

## Devotions for Feb. 28-Mar. 6, 2011

### **Monday, February 28, 2011: Joy Daily reading: Isaiah 58:6-10**

The focus of chapter 58 is worship. As the Jewish community returns to Jerusalem after captivity in Babylon, God is calling them away from rigid, heartless adherence to the law (particularly fasting), and calling them to repentance. The fast that God desires has to do with justice for the poor and oppressed, not abstaining from food. When God's people work for justice, then, God says, they will call upon God and God will respond. Specifically, verse 10 promises that if the Israelites will feed the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, their lives will shine as a witness to the world and they will know joy again. Isaiah is pointing the way for joy to return to the lives of the people of Israel. Do you feel like you have been in exile and need these words of promise that joy will return? Pray that God will direct you on the pathway to greater joy.

### **Tuesday, March 1, 2011: Lawyer Daily reading: Luke 10:25-37**

It all begins with a lawyer, an expert in God's law. He wants to know what he has to do to inherit eternal life. Jesus, in typical rabbinic fashion, answers this question with a question. He asks the lawyer how he reads the Scriptures, and the lawyer answers beautifully: "Love God; love neighbor." Jesus himself had said that the entirety of God's law could be summarized with those two commands. So Jesus says, "Bingo! Good answer. So, just do it." The lawyer asks the legal question and gets a response he's not ready for. You can imagine the series of questions the lawyer would ask next. But how? I can't do this on my own, can I? We hope that the "letter of the law" will answer our questions, but it often creates more questions. Are you seeking to follow the "letter of the law" or the spirit of what God intends? Ask God to open your eyes to what the law intends.

### **Wednesday, March 2, 2011: Self-Sufficiency Daily reading: Luke 10:38-42**

The lawyer's original question was, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" According to Jesus, if we just love God and neighbor we'll inherit eternal life. But the point of the gospel is that we can't, at least not perfectly and consistently! In fact, in today's reading, Jesus chastises Martha for her busyness, her acts of kindness. We are saved by grace, and grace alone! Perhaps Jesus is being a bit ironic with the lawyer in the Good Samaritan story. By telling him to "go and do likewise," he knows that the lawyer will come to realize the depth of his need for grace, because self-sufficiency is a spiritual dead end. Are you feeling like a Martha, one whose busyness produces acts of kindness but looks a lot like attempts at self-sufficiency? Ask God to motivate your actions from a deep gratefulness for God's grace.

### **Thursday, March 3, 2011: Grace Daily reading: Romans 3:21-26**

The fullness of life does not begin with what we do, but with what has been done for us by grace in Jesus. The concept and reality of grace can drive us to our knees with gratitude because we are set free by God's remarkable, unconditional, unending love for us. We don't love God or our neighbor because we have to, because that wouldn't be real love at all. That kind of love wouldn't breathe life into us or into others. It would only leave us dead, choked with guilt and shame. Instead, the good news of God's love for us in Jesus sets us free to really love. By grace through faith; that's how we are in relationship to God. God initiates this relationship as a gift. Are you overwhelmed and grateful for the unconditional, unending love of God? Ask God to draw you deeper into fullness of life by grace.

### **Friday, March 4, 2011: Free Daily reading: Galatians 5:1; 13:15**

It's easy for us to get out of alignment, like a car whose wheels constantly veer toward the ditch of "just do it" righteousness. We get caught up into believing that we have to earn God's love, and we wind up trying hard and failing miserably. Then we feel guilty, telling ourselves we're worthless and hopeless, which makes it even less likely that we'll be able to love anyone well, making us feel even more worthless and hopeless. It's a vicious cycle. But the good news of Christ knocks us off that cycle and into the arms of God's mercy and grace, reminding us again that we're loved, not because of what we've done, but because of what God has done for us in Jesus. God's love sets us free to love. And in this freedom we get to love God and love others. Do you feel "free" in your relationship with God, or are you living out of rules and regulations? Ask God to move your heart more toward "get to" than "have to."

### **Saturday, March 5, 2011: Vision Daily reading: Revelation 21:1-4**

We can't love God and others on our own. We need help. As people so dearly loved by God, we are moved to love God and love our neighbor, but as soon as we try we realize how challenged we really are. We need new eyes, new vision. We need eyes of faith that will allow us to see all people in need as our neighbor, not as a nuisance or a distraction. We need eyes that can see the new heaven and the new earth coming together, and all of God's plans and purposes coming true. Jesus is calling us all to see in a new way. Can you envision the time when there are no more tears, no more death or mourning? Can you see the marriage of earth and heaven, and God dwelling among it all? Ask God for new vision.

### **Sunday, March 6, 2011: Heart Daily reading: Ephesians 3:14-20**

This text about spiritual maturity involves having a new heart that beats for the things that matter to God. We read the story of the Good Samaritan, and wondered how the priest and the Levite could ignore the bleeding man. At a closer look, they were adhering to the law that said you don't touch a bleeding or dead body. But another law commanded them to aid someone in need. How could they be obedient to both aspects of the law? How will we discern between lesser or greater laws? Spiritual maturity would lead us to this conclusion: when it comes to living God's agenda, love trumps everything. We need a heart that beats with that kind of love. Dare to believe that God has already done it all in Jesus Christ. Does your heart beat for the things that matter to God? Ask God to lead you into deeper spiritual maturity where love trumps everything.