

November 30, 2009

Leftovers

“To be hungry is not enough; I must be really starving to know what is in his heart towards me. When the prodigal son was hungry he went to feed upon husks, but when he was starving, he turned to his Father.” - J N Darby

Still have those Turkey leftovers from the Holidays? There must be 1001 ways to utilize turkey. I've even heard of non-food related ways to use leftovers; those old rolls make great doorstops. Gorging on food festivities can really be a workout, but it's not the food that fills our need completely. It is possible to be full, but still be empty.

The words of Jesus ring true: "Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God." We can fill our lives with many things, but which items are most essential for our spiritual well-being? When we are far from God, our souls become in need of his Word; we become famished for His presence and grace. To go hungry is one thing, to be starving is another.

I remember a time when I use to fill my mind with non-Godly things. I thought that I could satisfy my own hunger, but every attempt was rooted in sin and self. When God captured my heart, all I desired was Him and to be filled by His presence. I wanted to be so close to God, that I filled my mind with His word and prayer. I rejoiced in His work around me and was astonished by his acts of love. I was in constant God-talk as I noticed that my old self-talk was fading. After some time, I would catch myself praying in almost every small, great or uncanny circumstance. Then it occurred to me. I was not trying to be close to God; His closeness was already with me. When I was starving, I turned to the Father who filled my every need in Word, prayer and presence.

"and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God." - Eph. 3.19

God does not give us His leftovers, he provides His fullness. God is the Father - the Fountain of all good. He is unchanging in every way. No matter the conditions of our souls, He is consistent and stands ready to fill us. The shelf-life of worldly leftovers never last and never satisfy. As Jesus multiplied the fish and loaves of bread, He fills our every need and every joy. We give Him thanks for His constant presence; so should we walk in His constant presence.

Reflection:

What is the condition of your soul - hungry or starving? Praise be to God that he provides us to the full and does not handout leftovers. However, even the crumbs from His table can fill the needy soul. How is God filling you with His goodness and grace? As you go through your day, what can you give out of your abundance to help others who are spiritually in need?

November 27, 2009
Advent 1 (Intro)

"A prison cell, in which one waits, hopes...and is completely dependent on the fact that the door of freedom has to be opened from the outside, is not a bad picture of Advent. "
- Dietrich Bonhoeffer

This coming Sunday, November 29, 2009 marks the first week of Advent. Here's a little Church history trivia. What is Advent and it's meaning?

If your only memory of Advent serves as the chocolate candy calendar that leads up to Christmas, you're not alone. The name Advent is not a electronic manufacture for producing surround sound home theater systems, nor is it a micro-filtration unit for your air conditioner. Advent is a four week period in which the Church celebrates the coming of Christ that precedes Christmas (his birth). Why isn't Advent more widely celebrated in most churches? Good question, our discussion will involve the point and purpose of Advent and its vitality in our services.

Advent is the coming (light) of Christ that shines into darkness to give hope and life to a dying world in need of Salvation. God's nature is love, that same love who spoke into Creation breathes new life into humanity through Jesus Christ, in whom we have the fullness of Grace and Truth. We also rejoice in His second coming, who is also our blessed Hope. When He comes, he will wipe away every tear and every pain as we will live in the light of his glorious Kingdom.

The word "advent" is from the Latin word for "coming," and as such, describes the "coming" of our Lord Jesus Christ into the flesh (Incarnation - Emmanuel). Advent begins the Church Year (another unfamiliar word). The Church Year or Church Calendar is a timeline of the seasons, celebrations and observances in the Christian Church. Each season is also marked by a color to emphasize significance and meaning (commonly known as Colors of the Church Year). We begin with Advent (Coming of our Lord); to Christmas (The birth of our Lord); then Epiphany (about his miracles and ministry); then Lent and Holy Week (about his Calvary-bound mission); then Easter (about his resurrection and the sending of the apostles); and then Ascension (40 days after Easter) and Pentecost (with the sending of the Holy Spirit).

Minor celebrated days such as Reformation Sunday, All Saint's Day and other observances mark important days of the Church's beginnings and the Christian Faith. During the Reformation, the Church Calendar was utilized as a tool for teaching the Gospel and God's actions in human history. The purpose for the Church Calendar is to reflect on these important Biblical seasons that remind us of our faith as we give praise and thanks to God. It also serves as an important teaching tool for our children and neighboring communities to understand the workings of God in the building of his Church and the heritage of our Faith. In conclusion, this is the Church Year in a nut-shell and Advent helps us understand the bigger picture of the Gospel.

Advent specifically focuses on Christ's "coming." This is a celebration that brings vitality to our services of worship. We give God praise and thanks for his indescribable Gift to man. In Advent worship services, the colors of blue or purple are used to signify the royalty of Christ. Candles are lit as they help commemorate the meaning of Christ - the Light of the world who comes to humanity.

The traditional use of Advent candles (sometimes held in a wreath) originated in eastern Germany even prior to the Reformation. As this tradition came down to us by the beginning of this century, it involved three purple candles (some today use the colors of blue as well) and one pink candle. We often use blue in place of purple because purple is also used during Lent and Holy Week. As my professor and mentor of Theology Mark D. Roberts says: "The first, second, and fourth Sundays of Advent are "purple/blue" Sundays. Only the third is a "pink" Sunday. The pink, joyful color reminds us that, even as Advent helps us get in touch with our sober yearning for God to come to us, we know that he did in fact come in the person of Jesus."

1. The first week/first candle to light signifies "Hope," our long expected Messiah to come.
2. The second week/second candle to light signifies "Love," God's motivation for sending Christ.
3. The third week/third pink candle to light signifies "Joy," Rejoicing of God's delivered promise.

The pink candle was the third candle to be lit (not the fourth) on Gaudete Sunday, the Third Sunday of Advent. "Gaudete" means "Rejoice!" in Latin, and is the first word of the traditional Introit for that day which is taken from Philippians 4:4, "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!"

4. The fourth week/fourth candle to light signifies "Peace," God's gift to man - Christ our Peace.

5. Some also included a white "Christ candle" in the middle to be lit during the 12 days of Christmas (December 25-January 5).

(to be continued on Week 2 of Advent)

Reflection:

How is the coming of Christ significant to you? As the Bible announces His coming (both to Bethlehem and in Revelation), what is your heart's response to the coming King? In what way can the Church Calendar and Advent help you respond in fresh ways to the Lord in rendering His deserved worship?

