

# Devotions for Dec. 5 – 11, 2011

## **Monday, December 5, 2011: *Restoration* Daily reading: Psalm 85:1-2**

This is a psalm in which the people of God cry out for restoration. We don't know the circumstances behind the psalm; exile, national sin, and famine are a few possibilities. We do know that this confident prayer is based on God's past actions of restoration (verses 1-2) and the people's faith that, when God speaks, there will be words of peace and restoration for all. The phrase "restored the fortunes" can be read as a description of Israel's successful return from exile, but the intent is probably much wider than that. This applies to any kind of trouble that they experience, or any kind of trouble that we experience today. Restoration is a theme common to all of human history; we cry out for help, and God hears our cries. Ask God to restore what needs restoration in your life.

## **Tuesday, December 6, 2011: *Fullness* Daily reading: Psalm 85:8-13**

As Christ-followers soon to celebrate the Savior's birth, we read these verses in faith that God has already responded to our cries. God has given us the Prince of Peace. God's salvation is at hand in Christ's death and resurrection. Jesus is the glory of God, a visible manifestation of God's presence. In Jesus, steadfast love and faithfulness meet; righteousness and peace kiss. Jesus IS our righteousness. We can join the psalmist in this prayer because, while we celebrate these gifts from God and proclaim them to have already been given, we also know that God's salvation, and ours, are being worked out and will not be fully revealed until Jesus returns. In this Advent season we both celebrate what has been given and wait for it, with certain hope that it will be given in fullness. Ask God for deeper understanding of the phrase often used at communion: "Christ has died! Christ is risen! Christ will come again!"

## **Wednesday, December 7, 2011: *Repentance* Daily reading: Mark 1:1-8**

Mark dives into the story of Jesus like he just can't wait to get to the cross and the empty tomb. Suddenly John appears on the stage. We're told that John appears in the wilderness, the place of Israel's formation as God's covenant people. This is Mark's way of telling us that God is reforming his people, calling them back to God. John is a continuation of God's salvation history. John proclaims a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. While baptism isn't new – the Jews practice repeated, ritual washings for temporary cleansing – this one-time baptism for repentance and forgiveness of sins is unprecedented. "Repentance" means "to change one's mind," connected in the Old Testament to the concept of turning to God. That's what John is up to: preparing people for the new age that Jesus inaugurates, the Kingdom of God. Ask God for a repentant heart.

## **Thursday, December 8, 2011: *Announcing* Daily reading: Isaiah 40:1-5**

In yesterday's text, Mark quotes Isaiah, the text we read today. When he does this, Mark not only tells us that John the Baptist is the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy, but also gives shape to John's ministry (he's a prophet), and to the salvation that God is bringing in Jesus (a new reign on earth of peace, forgiveness and justice). In the ancient world, when a king is about to enter into a land, a forerunner travels the main road to announce the king's coming so the people can prepare the way, making the physical road straight, filling in the ruts and potholes. John, of course, announces a most unlikely King: one not wearing fine robes or riding a fine horse. Nor is the preparation for this King merely a matter of the roads. It's a matter of the heart. By quoting Isaiah 40, Mark points to the universal implications of God's salvation in Jesus, for in Jesus "all flesh shall see the salvation of God." Ask God to help you understand the preparations you need to make for the arrival of Jesus.

## **Friday, December 9, 2011: *Clothes* Daily reading: 2 Kings 1:8; Malachi 3:1; Leviticus 11:22**

You can tell a lot about a person by what they wear. John's clothes are not the fashion of his day. He's outfitted for survival in the wilderness, like a desert monk. He dresses much like the prophet Elijah (2 Kings 1:8), perhaps to distinguish himself from religious leaders, whose flowing robes reflect sinful pride in their position. John is a man of great humility whose startling appearance reinforces his startling message. Just as Elijah is a messenger preparing the way for God (Malachi 3:1), John prepares the way for God's Son, the Messiah. His diet of locusts and wild honey is common for desert survival. Locusts are often roasted, and are considered "clean" food for the Jews (Leviticus 11:22). Wild honey is found in abundance. Ask God to lead you into deeper humility.

## **Saturday, December 10, 2011: *The One* Daily reading: Mark 1:1-8 again**

The real focus of these first eight verses of Mark has little to do with John. It's about the One to whom John points: Jesus. John is wildly popular, so it's important for early Christians to know that Jesus is the full meal deal, while John is just an hors d'oeuvre. John offers a baptism of repentance, but Jesus will baptize people with the Holy Spirit. John claims that Jesus is so much greater that John isn't even worthy of the lowest task performed by the lowest household slave: untying a guest's sandal and washing his feet. Yet we'll see Jesus do that very thing later in the story. It's easy to be impressed with a person who so overtly draws attention away from himself and places it on the one who is coming. Ask God for deeper understanding of the relationship between John the Baptizer and Jesus.

## **Sunday, December 11, 2011: *Align* Daily reading: Mark 1:9-13**

The One to whom John points arrives. All along, John has been pointing to the One who knows our need and responds through the gift of the Savior. The text proclaims that Jesus is all our hearts yearn for, and more. In him we will find peace, restoration and forgiveness. Jesus really is the miracle in the mess of our lives. The question that John asks is one we must wrestle with, also: how are we to prepare? John himself gives us the answer: repent! John calls us to turn from anything that would draw us away from God and turn to God, aligning our hearts, minds, hands and feet to what God is doing, as the Holy Spirit gives us grace to do so. This is a challenge during the holidays, when quiet time for reflection can be hard to find. Ask God to help you, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to align your heart, mind, hands, and feet to what God is doing.