

Devotions for Oct. 31 - Nov. 6, 2011

Monday, October 31, 2011: Context Daily reading: 1 Corinthians 1:1-9

Corinth is a hub of Roman power, holding the seat of government of the Roman province of Achaia. It's strategically located on a plateau overlooking the Isthmus of Corinth, and its 1,900 foot mountain provides a perfect citadel for the city. It has an unlimited fresh water supply from the fountain of Peirene, necessary for any ancient city to flourish. Its population swells to 600,000. In his letter, Paul gives thanks for all that God has done in Corinth, and within the believers themselves. Instead of chastising them for misbehavior, Paul refocuses their attention to the amazing work and gift among them in Jesus. Only after he anchors them there does he address the issue of divisions. Every time he mentions an issue, he brings them back to the cross of Christ. For Paul, the cross is the center of life and love for Christian living. This is the context for the letter to the Corinthians. We can learn much from the context of the Scriptures. Ask God to lead you to deeper understanding of the Bible.

Tuesday, November 1, 2011: Wisdom Daily reading: 1 Corinthians 1:20-25

Corinth believers begin to put their trust in the ancient concept of wisdom. Paul uses this backdrop to make his point about the wisdom of God. Wisdom is a virtue highly respected in the ancient world. Philosophers call it the highest of human virtues, and the learned are seen as elevated because they employ wisdom – the ability to think and apply reason – in their everyday dealings. Paul argues that believers have been moved from death to life in Jesus Christ. His proclamation isn't lofty or full of the wisdom of that age. Since the power of God comes to them without the wisdom they seek, why do they seek? Will the believers in Corinth settle for worldly wisdom, looking to it for hope and salvation? Or will they dare to believe in the wisdom of God, seen and given to them in the cross of Christ? When we read the Bible, we are not just seeking wisdom; we are opening our eyes to see the cross of Christ as God's wisdom. Ask God to lead you to deeper understanding of the Bible.

Wednesday, November 2, 2011: Cross Daily reading: 2 Corinthians 2:6-16

The Spirit of God has been given to them, evidenced by their faith in Jesus. They can see God's wisdom because they have eyes of faith, something that those who subscribe to the wisdom of this world cannot see. Following the world's wisdom cannot bring them to the wisdom of God. The wisdom of God is mysterious, even hidden, seen only in and through the cross of Christ. Imagine how difficult it must be for the people of Corinth to hear this! They have been raised to believe that human reason leads to wisdom and into the minds of the gods! How challenging it is to be told that human wisdom has its limits. How challenging it is to proclaim this today! Yet God continues to show God's power and wisdom as Jesus Christ is proclaimed and crucified, and the Spirit of God goes to work creating faith. This faith receives the gifts of God's spirit, something worldly wisdom cannot deliver. Paul reminds the troubled church in Corinth that they have the mind of Christ, and a glimpse into the power and wisdom of God. Do they want to settle for less? Do you? Ask God to lead you to deeper understanding of the Bible.

Thursday, November 3, 2011: Meaning Daily reading: 1 Corinthians 3:1-9

Do you know the song *Precious Lord, Take My Hand*? "Through the storm, through the night, lead me on to the light." On the surface it's a nice hymn, but when we consider that Thomas Dorsey wrote it after his wife and baby died, the way we hear it changes. It means more in that context. Our reading has more meaning today because we've learned that Paul writes this letter to a church experiencing internal turmoil in a city that holds wisdom as its highest virtue. In the search for what a passage "means," it helps to look for more information. Who is it written to? What style is it written in? What is happening at the time? What is the writer trying to communicate? As we learn about the context, the verse takes on more meaning. Ask God to lead you to deeper understanding of the Bible.

Friday, November 4, 2011: Tools Daily reading: 1 Corinthians 3:18-23

Paul is repeating himself, here; probably on purpose. He is a skilled communicator who knows his audience. A tool we can use to unpack Scripture involves four concepts: behind, in, around and in front of. When we consider a passage, we look behind the text to find out what historical situation may have prompted its writing. We look in the text and see what it actually says. We look around the text to see how it's interpreted by others. And we look in front of the text to identify what might be happening in our community, congregation or world that affects how we read, hear, or interpret it. Practice this by returning to today's reading and trying to identify the behind, in, around, and in front of concepts. Ask God to lead you to deeper understanding of the Scriptures.

Saturday, November 5, 2011: Around Daily reading: Psalm 23

On September 12, 2001, we gathered to process what happened the prior morning when terrorists attacked America. We sang a hymn we'd sung hundreds of times before, but in this new context it took on an entirely different level of meaning. It became a source of comfort in the middle of a fearful time. Today we read Psalm 23, another passage we've heard hundreds of times. When was the last time you heard it? At a funeral, or in a hospital room? Depending on what lens we look through, it can be understood differently. What's going on in your life that impacts how you interpret today's reading? Ask God to lead you to deeper understanding of the Bible.

Sunday, November 6, 2011: Exegesis Daily reading: 1 Corinthians 13:4-13

Now that we know more about the context, does this passage have new meaning? Chances are Paul hears that the Corinthians are behaving in childish ways, becoming jealous, arrogant or rude, and he writes this letter. When we apply biblical criticism to a text, it's called "exegesis." This means to "lead out" the meaning. Before pastors prepare a sermon, they apply exegesis to the assigned text, attempting to "lead out" its meaning so their proclamations can be as thoughtful as possible. Exegesis is a lot like biblical archeology; digging in and trying to unearth meaning. The next time you listen to a sermon, try to identify what the preacher exegeted to prepare the message. Ask God to lead you to deeper understanding of the Bible.