

Daily Devotions

Monday September 11

Ezekiel 33:7-11

⁷So you, mortal, I have made a sentinel for the house of Israel; whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall give them warning from me. ⁸If I say to the wicked, “O wicked ones, you shall surely die,” and you do not speak to warn the wicked to turn from their ways, the wicked shall die in their iniquity, but their blood I will require at your hand. ⁹But if you warn the wicked to turn from their ways, and they do not turn from their ways, the wicked shall die in their iniquity, but you will have saved your life.

¹⁰Now you, mortal, say to the house of Israel, Thus you have said: “Our transgressions and our sins weigh upon us, and we waste away because of them; how then can we live?” ¹¹Say to them, As I live, says the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from their ways and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways; for why will you die, O house of Israel?

For Reflection

In this reading, the Lord offers a word of deep responsibility and a word of great hope. First comes the responsibility: Ezekiel, who has received the Word of the Lord, has an obligation to warn and admonish God’s people when they are disobedient to the Lord’s will. Whether the people repent and obey is not his responsibility. He must live with integrity himself, though, which means passing on warnings that he receives from the Lord. (Not merely his own opinions or preferences, but what the Lord reveals to him.)

Since, in Christ, we have received the Lord’s loving Word of both law and Gospel, it is not too much of a stretch to see the obligation resting on us, as well. We are called to share the truths of God’s law, as well as the saving grace of God’s Gospel, with the world around us. We do not have to believe that God is somehow itching to condemn them if we don’t share the Good News; rather, “sharing the Good News” is simply what we are commissioned by Christ to do. Being people who resist lies and who tell people about Jesus is an expression of who we are called to be. If we resist this, we are resisting our baptismal calling.

The word of great hope is that the Lord is not eager to punish or condemn. Even when we feel our failures most heavily, God is always willing to lift them with his grace. He is constantly reaching out with forgiveness and new life. This is the treasure we can both receive and share!

Questions for Reflection

1. Have you ever felt sins or failures weighing on you? How does the Lord's promise, "I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from their ways and live," encourage you?
2. We have such a strong "live and let live" culture, which in many ways is a tremendous blessing. But it can discourage us from speaking up when we see someone making disastrous choices. Ask the Holy Spirit for wisdom, kindness, humility, and also courage to speak up when it is right for you to do so.

Read Psalm 132-135

Today's Prayer Focus: Pray for our fellow citizens and our nation as we observe the anniversary of the September 11, 2001 attacks. Pray for God's peace for those who were in Pennsylvania, the Pentagon, and New York 22 years ago and who were greatly affected by the events of that day. Pray that God will give his powerful strength and healing to those who grieve loved ones. Ask God to unite us as a country and plant a desire in the hearts of our leaders and of everyone in our nation to work for the good of all people.

Tuesday September 12

Read Psalm 136-138

Today's Prayer Focus: Pray for students, teachers, and schools staff beginning a new academic year. Pray for God's wisdom and joy to fill all those who work with young people in schools, day care centers, and other youth activities. Ask God to bless Reformation's Kids' Inc. program and the work of our Growing Young Team, that we might touch the lives of the young people in our day care and our congregation with the love and hope of Jesus.

Wednesday September 13

Psalm 119:33-40

³³Teach me, O LORD, the way of your statutes, and I will observe it to

the end.

³⁴Give me understanding, that I may keep your law and observe it with my whole heart.

³⁵Lead me in the path of your commandments, for I delight in it.

³⁶Turn my heart to your decrees, and not to selfish gain.

³⁷Turn my eyes from looking at vanities; give me life in your ways.

³⁸Confirm to your servant your promise, which is for those who fear you.

³⁹Turn away the disgrace that I dread, for your ordinances are good.

⁴⁰See, I have longed for your precepts; in your righteousness give me life.

For Reflection

This section of Psalm 119 is one long prayer for God to help the writer stay on God's path and follow God's ways his whole life long. It's striking how comprehensive this prayer is. The psalmist wants to know deeply in his heart God's statutes, commandments, decrees, ordinances, and precepts. He's leaving nothing out! The psalmist is praying for God's teaching, wisdom, and love to saturate his entire being. But there's nothing overly heavy about his request. While to our modern ears, words like "commandments" and "ordinances" might sound negative or oppressive, the psalmist says he "delights" in God's commandments. Everything God teaches him and instructs him to do is good. This psalm would make a wonderful daily prayer! It reminds us to look to God for instruction, guidance, and wisdom as we go about our days, and to delight in all the ways God leads us in his paths.

Questions for Reflection

1. The psalmist makes many requests of God in this passage, such as "teach me," "lead me," "turn my eyes from looking at vanities," and more. Which of the requests in this passage resonate with you today?
2. When has God confirmed his promises to you (see verse 38)? In other words, when have you felt the goodness of God's promises of love, grace, and faithfulness become a reality for you?

