

Good News Daily

July 9-15, 2017

Sunday, July 9

Romans 5:1-11 *But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.* (v.8 NIV)

This verse has always had a profound effect on me. Paul prefaces it with the observation, "Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die" (v.7). We can imagine a mother willingly surrendering her life so that her child might live, or perhaps a child doing the same for a parent. Perhaps a Marine would give up his life to save a fellow soldier. But which of us would voluntarily die for the world's worst, most depraved, evil, rotten-to-the-core law-breaker? Only Jesus has a self-emptying love that huge.

Once, during a spiritual retreat, a downturn in my personal life had made me feel rather unloved. I didn't even feel God loved me. As I prayed in the chapel, looking up at a life-sized crucifix, Jesus whispered to my heart, "If that's not love, I don't know what is." My earthly father always used to spread his arms wide and say, "I love you *this much!*" Christ said the same thing to each of us from the cross.

1 Samuel 14:36-45; Psalms 146, 147; Matthew 22:1-14

Birthdays: Susan Franco- Velez and Iris Sandoval

Anniversaries: Patrice Bennett

Monday, July 10

Acts 9:19b-31 *"Isn't he the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem?" They were all afraid of him, not believing that he was really a disciple.* (vv.21b, 26b)

Jesus' disciples questioned whether the Pharisee known as Saul, a notorious persecutor of the church, had really become an apostle for Christ. Could God change a person that completely? There were people in my life who likely thought the same, after I had a life-transforming encounter with the Living Christ. Some of what I stopped doing caused me to lose friends. Things I started doing—such as loving the unlovable—won me new ones. Others will not believe we truly have a relationship with Jesus Christ unless we start living differently than before we were converted.

Paul had a dramatic one-time conversion, but I also think he believed in ongoing conversion—a spiritual view St. Francis of Assisi shared. In addition to being an Episcopal priest, I am a life-professed Franciscan of the Holy Cross. Part of our community's "rule of life" is to daily repent of our sins and allow God to re-convert our hearts; good insurance against pride and making everything all about me. Recently, my husband and I made a major move to another state and a completely different living situation. A lot of things seemed difficult, and I posted various complaints on Facebook until a fellow Franciscan reminded me this is the perfect

occasion to exercise patience, humility, and simplicity—traits of a true follower of Christ. Jesus did say, "By their fruits ye shall know them" (Matthew 7:16 KJV). *Hmm!*

1 Samuel 15:1-3, 7-23; Psalms 1, 2, 3; Luke 23:44-56a

Birthdays: Ionie Ashterman, Ryan Mandell and Soyine Richards-Marsh

Anniversaries: None

Tuesday, July 11

Psalms 5 *In the morning, O LORD, you hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before you and wait in expectation.* (v.3)

Each day upon awakening, I pray a prayer I taught my Sunday school kids some years ago: "Good morning, Lord, this is Your day. I am Your child, show me Your way." The great thing about God is, He doesn't have an answering machine or voicemail. When we "call" He picks up on the first "ring", listens, and answers. It's been said that God answers "Yes," "No," or "Wait." The third is the hardest for me, as I'm not a very patient person. If answers don't come quickly enough, it's too easy for me to either worry or try to fix things myself—which never turns out as well as when I just let God take care of it.

Having to start all over again with this major move has been a challenge to waiting upon the Lord. And yet, God has come through time after time, consistently, throughout these changes. Like the psalmist, I just need to keep "laying my requests before God" and "waiting in expectation." Everything in God's time!

1 Samuel 15:24-35; Psalm 6; Acts 9:32-43; Luke 23:56b—24:11

Birthdays: Donna Carty and Marsha Edwards

Anniversaries: Rev. Robert & Deborah Deshaies

Wednesday, July 12

1 Samuel 16:1-13 *But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not consider his appearance or his height, for ...the LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart."* (v.7)

I had been dating a tall, dark, and handsome pastor who wore designer suits and drove a Mercedes. Something about him was addictive, despite the reality that he could be emotionally abusive. Then I met a nice-looking organist who wore jeans and drove a Honda. But he was also a kind, prayerful Christian, with a solid, upright character. The marriage question came up with both men, and I felt confused. Then the Lord put on my heart this verse from the Old Testament that had to do with the prophet Samuel choosing David as Israel's new king. God overlooked all the other candidates because He saw the true nature of David's character.