November 26, 2009

The Giving of Thanksgiving

"Remember God's bounty in the year. String the pearls of His favor. Hide the dark parts, except so far as they are breaking out in light! Give this one day to thanks, to joy, to gratitude!" - Henry Ward Beecher

On Thanksgiving we give more than just a great dinner and time with our families. The day calls to us to declare God's faithfulness to His people. More than just a day commended by our president to give thanks, we proclaim the mercies of God and give Him thanks for his abundant provision. We give God glory due to His name, as one who has always been our bountiful benefactor. As creation is satisfied by the kindness of his hand, we too depend on Him as our every source of being.

As David ordered the people to give thanks, we resound with them in a chorus of praise in saying: "Give thanks to the LORD, call on his name; make known among the nations what he has done. Sing to him, sing praise to him; tell of all his wonderful acts." - 1 Chronicles 16:8-9

At our tables on this very day, may we recite something similar to the words of this faithful prayer. May they not just be words that pass from our lips, but an encouragement to stir our souls and to live as God deems from His word. To be thankful is to have a sincere expression of humble gratitude. As a reminder from the teachings of Christ, may we give out of the abundance of what we have. May we be content in the little that we have, as all things great and small belong to God (Lk. 12.48).

A Thanksgiving Prayer

Lord, behold our family here assembled. We thank Thee for this place in which we dwell; for the love that unites us; for the peace accorded us this day; for the hope which we expect the morrow; for the health, the work, the food, and the bright skies that make our lives delightful; for our friends in all parts of the earth, and our friendly helpers in this foreign isle.

Let peace abound in our small company. Purge out of every heart the lurking grudge. Give us grace and strength to forbear and to persevere. Offenders ourselves, give us the grace to accept and to forgive offenders. Forgetful ourselves, help us to bear cheerfully the forgetfulness of others.

Give us courage and gaiety and the quiet mind. Spare to us our friends; soften to us our enemies. Bless us, if it may be, in all our innocent endeavors. If it may not, give us the strength to encounter that which is to come, that we be brave in peril, constant in tribulation, temperate in wrath, and in all changes of fortune, and down to the gates of death, loyal and loving one to another.

As the clay to the potter, as the windmill to the wind, as children of their sires, we beseech of Thee this help and mercy for Christ's sake. Amen.

- Robert Louis Stevenson

Reflection:

How will you spend this Thanksgiving day in reflection of all that God has given you? What does it mean to thankfully give? How does Thanksgiving Day set a precedent for your life as you walk daily before God and others?

November 25, 2009

Thanksgiving Eve

"True thanksgiving means that we need to thank God for what He has done for us, and not to tell Him what we have done for Him." - George R. Hendrick

Most people are not familiar with the term Thanksgiving Eve. To some, the it may sound a bit strange. We call the fourth Thursday of every November as Thanksgiving. The day before Christmas, it is called Christmas Eve. Why mash up these words together? What does this mean?

Thanksgiving is about hearing, remembering and commemorating the great things God has done for us - not what we have done for Him. Just as Christmas Eve prepares our hearts for celebrating our Lord's birth, Thanksgiving Eve prepares are hearts for the day of giving thanks. In North America, we celebrate the remembrance of God's bounty and blessings to our land and people.

Thanksgiving is also known for spending time with family and friends over generous portions of food and football games. Sometimes between the turkey and the pigskin, we can be distracted as we are caught up in the moment of our parties. Not to say this is bad, but only to say that through our celebrating, let's keep the thankfulness of God in the front of our minds. The Eve of Thanksgiving gives us a time to prepare our hearts and souls. If we take so much time in our preparation of Thanksgiving in terms of the meal, the drinks, the travel and the entertainment, why not take time to prepare spiritually?

About eight years ago, I was introduced to the significance of Thanksgiving Eve. I discovered how awesome it was to spend the day in solitude of prayer and to spend the evening in community of worship. My day would begin by the readings of the Psalms on the topics of thankfulness (commonly known as Psalms of Thanksgiving). Here are a few passages to help us take inventory of God's provisions as we prepare our minds on the giving of thanks:

Psalm 77:11 "I will remember the deeds of the LORD; yes, I will remember your miracles of long ago."

Psalm 98:3 "He has remembered his love and his faithfulness to the house of Israel; all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God."

Psalm 105:1 "Give thanks to the LORD, call on his name; make known among the nations what he has done.

Psalm 107:21 "Let them give thanks to the LORD for his unfailing love and his wonderful deeds for men."

Throughout the day, I would reflect on the great things God has done in my life, my spouse, my family, my friends, my local church and my neighbors. In the early evening, we would meet at church to celebrate over soup and bread, followed up by a service of worship, prayer, message and meditation. Thanksgiving Eve has a special place in my heart as it gears my mind for the day ahead. When we wake the next morning, my heart and mind has already been in tune with God. I am more focused throughout the day as we recall God's bounty and blessings. As we celebrate through the food and football, my soul is still resonating from the previous day of thankfulness. Among the family, my attention turns to God and not the stress of the big day. My ability to fully engage the day of Thanksgiving is well spent, well prepared and well appreciated.

Reflection:

On this Thanksgiving Eve, let the Scriptures help you set your mind and spirit on giving thanks to Almighty God. As you prepare for the celebration ahead, how is the Lord preparing your heart to give Him thanks on this wonderful day?

November 24, 2009

Listening

"Prayer is when you talk to God; meditation is when you listen to God."

- Diana Robinson

There is a reason why Paul insisted to the Philippians to stay in constant prayer. With the world clamoring around us, it's so easy to get lost in the noise. Getting away from it all sometimes feels out of reach. At other times, we can get so choked by the cares of this world and/or ourselves, that our minds are still running in circles. The Bible does not advise us to deny the reality of our pain, neither does it support our need to fixate on our earthly struggles. Instead, we are to turn our attention to God and listen to the whispers of His healing.

God invites us to come away, to think, pray and listen to Him. I love the words of Diana Robinson, that meditation is when we are listening to God. What does it mean to meditate? I believe it's found in Paul's encouragement to the Philippians. He says: "Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is

pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things." - Philippians 4:8

To meditate is to think upon the words of God. To listen to His reminders of grace and truth. It's a knowing that we have in God. A kind of love that knows us deeper than any person on earth. He knows our thoughts even before they are spoken from our tongues. In what way can we respond back to this kind of love? Listening is a beautiful expression as we meditate on his faithful words.

Meditation is to sit in silence before Him as his words rain down streams of mercy. I love the old hymn "Come Thou Fount." This faithful song is about meditating on His Word; it also encourages us to be chained to Christ and to be free of the worlds' wandering.