Read Psalm 139-140

Today's Prayer Focus: Pray for the ministry of Reformation Lutheran Church, that we would be devoted to serving God, bearing witness to the Gospel so that others may come to believe, and serving our community so that we may bless others.

Thursday September 14

Romans 13:8-14

⁸Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. ⁹The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not covet"; and any other commandment, are summed up in this word, "Love your neighbor as yourself." ¹⁰Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law.

¹¹Besides this, you know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; ¹²the night is far gone, the day is near. Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light; ¹³let us live honorably as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy. ¹⁴Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

For Reflection

This section of Paul's letter to the Romans continues the themes that started in Romans 12 a few weeks ago. After 11 chapters of careful explanation of how God has saved us through the death and resurrection of Jesus, Paul starts to describe in chapter 12 what our Christian life looks like as a result of everything God has done for us. In today's passage, Paul emphasizes how love is the foundation of all of our beliefs and our actions as Christians. Love is so important that it sums up all of the commandments! You probably noticed Paul's mention of what we call "The Golden Rule." In verse 9, Paul writes that all of the commandments are summed up in "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Just as God first loved us and gave up his Son for us, everything we do in our lives as Christians flows from the love we have received from God. That love flows out from us in service to our neighbors.

This passage is also notable in that Paul plants his readers and us in a specific timeframe for living out our faith in Jesus. He reminds us that

we live in the in between time. Jesus has died and he rose again, but he has not yet returned to make the world the way God wants it to be. Paul's instructions for us during this time is to "put on the Lord Jesus Christ" (v. 14). In other words, we are to trust in what God has already done to change our future from sin and death to life and salvation. We can live in the confidence that God's gift of grace is ours forever. The Bible paraphrase called *The Message* puts this view of the time we're in beautifully when it says, "Be up and awake to what God is doing! God is putting the finishing touches on the salvation work he began when we first believed." This passage from Romans urges us to do everything from a place of love and to stay awake to God's work in the world. Doesn't that sound like a terrific way to live?

Questions for Reflection

1. When do you find it easy to love? When is it harder to love? Have you ever been surprised at how God worked on your heart and allowed you to love someone when you didn't expect to? Who are you having a hard time loving today? How can you pray for God's help with that challenge?
2. Do you need God's help with any aspect of "laying aside the works of darkness and putting on the armor of light?" (v. 12). Spend some time in prayer talking with God about that.

Read Psalm 141-143

Today's Prayer Focus: Pray for the spiritual growth of yourself and all our members, that we would be filled with the Holy Spirit, increase in our knowledge of God's will, and overflow in love for each other and the world around us.

Friday September 15

Matthew 18:15-20

¹⁵[Jesus said,] "If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one. ¹⁶But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. ¹⁷If the member refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. ¹⁸Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on

earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. ¹⁹Again, truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. ²⁰For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.”

For Reflection

Mutual forgiveness and the presence of Jesus in the community go hand in hand. Where Jesus is present, we will be drawn to resolve conflicts and forgive one another. When we resist resolving conflicts with grace, we resist the presence of Jesus. This is a bold claim, but the words of Jesus in Matthew’s Gospel support it. Notice how Jesus instructs us to work through the disruptions that sin brings to relationships: first, go privately to the offender and try to make things right. If that fails, bring someone along to help. If that doesn’t work, bring it before the community, not to shame the person, but to bring about reconciliation. The entire process is designed to heal relationships and bring people back together.

If the offender refuses to be reconciled, then there is a change in the relationship: “let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.” The relationship is changed, but the love isn’t. Remember: Jesus treats Gentiles and tax collectors with love and grace!

All of this is challenging. But it is possible because Jesus is with us in the midst of it. In fact, when we allow his love to enter and guide our response to conflict, then those struggles becomes pathways to greater understanding, deeper spiritual maturity, and healthier relationships. All of this leads to our common life more fully reflecting the glorious love of our Savior.

Questions for Reflection

1. Is there someone in your life you have a conflict with? How do the words of Jesus guide you to work towards reconciliation?
2. One of the things that happens when we go to someone, in a loving way, to reconcile a hurt is that we often discover ways we ourselves have contributed to the conflict. How can you rest in the grace of Jesus if you discover you have hurt someone else, and how would Jesus’ love move you to respond to this?

Read Psalm 144-146

Today's Prayer Focus: Pray for peace in the world, especially in Ukraine. Ask God to sustain those who suffer under persecution for the name of Christ. Pray that all people would have freedom and good government.

Saturday September 16

Read Psalm 147-150

Today's Prayer Focus: Pray for police, fire fighters, all emergency workers, health care workers, and those who serve in the military. Pray for farmers and those who transport food. Ask God to grant well-being to all in our community, and to stir up generosity to meet the needs of those who lack food, shelter, or other needs.

The Mission of Reformation Lutheran Church is to:

Invite our neighbors as Jesus invites us.

Engage in a community of graceful discipleship.

Equip our members to grow in faith and ministry.

Embody the love of Jesus in our world.