

Devotions for Nov. 7 - 13, 2011

Monday, November 7, 2011: *Rosetta Stone* Daily reading: 1 Corinthians 15:1-8

The Rosetta Stone is an ancient Egyptian stele inscribed with a decree issued at Memphis in 196 B.C. on behalf of King Ptolemy V. The decree appears in three scripts: ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs, Demotic script, and ancient Greek. Because it presents essentially the same text in all three scripts, it provides the key to modern understanding of Egyptian hieroglyphs. Prior to this discovery, scholars had not been able to translate this picture language of ancient Egypt. In a similar way, if we can find the “center” of the Scriptures, it will serve as an interpretive key for the whole Bible. This passage from 1 Corinthians gives us insight into the “center” of Scripture and how it helps us understand the rest of Scripture. Today, let’s let this be the Rosetta Stone, opening our eyes to meanings in the whole Bible. Ask God for greater interpretive insight.

Tuesday, November 8, 2011: *Gospel in a Verse* Daily reading: John 3:16-21

John 3:16 has been translated into more languages than any other verse in the Bible. For many Christians it is “the gospel in a verse.” It does indeed encapsulate the heart of the gospel, but it is often misunderstood because we read it through a framework that neither John nor Jesus would subscribe to. To understand this passage, we need to put it into context. A Pharisee named Nicodemus has come to Jesus by night. In John’s Gospel, night is a symbol of disbelief. John lets us know from the start that this is a passage about moving from the darkness of disbelief to the light and life and belief. Jesus and Nicodemus enter into a conversation about being born “from above” (a better translation than “again”). While Jesus is referring to spiritual birth (coming alive spiritually), Nicodemus can’t see past the literal meaning of Jesus’ words. Once again, John 3:16 gives us insight into what the center of the Scriptures can be for us.

Wednesday, November 9, 2011: *Incarnation* Daily reading: John 3:16-21 again

For many, this verse means: God loves the world; God sacrificed Jesus on the cross so we could be forgiven and not be sent to hell. If we believe this (give intellectual assent), we will be saved (from hell, in life after death). This is substitutionary atonement. “World” in John, and in much of the New Testament, means two different things. First, it means what God has created. This is a positive thing. “This world,” with its corruption of power and self-centeredness, is what we have created. This is negative. The world that God loves in John 3:16 is *all* that God has created, including all people and the whole of creation. When John talks about God giving his only Son, he is not referring to substitutionary atonement. In fact, this concept is not found in any of the Gospels. In John, this “giving” refers to the incarnation. How much does God love the world? Enough to come to us in human flesh. Ask God to help you more fully comprehend the radical love of God that would come in human flesh.

Thursday, November 10, 2011: *Believe* Daily reading: John 1:9-13

To “believe” in Jesus in the New Testament context does not refer to intellectual assent. Believing is better understood as “beloving.” It refers to one’s heart, loyalty, fidelity and commitment to Jesus and the Kingdom he has come to inaugurate and proclaim. As a result of Martin Luther’s reforming work, this is the theological center of what Lutherans believe. We are saved by the grace of God alone, not by anything we do. Our salvation is through faith alone, a confident trust in God, who in Christ promises us forgiveness, life and salvation. The Bible is the norm for faith and life, the true standard by which teachings and doctrines are to be judged. God gives us, through “beloving,” the power to become children of God. What we believe is truly important. Ask God to help you see your heart, loyalty, fidelity and commitment to Jesus in a new way.

Friday, November 11, 2011: *Eternal Life* Daily reading: John 17:1-3

“Eternal life” in John’s Gospel refers to present experience, not life after physical death. The Greek word translated “eternal life” means “the life of the age to come.” In John’s theology this is both a future hope and a present reality; an “already but not yet” reality in Jesus. It can be experienced now, but will not come to fullness until God completes the restoration of all things. John 17:3 says, “This is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.” Notice the present tense! To “know” God and Jesus is relational, present, and leads to abundant life now. When we dig into the Bible we discover how our limited understanding of time and space shape how we read. It’s hard for our minds to comprehend an “eternity” that begins now. Ask God for deeper insight into what eternal life can mean for you today.

Saturday, November 12, 2011: *Interpretation* Daily reading: John 16:12-15

What prevents us from just interpreting the Bible the way we want? First, since we believe that engaging with the Bible means engaging in a conversation with God, we trust that the Holy Spirit will show us the way. Second, we rely upon the community of faith to guide us. We trust the wisdom of the community, and trust that where two or three are gathered in Jesus’ name, he’s right there! Third, we trust in God’s grace. We *will* get some things wrong. The church has gotten all sorts of things wrong over the course of history. God’s love won’t let us go even if we get it wrong, because God’s love isn’t dependent upon us getting it right. Fourth, we focus on the center, the gospel. We hold this tightly and hold everything else loosely. Fifth, we remember that we don’t worship a book. Instead we worship the One to whom this book points. Ask God through the Holy Spirit to “guide you into all truth” today.

Sunday, November 13, 2011: *Resurrection* Daily reading: 1 Corinthians 15:12-22

Corinth was a thriving center of industry that valued philosophers and honored the gods. After starting a church in Corinth, Paul leaves to start other churches. The Corinthians write to him, asking many questions. One question focused on resurrection. In chapter 15, Paul reminds them, and us, that the resurrection is important and that he’s not making it up. The cross of Christ, and his resurrection, is clearly the center of the theology Paul shares throughout the world. How important is Christ’s resurrection to you? Ask God to give you new insight into the meaning and significance of the resurrection.