"Come thou fount of every blessing, tune my heart to sing thy grace. Streams of mercy never ceasing, calls for songs of loudest praise." (Robert Robinson, 1758.) Jars of Clay has a sweet arrangement of this song found here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4f7tx25O9XM>

Listening to God helps tune our hearts to sing His grace, as his Word abides in us. We are to occupy our minds with God and His good gifts which are: true, noble, right, pure, lovely and praiseworthy. By the power of the Holy Spirit, we are enabled to worship Him through our difficulties. When we meditate and remember the gifts that God has given, the worries of our world our drowned in the fanfare of His faithfulness.

Reflection:

Do you listen to God as much as you pray? Listen to His soothing waters that can still your soul and bring peace. As an expression of worship, what are some faithful and true words of God that can cause your heart to be still and meditate on His peace?

November 23, 2009

Freely Give

"God created us to be channels of blessing, but our ability to receive the resources with which He wants us to bless others, depends on our being able to give then away - freely, faithfully, generously." - Jack Hayford

When was the last time a friend loaned you an item without asking for it to be returned or setting a deadline? You find the true generosity of a person when they give without requirements. There's no time stamp, no demand, no condition. It's just there, ready to be taken and prepared to be a blessing. You find a person's true selflessness when they are more excited in giving than receiving. The gift is not found in the item itself, it's found in the giver alone.

King David felt strongly about giving. He desired to give all that he had to the building of God's temple. When you stop and think about it, he had more power and more riches than anyone on earth. He was the "Trump" of his day. He could have become greedy with his wealth. He had all the power to buy-out other kingdoms and lands in order to claim an unsizeable reputation of fame. But that's not what happened. He gave everything away to the Lord and proclaimed God's fame through out all the earth. David not only gave out of the treasury of Israel, but he gave out of his own personal treasures. His heart was set on giving to God without reservation: "Besides, in my devotion to the temple of my God I now give my personal treasures of gold and silver for the temple of my God, over and above everything I have provided for this holy temple:" (1 Chronicles 29:3).

What we receive from God is not a gift to keep for ourselves, but to share with others in the process. As we've seen in David, God designed us to be conduits of blessings. What is a conduit? It is a channel for conveying water; it is also a protective tube for housing wiring. Our bodies carry the gifts of God to bless others, with these gifts, we respond back to Him in praise. What are the gifts? Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control; these gifts are better known as the fruits of the Spirit. We honor God and bless others when we freely share the fruit of the Spirit with people.

When we begin to trust God in His lordship overall, we find the joy of giving beyond ourselves. Even the physical and material things we have received are to be used for God's Kingdom work. If God is the giver of all blessings, he is also Owner of all we have. To give means to freely transfer the possession of (something) to (someone); hand over to. There is a freedom to experience when we learn to freely give as He freely gave His life to us (Matt. 10.8). Giving is about setting aside the building of our personal kingdoms. As an act of worship, we give ourselves willingly, joyfully, sacrificially in dedicating ourselves to God for His purposes.

Reflection:

How gracious God is to share all good things with His children! In what way are you giving back to God that honors him? Giving unto God is an act of worship, it's not just the offering time in the worship service. We worship the Lord daily through our acts of generosity and service to Him and to others. How much is your time spent in offering back to God what is rightfully His?

November 20, 2009
Stuck In A Moment

"Trust the past to the mercy of God, the present to his love, and the future to His providence." - St. Augustine of Hippo

Ever got "stuck in a moment that you could not get out of"? This is a favorite song title of mine by U2 from the "All That You Can't Leave Behind" Album. It holds a great amount of relevance. You may be stuck in a situation right now. It can be an event at work, a dilemma at home or a challenge in your ministry. What's got your foot caught (or both) as you are trying to regain your step? In these moments it can feel like time is standing still and God is choosing to wait. All the while, God is moving, he's just waiting for our response.

Back in the days of Jeremiah the prophet, Israel had this very problem. They were exiled into Babylon and were barred from getting into Jerusalem. The people were very anxious to get on with their dreams and ambitions of home. They were disheartened because they were held captive in a foreign land. There they were, with their plans and visions and could not do a thing about it. Have you ever felt like this? Israel was hoping for God to bail them out, but the Lord had something else in mind.

In Israel's circumstance, the Lord spoke through the prophet Jeremiah and said: "Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease." - Jer. 29:5-6

Ironic isn't it? I'm sure Israel had more to say than this. But look at God's response; he said to build, plant and produce. God knew very well where His people were, but He had greater plans than just an immediate fix. In the same way, God tells us to build, plant and produce, even in the times when we are stuck. Look at Psalm 37.3, it says: "Trust in the LORD and do good; dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture." God does not leave his people to the side without His provision. He is always at work, as He is building something greater on the inside of us.

When we get stuck, God uses our situations to learn in order to grow (Rom. 8.28). When we're always moving, we're not always listening. God causes us to slow down. Being stuck can be the greatest blessing. It is here when we learn to build, plant and grow. We take stock in the Lord's faithfulness as He works in the other areas of our lives. When the time is right, He makes a way and brings us to a new place.

How do we get unstuck? It begins by seeking Him with our full hearts. The Bible says when we seek Him, we will be found by Him (Jer. 29.14). As He finds us in our pits, He sends his grace and strength to lift us up (Ps. 40.2). His Word lights the path in which we are to walk (Ps. 119.105). He comforts us with His Spirit to guide our every step (Psalms 37: 23-24). Before we know it, we are moving again.

Take heart my friends in these encouraging words: For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you," declares the LORD, "and will bring you back

from captivity. I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have banished you," declares the LORD, "and will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile." Jer. 29:11-14.

Reflection:

Where in your journey have you gotten stuck? Look around and survey the land, God may be doing more than you realize. Are you trusting Him to show you? As we seek Him first, God responds to us with words of wisdom, comfort and hope. In your circumstance, what is your response to Him when He comes and finds you?

November 19, 2009
Sweetly Broken (Part 2)

"The highest act of love is the giving of the best gift, and, if necessary, at the greatest cost, to the least deserving...God gave the best gift – the display of the glory of Christ who is the image of God." - John Piper

He broke the bread. This breaking of Christ's body is likened to how a father of the family breaks bread for his children. Likewise, our Heavenly Father breaks the bread for his children of the Kingdom. Jesus gave the bread and wine to his disciples as a Master of the family and a Master of the feast. This picture is very familiar. Think back when Jesus multiplied the fish and loaves for the multitudes. Just as he distributed this miracle of mercy, we see His glory in a much larger sense in the act of communion.

