4/15/20                                                      Devotional

This is the fourth is our series of devotions.  Let us reflect upon the letter of Philippians 2:2-5.

*“Make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose.  Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves.  Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but to the interests of others.  Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.”*

Attitude is critical.  We are familiar with thinking that someone has a bad attitude or a good attitude.  In these verses we find a number of insights about attitude; I want to point out two of them.

First, our attitude toward others.  The word of God in this context reminds us not to live only to please ourselves or to only meet our own needs.  We are to look to the interests and needs of others.  This demonstrates an attitude of humility.  We are to strive to seek unity with one another in the body of Christ, unity in spirit, in truth and in purpose.  Humility builds relationships.  Why?  Because others feel that you care about them and respect them.  They are confident that you are genuinely interested in their story and their opinions.  Humility recognizes that we are all forgiven sinners in Jesus Christ.  It recognizes that God has bestowed gifts and talents among us all, not just a few.  It recognizes that all are valuable in God’s sight as persons created in God’s image.

Second, attitude is a choice, a really important choice.  The apostle Paul is challenging believers to choose the right attitude, the attitude of Christ.  Attitude is a decision.  We may make it once or we may make it over and over again in life.  God has created us in His image with a mind that has the ability, the freedom and power to think, to believe, to choose, and to respond.  Victor Frankel, who survived the atrocities of a German concentration camp wrote*: “Everything can be taken from a man but one thing, the last of the human freedoms, to choose one’s attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one’s own way.”*

Our attitude affects everything we do in life.  It can be positive or negative, destructive or constructive.  How one thinks about events in life determines how we will get through these events.  God’s Holy Spirit empowers us through faith, to choose how we shall respond to incidents in our lives.  We can choose to be victims or victors.  We can choose to give up or endure.  We can choose to go it alone or to reach out to others for support.  We can choose to pray to and trust in God or to renounce our faith in God.  We can let our circumstances mold us, or by our faith and trust let God shape us in and through our circumstances.

By God’s grace, and the power of the Holy Spirit, as we read in these verses, as hard as it is to believe, we may be able to actually have the mind of Christ.  *“Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.”  Blessings,*

Rev. Alan W. Deuel

4/13/20                                              Devotional

This is the third is our series of devotions.  Let us reflect on the letter of Acts 20:1-2:

*“When the uproar had ended, Paul sent for the disciples and after encouraging them, said good-by and set out for Macedonia.  He traveled through that area, speaking many words of encouragement to the people, and finally arrived in Greece.”*

The apostle Paul was a great encourager.  In this chapter we find Paul in Ephesus.  He has become the center of a riot over his preaching.  He was saying that idols, gods the craftsmen were making, weren’t gods at all.  He preached that there was only one true God.  He was being threatened with violence because of his controversial message.

And yet in the very next verse we read, when the uproar was ended Paul began encouraging people.   What an inspiring example.

Can you be an encourager when your own life is not perfect?   Are you totally happy or content today?   We can always find things we don't like about ourselves or our circumstances.  Examine your relationships.  Relationships are always less than ideal; they don’t usually meet all our expectations.

Think of one person who encouraged you at a critical time in your life. Why do you think he or she was such a good encourager to you?

I have found that people who are encouragers have themselves experienced pain in their lives: suffering, hurt, disappointment, and even tragedy.  They have an understanding and empathy for others.   I have found that encouragers are thankful, grateful and humble.  They can encourage because they do so out of a heart of gratitude.   I’ve found that people who possess a faith in God, who have a genuine spiritual life, are good encouragers.  Encouragers are good listeners.  They are genuinely interested in you and what you have to say.   It’s been said that you will encourage more by listening than by talking.

The word encouragement comes from the ancient Greek.   The Greek word is paraklesis and means a holy urging, a personal urging, an urging of the Spirit.  Recall Jesus promise to his disciples – “*I will send you another Paraclete who will remain with you forever.”*Paraclete is translated as comforter, counselor, and encourager. Encouraging others is God’s holy work in and through us to inspire, to warn someone, to spur or urge someone on, to hearten, to embolden, to fill with courage or confidence, or strength of purpose.

Compliment people when it occurs to you to do so.  Express appreciation and gratitude.  Be happy for others in their good fortune.  Jesus calls each of us by His grace and through the power of the Holy Spirit to the ministry of encouragement.  And what a powerful and astonishing witness it can be.

I am personally grateful for brothers and sisters in Christ who have encouraged me in the church over the years. Their words and support have made all the difference.  May your walk in the Spirit be a ministry of encouragement to others so that God may use you for His glory.  Amen!

4/8/20

Devotional

This is the second in our series of devotions.   Let us hear God’s word from the prophet Jeremiah.

*“For I know the plans I have for you.  Plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.  Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me and I will listen to you.  You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.  I will be found by you.  Jeremiah 29:11-14.*

God spoke through the prophet Jeremiah to the people of Israel.  The prophet was speaking to the Jews who were in captivity in Babylon.  Jeremiah was announcing God’s will to the Jews.  He was speaking about God’s plans for the Jews.  He was bringing God’s word of hope amidst their despair of living in a foreign land.  And God’s living and breathing word speaks to us through the scriptures today.

We often think of God as distant, beyond, majestic, transcendent.  We think of God as the ruler of the universe, the maker of heaven and earth, the creator of all things.  We see God’s handiwork in nature, in the majesty of a rainbow, in a thunderstorm, in the Grand Canyon or in the oceans.  We understand that God is the ruler of the universe and has plans for the nations of the world and an ultimate purpose for history.

Where do we see God or hear God or sense God’s presence in our personal lives?  The challenge for faith is to also see God at work in our daily lives.  It is to remember that God has plans for our individual lives.  God is involved in our everyday activities.  God is involved in our daily interactions.  God has plans for the details and small things of our lives.  Believing this, knowing this gives a sense of holiness to the small things, the mundane things, the little things that we do in life.  These things matter.  They matter in the larger kingdom of God.  They matter in terms of God’s plans for our lives.  Doing a good job with little things matters in the realm of God.   It is the small decisions we make, the little gestures and commitments, that lead to the larger accomplishments in our lives.  If we are not faithful in fulfilling the small things, we will not be ready for the larger tasks and opportunities in life.

Nothing escapes God’s notice.  Nothing is too insignificant for God.  Keeping a promise, making that phone call, doing an errand, finishing up one’s work, asking if someone needs help are all vehicles for God to implement his plans for our lives.  Small things show your character.  Small things show forth your faith.  Little things are a witness to your love.  Taking pride and being responsible in little things is a way of showing thankfulness to God.  Daily thank God for gifts and tasks.  Display what you believe.  Look for opportunities.  Be teachable and reachable.  Make good on your promises.

In the name of Jesus our Lord, Amen.   Rev. Alan Deuel