When I looked past the one suitor's flashiness to other's steady dependability, I realized the way God saw a man's "heart" was more important than anything else.

Now, 23 years later, that same dear man continues to make me the happiest wife in the world—and his constant faith, love, and devotion, great sense of humor and musical talent, make him way more handsome to me than any designer suit could.

Psalm 119:1-24; Acts 10:1-16; Luke 24:12-35

Birthdays: Nadia Kemp and Camille Stokes

Anniversaries: Tricia & Roger Roberts

Thursday, July 13

Psalm 18:1-20 *He reached down from on high and took hold of me; he drew me out of deep waters.* (v.16)

Back in the 1980's, I traveled to Nicaragua with an ecumenical team, doing some work as a photojournalist. I had never been to Central America, and knew nothing about the powerful undertows that can happen in the Pacific Ocean. One afternoon, our group went swimming. The waves were enormous, and we were having fun bouncing in and on them. Suddenly, forces in the water began pulling me under and sideways, away from the shore. An amateur swimmer, I panicked, screamed, flailed, and started to drown. The next thing I knew, a strong male arm was supporting me, and despite the powerful current, was towing me back to shore. David literally saved my life that day, and I'll never forget it.

A few years later, in 1987, I had a life-changing encounter with the Living Christ in which he rescued me from drowning, spiritually. I had gone off the deep end emotionally and was in a very dark place. Then, like David reaching down, taking hold of me and pulling me to shore, Jesus yanked me out of the depths and into his glorious light. Christ saved my soul that day, and I'll never forget it. I'm still not much of a swimmer, but grateful that our new community has a heated pool—with no waves.

1 Samuel 16:14—17:11; Acts: 10:17-33; Luke 24:36-53

Birthdays: William Alvarez, Molly Fraser and Jazmine Kiefhaber

Anniversaries: None

Friday, July 14

Psalm 17 *I call on you, O God, for you will answer me; give ear to my prayer.* (v.6)

Once again, this week's lessons remind us that when we pray, God listens and answers. Fr. Nigel Mumford, a well-known author on healing prayer and a former clergy colleague of mine, often says: "God always does *something* when we pray." Do we truly believe that? Sometimes it's hard to. But just maybe, God is answering, only it's not about us. If we could see the big picture, as God does, we would know that God is always at work for our good and for His glory, and that no prayer goes unheard or unanswered. Possibly, the answers to our prayers will only be known when we get to heaven.

In today's Old Testament reading, David prepares to battle the giant, Goliath. We know God answered his prayer immediately—he won that fight. In the Epistle lesson, the Holy Spirit leads the Roman officer Cornelius into a relationship with Peter the apostle, paving the way for the gospel to be spread among the Gentiles. That was a long-term work of God which may not have been apparent right away. But think about it: The fact that you're reading this devotion is the outcome of someone's prayer for you. Yes, God always does *something* when we pray!

1 Samuel 17:17-30; Psalm 16; Acts 10:34-48; Mark 1:1-13

Birthdays: Pamela Merritt and Anita Pluta

Anniversaries: John & Anita Pluta

Saturday, July 15

Acts 11:1-18 *"The voice spoke from heaven a second time, 'Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.' So if God gave them the same gift as he gave us, who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think I could oppose God?"* (vv.9, 17)

It's been said that Jesus had a ministry of "mealing and healing" because so many of his teachings and miracles took place during a meal (just think about the institution of the Eucharist!). Because sharing a meal more easily facilitates conversations and encourages friendship, the Lord had to convince Peter that it was OK to eat with Gentiles so that the good news of Jesus could be shared with them, too. Fortunately, Peter was obedient, and the rest is history.

Today, God continues to "make clean" anyone who receives Christ in faith. I've been reading about Muslims—also Jews, Buddhists, and Atheists—who are coming to Christ as believers. And in our present polarized culture, it must be hard for some to think God could "give them the same gift as he gave us, who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ." But if Peter was open-minded enough to break bread with a Roman soldier who wanted to learn more about God, shouldn't we rejoice that no matter what their origin, God is bringing many to faith in His Son?

1 Samuel 17:31-49; Psalms 20, 21; Mark 1:14-28

Birthdays: Roger Bernsen, Aaron Edwards and Merlyn Osborne

Anniversaries: Leslie & Phyllis Fabara

by The Rev. Dr. Nina George-Hacker, FHC

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