The veil has been removed from our hearts as we celebrate our new covenant in Christ. He has removed the old clothes of the law and has broken the stone walls of our hearts. We live by His grace with a heart of flesh. Our unveiled faces reflect the Lord's glory as we are transformed into His likeness (2.Cor. 3.15-18). Coming to the table means that we embrace the new mercies of God and find restoration in the body and blood of Jesus. Thus, we worship Him in giving thanks for his everlasting love and forgiveness of sin.

In communion, His presence is with us and just as real to us as it was with the disciples. His blood poured out on the cross as it poured out from the cup. Our sins are forgiven and because of this we have peace and experience intimacy with God. His presence is just that much with us every time we eat and drink. He is deserving of our worship, his sacrifice is not afterthought.

Just like the New Testament apostles, we as disciples of Christ have every right to respond to his invitation. We receive the bread and wine, not just to remember, but to commune as an act of praise. We give Him thanks for the breaking of his body and shedding of his blood. They are gifts as we receive his kindness of mercy and grace. Every time we sit at the table, we acknowledge and proclaim the atoning work of the Lord Jesus. Our Heavenly Father does not leave his children as beggars waiting for the

crumbs of the table. Rather, He freely gives food and drink to satisfy our every need as sons and daughters of the Kingdom. We honor Him back by partaking in his sacrifice that has brought us new life. He says: "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me." (Lk. 22.19).

Reflection:

Imagine what it must have been like to sit at Christ's table. Jesus divides the bread and pours the wine, as we too are sweetly broken by His mercy. When you are before the Lord in worship, what is your response to his invitation of the meal? How do you see communion as not a mere time of remembrance, but as an act of praise and worship?

November 18, 2009
Sweetly Broken (Part 1)

"Our old history ends with the cross; our new history begins with the resurrection."
- Watchman Nee

Songs like "Sweetly Broken," "Nothing But The Blood," and "The Wondrous Cross (When I Survey)," have a special place in my heart. I remember learning about Communion and its significance to the Scriptures. Today, I find even more significance in the relation of this act of praise in our services of worship.

At the Passover evening before His death, Christ introduced the communal meal. Jesus took bread, gave thanks and gave it to them saying: "Take and eat; this is my body," (Matt. 26.26). In the same way He also took up the cup in the same way saying: "Drink from it, all of you (v.27). This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for the many for the forgiveness of sins (v.28). I tell you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom," (v.29).

What a wonderful proclamation of affection and promise spoken by our Lord. As disciples, we are invited to His table. Christ offers to us a partaking of his fellowship in his atoning work of the new covenant. No longer are we under the Law, which is the old covenant, but now we are under grace of the new covenant in Christ.

The bread and wine holds more significance than just mere items of food. Jesus uses them to institute the new covenant as we see in a mirror image of Genesis 17:1-8, when God made his covenant with Abraham. The Old Testament (Law) required an outward sign marked by man; the New Testament (Grace) requires an inward sign marked by Christ. God opened a way for anyone of us to become a child of Abraham and an heir of God's promises, which points to Jesus the Messiah.

As the life of the body is supported by bread, so the life of His word feeds our souls. Isaiah 53.5 denotes, "He was bruised for our iniquities." As the nourishment of his blood

gives us life, so His mercy, grace and forgiveness washes us clean. Ephesian 1.7 declares, "In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace." The miracle of Christ's atoning work is spoken from the bread and wine. He chose to be broken and spilt on our behalf, so we may have new life in Christ and fellowship with the Father.

Reflection:

When you come to the table, do you come full and complete or do you come empty and broken? God speaks his message of mercy and love through the bread and wine. In reflecting of the covenant God made through Christ, what do you say as a response to Him in worship?

November 17, 2009
Beyond Our Words

"You can give without loving, but you cannot love without giving." - Amy Carmichael

Have you ever had a song that sings to you in tough times? Maybe it was a familiar chorus line you sang as a child, maybe it was something you recently heard. When God gives us a song to sing, it comforts the soul. He uses music as a way for us to sing back to Him in praise. Such is the story of a young wife and mother of one as they struggle to make ends meet.

A lady and her husband were facing depressing times. The young mother was a stay at home mom, while her husband was a full-time college student. They lived in a trailer park, had one car and survived by \$400 a month with no home church nor friends nearby. Everyday became a struggle to pay bills, yet they trusted God in his providence. As time grew, the woman's faith was fading. She felt so empty inside, wondering what God was doing as she reflected over their circumstances. Hosea 2:14 came to her memory as the Lord said: "I will lead her into the desert and speak tenderly to her." Suddenly, the Lord brought the significance of this verse. She knew in her heart that God had something to say or sing to her.

Indeed, God had a response for this woman and her family. In her quiet time, Laurie wanted to offer the Lord something, but she felt sad because she was so distraught. She look towards heaven and asked God if He would like to hear her sing. She inquired if He would give her a melody just to recite back to Him. In this moment is where Laurie Klien received the song to write "I Love You Lord." Immediately, she wrote these lyrics:

I love You, Lord, and I lift my voice,
To worship You, Oh my Soul rejoice!
Take Joy, My King
In what You hear
May it be a sweet, sweet sound in Your ear.

By Laurie Klein © 1978, 1980 House of Mercy Music CCLI # 173653

Soon after playing the chorus for her husband and a local pastor, the song ended up at Jack Hayford's church and soon was cataloged at Maranatha! Music. What turned around Laurie's life was not just the song, but she found a deepening in her walk with the Lord. She learned to hear God's voice in the wilderness as He spoke/sang words of comfort to her. Laurie was reminded that even in her deepest despairs, to every day life, worship is always on-going. God desires to hear his children sing to him. It's not about what we sing as far as melody, it's what we can say that will be a sweet, sweet sound in His ear. Beyond our words, He hears our love.

Reflection:

God is our comfort in all of life's circumstances. He brings songs of deliverance, melodies of joy and songs of thanksgiving. More than our many words, God is more concerned about our hearts. When God hears your songs, what is your heart really saying to Him?

November 16, 2009

Jesus and UFO's

"And how am I to face the odds Of man's bedevilment and God's? I, a stranger and afraid In a world I never made." - Alfred Edward Housman

Like any other child growing up, I was fascinated with space. My toys, books and video game collections ranged from Johnny Quest to StarWars to ET. My friends and I would role play as humans versus aliens. Back then, UFO's, aliens and different kinds of species were not so scary. It was all kid's stuff. Now, as adults, we play the game differently. We tend to look at others differently. Our tendency is to compare and observe the differences in a person when they do not look like us, talk like us or act like us. We like to associate with our own kind; it keeps us safe. However, is this really the kind of acceptance and love that Jesus wanted us to have with one another - Christian or not?

