on God rather than Paul in saying, **"God did extraordinary miracles..."** Are there ever times when we have taken the credit for what God is doing in our lives? How is God working now in miraculous ways through you?

Wednesday, June 24 – Read Acts 19:23-41. Artemis was a pagan goddess at Ephesus. She was a fertility goddess whose statue was supposed to have fallen out of heaven. Her temple at Ephesus was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Demetrius, a silversmith, owed his living to the manufacture of idols of Artemis. Demetrius and several friends organized a riot against Paul. This passage explains how the riot was quelled, and Paul moved on to another location. Luke is reminding us again that the gospel of Jesus will often threaten the ways of our society. How do you see the gospel in conflict with our culture today? Who is the focus of these conflicts? What is God calling you to do to speak out against in our culture that is in conflict with the ways of Christ?

Thursday, June 25 – Acts 20:1-6. By the time Paul left Ephesus, he had spent more time there than any other city. He believed it was God's will that he leave this area, and he wanted to deliver the offering for Jerusalem in person. While visiting Ephesus, Macedonia and Corinth, Paul wrote three of the major books of the New Testament. Paul probably wrote I Corinthians while in Ephesus, II Corinthians while in Macedonia, and Romans while in Corinth. What is God calling you to do this week for Christ?

Friday, June 26 – Read Acts 20:7-16. Paul travels to Troas, where Luke rejoins him. While in Troas, he preached an all-night sermon. This passage tells the story of a man named Eutychus, who falls asleep and drops out a window to his death. Paul then uses the opportunity to raise the man from the dead to show the power of God. How is God using your situations to show God's power? Are you willing to put your life in God's hands to see what God can do? Do believe that God can bring new life to your tired situations?



TRIETSCH

STUDY GUIDE & DAILY READINGS

Sunday, June 21, 2009

Down on the Bayou (Week 3 of 4)

Bogged Down

Mark 9:14-29

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

When they came to the other disciples, they saw a large crowd around them and the teachers of the law arguing with them. As soon as all the people saw Jesus, they were overwhelmed with wonder and ran to greet him.

"What are you arguing with them about?" he asked.

A man in the crowd answered, "Teacher, I brought you my son, who is possessed by a spirit that has robbed him of speech. Whenever it seizes him, it throws him to the ground. He foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth and becomes rigid. I asked your disciples to drive out the spirit, but they could not."

"You unbelieving generation," Jesus replied, "How long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy to me."

So they brought him. When the spirit saw Jesus, it immediately threw the boy into a convulsion. He fell to the ground and rolled around, foaming at the mouth.

Jesus asked the boy's father, "How long has he been like this?"

"From childhood," he answered. "It has often thrown him into fire or water to kill him. But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us."

"If you can?" said Jesus. "Everything is possible for one who believes."

Immediately the boy's father exclaimed, "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!"

When Jesus saw that a crowd was running to the scene, he rebuked the evil spirit. "You deaf and mute spirit," he said, "I command you, come out of him and never enter him again."

The spirit shrieked, convulsed him violently and came out. The boy looked so much like a corpse that many said, "He's dead." But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him to his feet, and he stood up.

After Jesus had gone indoors, his disciples asked him privately, "Why couldn't we drive it out?"

He replied, "This kind can come out only by prayer."

I Do Believe; Help My Unbelief

Jesus hears the voice of the father in desperation. How ironic! In the midst of multiple physical crises, the disciples are arguing with the scribes. Jesus takes action by instructing the desperate father, **"Bring him to me"** (v. 19). Immediately, the evil spirit reacts in a grand mal convulsion. Jesus refuses to dignify the Devil, instead, Jesus calmly asks the father to talk about the history of his son's disgrace. Beginning with his childhood, the father traces the violence with which the family has lived until his desperation breaks through again, **"But if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us"** (v. 22). Sadness sounds in his words. Whatever faith he had in Jesus when he brought his son to the disciples, their failure has undermined that faith. Restoration can only come as Jesus reasserts His power to heal and recalls the trust of the man. Mark's choice of words brings the scene alive, **"And immediately the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, 'Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!'"** (v.

24). No one has ever echoed that tearful cry without God’s response.

Often we too in the mist of crisis will cry, “Lord, help my unbelief.” The current Christian culture takes a dim view of doubts, often referring to these doubts as a sin. Some will even go so far as to claim that to doubt as a follower of Christ is an unforgiveable sin. The Bible is full of those who have doubted, questioned or struggled with God. What do we do when we get stuck in our faith?

Doubting Myths

1) **Doubt is the opposite of faith.** Unbelief is the opposite of faith. Unbelief refers to a willful refusal to believe, while doubt refers to inner uncertainty.