We have several illustrations from Scripture that show how the Pharisees and teachers of the law criticized Jesus. They were angry at him because he associated with the sinners, the unaccepted, the aliens. The reason for their anger was because these people were no Jews and were unclean. In other words, they weren't part of the church membership. We read here in the passages below:

"While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and "sinners" came and ate with him and his disciples. (Matthew 9:10)

"When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and 'sinners'?" (Matthew 9:11)

"The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and "sinners..." (Matthew 11:19)

More than we would like to admit, these conversations continue today both in and outside the church. The reality is that, before Christ, we were looked upon as unclean, unaccepted and unlovable. We were the man who was slowly dying of leprosy, we were the woman who was casted out for her adultery, we were also the rich young ruler who was selfishly arrogant. Yet even deep in our sin, Christ still loved us, called us by name and took us into his arms of healing and forgiveness (Eph. 2.5).

To identify and embrace the alien, the outcast and the people of this world, you will get dirty. It is through those same stains that by His grace, Christ loved us, just as he loves each person today. To love broken people of this world, is to learn and understand the words of Jesus: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners," (Matt. 9.13).

Reflection:

We are all broken before God and are in need of the Great Physician; if not, then what point in having a Savior or following One? We all come from different planets and have our own identities. The question is not if you are able to love people past their differences, their history and present appearances to help love them into the Kingdom. The question is are you willing?

"Since you call on a Father who judges each man's work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear." (1Peter 1:17)

November 13, 2009

All In All

"At that moment, I cried out to God and lifted those burdens to the Lord and said, "Lord Jesus, I can't change me or the mess I've gotten myself into--but you can!" And you know what? He did change me!" - Dennis Jernigan

If you know Dennis Jernigan then you may know his journey, ministry and mission. You may have sung his songs "Thank You," "Who Can Satisfy My Soul" and the all-time favorite "All In All." He is a dear friend and wonderful person. His music goes beyond memorable melodies and words. They speak deep into the soul that conjure up utterances of honesty. But it's not the songs alone that cause us to sing, but the miracles of healing found in God the Father, Son and Spirit whose desire is to set us free. The Lord set Dennis free from a life of homosexuality. When you hear his music,

you hear the sound of freedom. You hear the story of how Jesus came to heal a person who was honestly seeking Him.

God desires our honesty, He desires to be our all in all. The problem: we carry too many weights and letting go sometimes is not as easy as one thinks. A friend once told me about the truth of life's weights, whether it be baggage, addiction and/or painful burdens. Life's baggage is heavy enough as you constantly feel its weight. Imagine you're on this tiny bicycle and behind you is a U-Haul trailer carrying all your burdens. Your peddling so hard and so fast, only to find that you are going up a hill. The only thing that separates you from the burden is this very small pin. He put it this way:

When someone comes and removes the pin that's holding you and the trailer together, it can be a very great feeling of release yet a very great feeling of uncertainty. You've been accustomed so long to the weight and the feeling of being free is an unusual feeling. But God, is able to remove the pin, lift all the burdens and absorb all our ill feelings. Allowing Him to be our all in all encompasses every fiber of our being. He is our comfort in the uncertainty, and makes of certain in the truth of His freedom.

The Lord is able to remove the pin. It's not a question if you are able, it becomes a question if you are willing. Willing to be set free. Willing to walk with Him. Willing to work with your faith. Are you willing for Him to make you clean?

In John 9, there is a story of a blind man. Jesus did three amazing events to restore this man's sight. First, He put mud and spit on the man's eyes; second he told the man to "Go." This third event is what really got to me. It did not even happen in Jesus' presence. When the Lord touched the man's eyes, the healing process began. His healing was complete when the man obeyed Jesus' command to go. The man was told to wash in the Pool of Silaom. The Bible says: "So the man went and washed, and came home seeing." The Lord grants us his mercy and forgiveness.

Healing is a process. It begins with God and yet demands our needed attention. As we are reminded by James 2.17, we are to have works along with our faith. The blind man was able to see, yet He also obeyed the words of the Lord. The words of Jesus are true; they bring wisdom, comfort and healing. More importantly, they are true. It is His truth that sets us free. When we make ourselves a slave to Christ, he sets us free from the slavery of sin. Truly, when Jesus sets us free, we are free indeed. In that freedom, we find that He becomes all that we ever need. He is our all in all.

Reflection: To the Lord, what is your worship response from this song?

All In All

You are my strength
When I am weak
You are the treasure
That I seek

You are my all in all
Seeking You as a precious jewel
Lord to give up I'd be a fool
You are my all in all

Chorus
Jesus Lamb of God
Worthy is Your name
Jesus Lamb of God
Worthy is Your name

Taking my sin
My cross my shame
Rising again I bless Your name
You are my all in all
When I fall down You pick me up
When I am dry You fill my cup
You are my all in all

Chorus
Jesus Lamb of God
Worthy is Your name
Jesus Lamb of God
Worthy is Your name

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To learn more about Dennis visit: www.dennisjernigan.com

November 12, 2009
The Living Ark

"In the Old Testament, God dealt with His people as a nation...Their relationship was completely external. But in the New Covenant, the presence of God moved out of the temple and into our hearts." - John Chisum

Have you ever longed to have something returned to you? There is no other kind of joy to lose something then to find it again. The experience of restoration brings a sense of fulfillment. What was once far off is now brought near. David longed to build a dwelling place for the ark of God. He went to great lengths in defeating the enemy to regain what was rightfully theirs. The ark was finally brought home. But there is a deeper meaning.

1 Chronicles 16

"1 They brought the ark of God and set it inside the tent that David had pitched for it, and they presented burnt offerings and fellowship offerings [a] before God. 2 After David had finished sacrificing the burnt offerings and fellowship offerings, he blessed the people in the name of the LORD."

It's not just a box of wood, overlaid with gold, instructed by God and fashioned by the hands of men. It's not an item that held mysterious wonders and powers to overthrow the enemy. Nor was the tabernacle just a mere place to offer up prayers and atonement for sin. The ark of the covenant was God's visible representation of His presence and promise. The ark of God served as His throne as He dwelt with his people.

What does the Ark have to do with worship in the 21st century? Fulfillment of the Old Testament promise. God promised Abraham that he will make a covenant with His people and his Spirit will reside with them. The condition was for Israel to follow God's commands. Tragically, the people were unable to fully comply with God's precepts. Despite the people's sin, we see God extend his hand of mercy and justice. Now we have a New Covenant in Christ; he came to fulfill the law through grace. This is purposeful in order that we may live and experience pure fellowship with the Father as he originally intended.

The ark stands as a reminder and symbol of God's fulfilled promises in Christ. Today, we do not have an ark, but the full Holy Spirit himself. These shells that we refer to as the human body now serve as God's living ark. His perfect love casts out all fear and purges our every sin; He dwells inside the believer. We now carry the Spirit of Christ as 2 Corinthians 4:10 says: "We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body." He inhabits our beings as he inhabits our praises (Ps. 22). If God inhabits and is lifted up on our praises, then he literally rests on the praises of His people. We serve as His living ark; created to worship Him and to enjoy his indwelling presence forever.

Reflection:

When you worship, in what ways can you think about the fullness and presence of God? He is here with you now. Not far away, not out of reach, but He is right here, even where you sit or lie down. Have you invited Him into the ark of your heart to dwell? In this act of praise, how does God use your entire being to be an offering for Him?

November 11, 2009
Our Nation Under God

Veteran's Day November 11, 2009

"And whereas it is the duty of nations as well as of men, to own their dependence upon the overruling power of God, to confess their sins and transgressions, in humble sorrow,

yet with assured hope that genuine repentance will lead to mercy and pardon; and to recognize the sublime truth, announced in the Holy Scriptures and proven by all history, that those nations only are blessed whose God is the Lord.” – Abraham Lincoln

Each year on Veterans Day I call my dad to send well wishes and to thank him for serving our country. My dad was an Army Airborne Ranger, 4th Infantry Division in the jungles of the Vietnam War. Also in the Vietnam War, my wife's dad was a gunner on the mighty guided missile destroyer the USS Bainbridge in the U.S. Navy. Both these men dodged bullets, explosives, shrapnel and every other wicked nightmare on behalf of the people of South Korea and the United States. Like countless other brave souls, these men bear the marks of bullets and scars to serve as a reminder that Freedom isn't free. It has a price in which we all pay.

It's a joy to say the words thank you. It simply means to appreciate a person who puts the lives of others before their own. Words like honor, code and duty mean something to these brave men and women who stand guard to defend our nation's liberty. They give their word as a life commitment to serve their nation, townspeople, friends and family. Their duty is to stand, defend and fight, not to run away and desert their friends nor country. There is no option for failure. Honor is earned, when despite the desire to scream and flee, they stand relentless and fearless to never quit, never give up and never to leave any brother or sister behind.

We commemorate all veterans as well as those who presently serve our country today. This day is special to all who embrace freedom. Each and everyday, beyond November 11th, is worth celebrating our liberty as we praise our God and the individuals who protect it, especially those who have gone before us. For those who love our country, no soldier's life nor death is in vain.

Without the love and loyalty of our country's defenders, we would not be able to worship freely and to pursue life and happiness. We appreciate each of you and your families who have sacrificed so much for the call of duty and honor. Our prayers and thoughts of faith are with you and to your extended families. Thank you for serving our great United States of America.

Psalm 33:12 (New International Version)

12 Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD,
the people he chose for his inheritance.

The children of men are all under His watchful eye and care; and the motions and operations of their souls. He fashions the heart and forms His spirit into the souls of mankind. Hence, he is called Father of the spirits. All creatures look to His hand for their food. The provisions of man is met by our God. The strength of an army is nothing without God. The strength of an enemy is nothing in comparison to God. The strength of a nation is in vain if the Lord is not their God.

Let not any man glory in his own strength, but only in the glory of the Lord. We give God praise for his grace upon the nations of the world. It is in our best wisdom that we make and continue to make the Lord as our God. He has blessed us to be called His people. It is His joy to receive a great land in which we dwell. It is our joy to cultivate, protect and nourish the land He has given; in gratitude, we help our friends and neighbors around the world.

We may not always agree as a nation, but with differences aside, we share a common bond of liberty and good will to all men. On this Veterans Day, let us praise our God for his faithfulness. Let us honor the Lord for all that He has given, even in times when war and the actions of people do not make sense.

Reflection:

In thinking of the many great leaders and defenders of this nation, what are you most thankful for? How can God use your thankfulness to encourage and praise our service men and women? Who is the closest individual or family member that you can think of right now to say the words: thank you.

November 10, 2009
In His Rest

"You have made us for yourself, and our hearts find no rest until they find it in You." - St. Augustine of Hippo

When we face life's decisions on our own - apart from God, our strength can only take us so far. Without proper care and rest, our bodies fail and we are left in miserable shape. Such as the case for David, as he unyieldingly ran away from the arms of Rest and into the arms of adversity.

David and Saul had this love/hate, off-again-on-again relationship. Saul was very jealous of David and pursued him to the death. In the early chapters of 1 Samuel, David hid himself in the refuge of God. There he would refresh himself in the Spirit of the Lord. Even in times of battle, David constantly inquired of the Lord's wisdom and strength. The Scriptures would say "David inquired of the Lord," (1Sam. 23.2). In the Lord, David found the rest he needed and was able to strengthen himself to make right decisions. Unfortunately, as time grew and conditions worsened, David became weary. He was unable to keep his spirit in check; like an unstoppable train, he ran for his life.

Times got so bad for David that he fled into enemy territory to seek shelter from Saul. David was in need of God's rest and nourishment. But this did not happen. David turns away from God to draw upon on his own strength or lack of. We read in 1 Samuel 27:1,

"But David thought to himself, "One of these days I will be destroyed by the hand of Saul. The best thing I can do is to escape to the land of the Philistines. Then Saul will give up searching for me anywhere in Israel, and I will slip out of his hand."

In the above passage, David never mentions God. It is clear that there is no thought or action in seeking for God's help. David chooses to be on his own. Here, we see the words "But David thought to himself." Rather than praying to God, David is consoling himself in the form of self-talk. You know the form of self-talk. It's those repetitive voices you hear in your head that you try to help convince yourself out of a situation. They breed negativity and escalate anxiety as you tell yourself: you're no good, there's no way, there's no hope. These are mere lies from the Enemy. Convincing ourselves in our own strength, apart from God leaves us empty, frightened and dismayed.

It is easy to look down on David for making poor choices, until we realize that we are much the same. When we run from God and do not seek His rest, our spirits go malnourished. We are to stop and turn from our methods and seek the Lord and His goodness. Like the story of the lost son in the Gospels, we are embraced by the Father. His smile provides our homecoming. His arms of mercy gives us shelter. He envelopes us in His rest. The Lord provides for our every need. God designed our bodies with certain limitations. How good it is to know and to experience His unlimited care as he freely satisfies our entire being.