2) **Doubting is unforgivable.** God doesn’t condemn us when we have questions. Both Job and David repeatedly questioned God, but they were not condemned. God is big enough to handle all our doubts and all our questions.

3) **Struggling with God means we lack faith.** Struggling with God is a sure sign that we truly have faith. If we never struggle, our faith will never grow.

As followers of Christ we understand ourselves as spiritual beings existing in a physical world. Our perceptions are based first on the physical realities in which we live. The temptation is to discount our spiritual experience of God because we can not completely prove, with physical evidence, the existence of God. Hebrews 11:1 defines our faith in this way, ***“Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”***

No matter how many times our beliefs have been attested through experience, there will always be a tension between that which is seen and that which is not seen. The result is the inner struggle we all experience – doubt.

Recognizing and dealing with our doubts rather than denying them is healthy and productive. Our doubts help us grow. Often our struggle bring us closer to God. Our questions are a way by which God can stir our souls.

The Ants in the Pants of Faith

Every church should have a sign displayed for all to read: **DOUBTERS WELCOME.**

Here is our message: ***If you have doubts, come inside. If you have questions, come inside. If you are uncertain, come inside. If you are a skeptic, come inside. If you are searching for truth, come inside.***

Deep doubt is often the prelude to an even deeper faith. I love the way Frederick Buechner expresses it: “Doubts are the ants in the pants of faith. They keep it awake and moving.” (from the book *Wishful Thinking*)

It is a wonderful truth that the greatest doubters often become the strongest believers. And honest doubts — once resolved — often become the bedrock of an unshakeable faith. It has been said that no truth is so strongly believed as that which you once doubted.

Getting out of the Bog – Moving from Doubt to Faith

Ask for help. Go to a Christian friend, a pastor, a trusted teacher, or anyone with a strong faith and insight. Ask them to walk with you as you face your doubts honestly.

Go back to what you know. The most destructive doubts are based on difficult life situations or the unwise counsel of a friend. Retrace your steps and make sure you are on the right track.

Doubt your doubts. Never give up. Keep moving forward. Nothing is gained by camping out in the valley of darkness. Every step forward is a way to “doubt your doubts.”

Practice until you feel it. All the great heroes of the faith had their doubts. None of us know the future. At some point, they decided to trust God and act on their faith and not on their doubts. Faith, like a learned skill, requires practice. After many years of practice, a skilled pianist is able to sit down with a new piece of music and play it through. Faith works the same way — with practice, we are able to handle new doubts and new life crises as they come up. The question is, what does practicing faith entail?

The methods of practicing faith are called Spiritual Disciplines. Think of the discipline involved in that pianist practicing the scales every day. There are hundreds of books written about the spiritual disciplines (at amazon.com, a search of Christian spiritual disciplines brings up 953 results). Various people have called up to 23 different practices *spiritual disciplines*, but I believe there are four main ones — ***prayer, reading the Bible, worship and service to others.*** These are a great place to start. Others that may be meaningful in your practice of faith are celebration of Christ’s work in your life; silence, solitude and fasting in order to focus your attention on God; lectio divina, an ancient method of praying Bible verses; meditation, witnessing (evangelism) and journaling.

If you are interested in learning more, Trietsch will be offering a class beginning soon that looks at various spiritual disciplines, or you can check out *Celebration of Discipline* by Richard Foster, *The Spirit of the Disciplines* by Dallas Willard or *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* by Donald Whitney.

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 that prayer changes lives and hearts for good and for God.

We invite you to join these volunteers by praying for those persons around you. Feel free to pull out your cell phone to Twitter, Facebook or text friends and neighbors not attending this service. We want the message of Christ to reach out beyond the walls of this building into the hearts of everyone possible.

In addition to texting your ideas and impressions of the worship service to friends outside the service, share your prayers with others. 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:

I want to spend every day open to being amazed by you, God! I want to see you and know you and be sure of you. I have invited you in, yet I know you were present before my invitation. I have treated you as my guest, even though I know you are the very definition of home. Guide me now in my discovery, O God. I have so many questions! I am stepping into the fullness of your love and grace. Lead me. Direct me. Encourage me. O God, sometimes I am embarrassed by my own questions; yet, sometimes I am proud of my capacity for suspicion and inquiry. God, sometimes I feel strong and confident in the success of my day; yet, sometimes I feel small and limited in understanding. God, sometimes I have a sense of your encouragement and love for me; yet, sometimes I diminish myself with self-criticism. It is a good thing you are true and faithful, God! I must push your patience. Thank you for knowing so well the struggles of my human heart. Thank you, God, for loving me without condition.

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 lead our church deeper into prayer

Pray God will lead each person here into a deeper relationship with Christ through worship and Bible study

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.