Reflection:

How long have you been running? What are the fears that are leaving you empty? In His rest, we find His mercy and grace. The Lord says in Amos 5.4 "Seek Me and live." How is God calling your heart and wooing your soul to seek Him and to find rest? We find in His perfect love, He casts out all fear (1 John 4:17-19).

November 9, 2009
Songs Of Life

"Part of the power of song is that it is a beautiful expression of devotion...singing releases the pent-up joy and thanksgiving we feel because of God's grace and goodness." - Jack Hayford

What songs are you singing in your church? What are the lyrics saying? Do the words resonate in your heart that enables you to connect passion to worship? How can songs of joy or deliverance be used to encourage the souls of others?

Recently, my family and I have experienced severe hardship and loss. Sometimes, staying in the pits is all we know. Going through the grieving process is healthy and only natural. We have sung songs of sorrow and have experienced how these songs have turned to joy. The Lord calls us to respond. Even in our pain, the Lord hears our words.

Even in times when we can't utter a word, the Lord sings over us (Zeph. 3:17). One of my most favorite verses from the Psalms comes from verse 40, which says:

1 I waited patiently for the LORD;
he turned to me and heard my cry.

2 He lifted me out of the slimy pit,
out of the mud and mire;
he set my feet on a rock
and gave me a firm place to stand.

3 He put a new song in my mouth,
a hymn of praise to our God.
Many will see and fear
and put their trust in the LORD.

The Lord always hears us as we wait and are patient, trusting him in love. He hears our cries and comes to our defense. He lifts us out of the dark canyons into his marvelous light. We are able to stand on the foundation of Christ, which is never weary nor grows faint. He fills us with new songs to sing. Melodies of praise that declare his victories. When others hear our songs, they recognize the work of the Lord. May the songs we sing encourage others to put their trust in the Savior.

What songs are currently affecting you in your personal/spiritual life? How can your expressed melodies be potent cries of mercy and praise to the Savior?

November 6, 2009
His Song, Our Joy

"Hymns of today that may be sung by people who know the thought of the age...are not afraid that any truth of science will destroy Christianity, or any revolution will overthrow the Kingdom of Heaven." - Henry van Dyke

Being joyful in hope melts sadness away. It is not joy alone that causes the sun to shine, but the love of Christ that works through that joy. We may be in need, but we are never forgotten. The world relentlessly pursues to divert our attention away from God. The present calamities of this world, life's tribulations and emotional damage can rob a person's world; but the world cannot rob us from the love of Christ.

How can a person have joy in the midst of sorrow? I remember going through a very dark time in my life. There were times when I was not sure how to make it through. I likened myself to the Psalmist who said, my tears have been my drink and my bones

wasted away through my groaning all day long. In turning to the piano, I flipped open the hymnal and stumbled upon these words:

Melt the clouds of sin and sadness; drive the dark of doubt away;
Giver of immortal gladness, fill us with the light of day

These words come from the Hymn "Joyful, Joyful," by Henry van Dyke (also author of the inspirational quote listed above). Upon hearing of the Hymn's first verse, I was astounded. God's never ending love seeks to fill us with His joy. This kind of joy is our strength when we are in the midst of sorrow, pain and/or worldly confusion. Even in the here and now, we can sing "Center of unbroken praise," as we will in the Kingdom. It is comforting to know that these great times of difficulty are not worthy to be compared to the glory of Christ that will be revealed in us (Rom. 8.18). As we remain in the here and now, let us be encouraged to sing songs of comfort while in times of sorrow. The Lord's song gives us joy.

The Hymn "Joyful, Joyful" contains the essentials of the Christian life: our life on earth, life in Christ and life in joy. Read these lyrics again for a second time:

Joyful, joyful, we adore Thee, God of glory, Lord of love;
Hearts unfold like flowers before Thee, opening to the sun above.
Melt the clouds of sin and sadness; drive the dark of doubt away;
Giver of immortal gladness, fill us with the light of day!

All Thy works with joy surround Thee, earth and heaven reflect Thy rays,
Stars and angels sing around Thee, center of unbroken praise.
Field and forest, vale and mountain, flowery meadow, flashing sea,
Singing bird and flowing fountain call us to rejoice in Thee.

Thou art giving and forgiving, ever blessing, ever blessed,
Wellspring of the joy of living, ocean depth of happy rest!
Thou our Father, Christ our Brother, all who live in love are Thine;
Teach us how to love each other, lift us to the joy divine.

Mortals, join the happy chorus, which the morning stars began;
Father love is reigning o'er us, brother love binds man to man.
Ever singing, march we onward, victors in the midst of strife,
Joyful music leads us Sunward in the triumph song of life.

Reflection:

It is amazingly beautiful to hear great words that intersect with great melodies. Good songs do not come from the writer alone, but from the One who sings those melodies into the heart of the receiver. What are the melodies that He is singing into you? What are the songs that you are singing back to Him?

November 5, 2009
Driving Me Crazy

"God is so good that He only awaits our desire to overwhelm us with the gift of himself."
- Francois Fenelon

"What good can come from this?" I said to my father as we were lost. We took one of my famous short cuts and ended up going in a complete 5 mile circle. My dad comically interjected, "Hey Branon, didn't we see that gas station before? I think we saw that water tower now a 2nd time." I groaned. Hungry, tired and out of wits. I just wanted to get back on the right path to our destination. Embarrassingly, Dad was right, we traveled in a circle about three times.

The level of anxiety was starting to rise as the clock said we were 20-25 minutes behind. Ever get the feeling that you're spinning your wheels? Finally, we spotted the Texas Highway sign. Yes, it was hidden in the bushes by some elf. He must have moved it when no one was looking. I can hear Willie Nelson echoing in my mind of being on the road again. Suddenly, just ahead, there was a massive car accident. It looked like a horrible six car pile-up. Police and emergency crews were just arriving as they blocked-off the road. In a deep breath of prayer, I was thankful for our detour.

This is not to say that it was for our good, while others incurred an the accident. The Lord is not a God of partiality. We cannot explain why terrible things happen. This story was simply my experience. Had I been in this accident, I know that God would be with me, just as He was with those who were experiencing this tragedy.

Romans 8.28 says:

"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."

The Bible literally says, that if we have been called to His purpose, He will work His goodness within us. What a faithful and truthful promise. The Lord searches the heart and knows the mind. What ever our tragedy, despair or loss of hope, He knows our needs before we ask of Him. Jesus said, "What ever you ask the Father according to his will he will give you" (Jn 14.13).

But how will we learn to ask the things that belong to the will of God? How will we know? The Spirit will teach us. Even better, it is comforting to hear these spoken words: "In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express" (Rom 8.26).

We have all the provisions from God that is needed to work all things for good. All His mercy, grace, strength and wisdom comes from God alone. James 1.5 tells us to ask for wisdom to keep us from doubt. Those that love God make the best of all he does. We take all the good in every part not on our own merit, but by His perfect love that works so mightily within us.

Reflection:

What has caused you to veer off the road to put you in circles? The workings of His will and the direction given from His voice, resonates through His Word and Spirit. He speaks through our circumstances in order to find His good will. Finding our worth in God, begins with His goodness; what is His goodness worth to you?

November 4, 2009
Chaos and Creation

"God is forever seeking to speak Himself out to His creation...He is, by His nature continuously articulate. He fills the world with His speaking voice." - AW Tozer (1963)

"In the beginning God..." (Gen 1.1). These first four words of the Bible is the most compelling phrase of mystery. God was. Time began. He existed before Creation. This concept is so difficult to wrap our minds around, yet in this mystery, we find God's loving providence. He is the beginning and the end. He spoke and it came to be, creating something out of nothing. Light out of darkness. Order out of chaos. As we came into being, God sought us, called us and through Christ, redeemed us.

Chaos represents the state of complete disorder and confusion. It is also defined as the formless matter supposed to have existed before the creation of the universe. In the human definition, chaos also represents an unregenerate graceless soul. Praise be to God that he did not leave us in this state. He still seeks and speaks to his creation to redeem us from chaos.

At His command, light came to be. Visible light illuminated truth, it shined upon creation as it still shines today. The nature of the Word of God, and the great intention of giving it to the world; it is a lamp and a light. It discovers us and draws us into His presence. As in Creation, He calls out to us to live. His Word is not only light to our eyes, but also is a lamp to our feet. He chooses to light our way, as He orders our steps. Do you hear His voice?

God still speaks to us today as his love is written on every green leaf, flower, mountain and each heavenly cloud. He created us in his own image to respond back to him in adoring praise. In Christ, He choose us before the foundations of the world to love Him and enjoy his fellowship - forever. How vast is the Father's love for us? It is so deep and so pure, beyond all measure.

Chaos would have continued if He did not define its boundaries. Darkness would have left a constant shadow, had He not ordain light to shine. Existence would have been confined to death, had He not sent Christ to liberate us from sin. Tears and isolation would have been our comfort had He not sent his Holy Spirit to come beside us and dwell with in us. God is not only the author of all being, but is the fountain of Life and spring of motion.

Reflection:

Genesis reveals to us that God is not disconnected from His creation. The Word also reveals God's covenant and special relationship, are you responding to his invitation? What is God speaking into you, that calls you out of darkness and into his marvelous light to worship Him?

November 3, 2009
Instruments of Peace

“Lord, make me an instrument of your peace; where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; and where there is sadness, joy.” - St. Francis of Assisi

As a musician, singer or worship team, have you ever considered that you are His disciple, and just so happens that you sing or play an instrument? God desires to use you and each of us as instruments of His peace. He breathes life in us and fills us with his will to accomplish the missional work of Christ, in hopes to bring peace to all mankind. The melodies of His work resounds from our souls and echos back to heaven in His praise.

Isaiah 55:11

"so is my word that goes out from my mouth:
It will not return to me empty,
but will accomplish what I desire
and achieve the purpose for which I sent it."

In order to reach the world, even through music, God desires to use us effectively. Like a fine tuned instrument, God wants to fix, adjust and polish you. Music is the universal language of the world and generations, even more so is the message of the Gospel. Proclaiming His symphony of love begins by the working of His peace within you. If we cannot be at peace with Christ, we cannot be at peace with people. When the peace of Christ breaks, changes and molds are hearts in His mercy, we are pliable by the Spirit to do the Father's will.

A good musician knows how to maintain their instrument and is always prepared. They are skilled in adapting to all kinds of playing environments and challenges. The art of their mastery is clearly seen as they also adapt to other musicians. It is amazing to

experience the beautiful sounds of music when great musicians come together. Likewise, we are the musicians of His orchestra. We are members of one another and are a small part of God's larger work of His Symphony - the Church. In learning to play in harmony with one another, our music is pleasing to the Concert Master and Grand Conductor. Our music is also clearly understood by the world as we love one another.

"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God." - Col. 3.16

"Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position.[c] Do not be conceited." Rom. 12.15-16

"By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."
- John 13.35

As an instrument of peace, we understand how to relate and identify with the people of the world. We bear with them in love and acceptance. The music they hear comes from the Author of the Gospel as He conducts through us, as instruments of His peace.

Reflection:

How has God called you in being an instrument of His peace? As a member of His symphony, what notes of love are you playing? In association with others, what kind of music are you making that pleases God?

November 2, 2009
Here And Now

"To live in the present, we must deeply believe that what is most important is in the here and now." - Henri Nouwen

You've heard the statement: "times are like they use to be." Times definitely have changed, and our memories serve as constant reminders. Things that have happened in the past, or things we anticipate to happen in the future, can sometimes distract us from the present day.

Prayer is our connection to God in whom we find solace and intimacy. In finding our focus on the present begins with prayer. But prayer has an essential quality. It's not sputtering out the first of words that come to mind. This is not to say that we are not to begin prayer with words. I am speaking about the essential quality of prayer. Listening. What I mean is that we listen to God for the words to pray. Like worship, prayer begins and ends with God. He is the Initiator, we are the respondents. God speaks, we listen; we respond, He receives our prayers, praise and worship.

God is not only past nor future, He is present. The Lord is with us in the here and now. The psalmist was troubled by past events and questioning the future. He prayed aloud to God in search of his present help to restore Israel. In Psalm 85:8 we hear:

"I will listen to what God the LORD will say;
he promises peace to his people, his saints—
but let them not return to folly. (Ps. 85.8)

To pray is to listen to the voice of love. We enter the presence of God each time we pray. When we listen to God, really listen to God, we enter into His intimacy. Like a mother who sings her child to sleep, the Lord sings over us. As we focus on God, the cares of yesterday and tomorrow fade away. This is where we find our delight in the words of Jesus when he says: "Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own." (Matt. 6.34)

Reflection:

What is God speaking into your heart right now? How is your soul echoing to the words of deep. What is your response to what you are hearing, what you are feeling, what He is meaning?