**Daily Devotions**

*02-01*

“When he came to Galilee, the Galileans welcomed him, since they had seen all that he had done in Jerusalem at the festival; for they too had gone to the festival.”

— John 4:45

Jesus got around. And his reception varied widely by location. He had just gotten back from Samaria, where the woman at the well had rounded up a whole bunch of folks who believed in Jesus. But he didn’t go home to Nazareth, because we know they weren’t too keen on him there—they knew him as a kid, so they had no faith in him as a prophet. Instead, he went elsewhere in Galilee, where he was welcomed.

Sometimes we have to just accept that there are people and places that aren’t healthy for us. Jesus knew he wasn’t welcome in his hometown, so he went where people were open to his message. Even the son of God accepted that there were things he could not change. How much more so should we be willing to set healthy boundaries, even leaving situations that are causing us harm?

Are there people or situations in my life I am trying to change?

*02-02*

“For my people have committed two evils:

they have forsaken me,

the fountain of living water,

and dug out cisterns for themselves,

cracked cisterns

that can hold no water.”

— Jeremiah 2:13

God’s living water gives us new life. That’s the whole theme of the VBS program I just wrote for Clergy Stuff. Living water is a complex concept—it’s mentioned all over the Bible (as the rest of this week’s devotions will explore) without a specific definition. It’s one of those beautiful, divine mysteries that invites us to dive ever deeper into God’s word and our relationship to God.

God’s living water sustains us in ways far beyond quenching physical thirst. It is our ultimate spiritual source, without which life is empty and meaningless. Jeremiah scolded the people for seeking after human sources of satisfaction—digging out their own cisterns. And, of course, it doesn’t work. The things we create for ourselves, our attempts to control people, places, and situations, will never fulfill us in the way God’s living water does.

Jeremiah is calling us back to the source that will never run dry, so that we might flourish beyond our limited imagining.

How am I trying to dig out my own cisterns instead of turning to God’s living water for all my needs?

*02-03*

“O hope of Israel! O Lord!

All who forsake you shall be put to shame;

those who turn away from you shall be recorded in the underworld,

for they have forsaken the fountain of living water, the Lord.”

— Jeremiah 17:13

Why would anyone turn away from the source of life? Lack of trust. It’s that simple. Adam and Eve’s first sin wasn’t about disobeying an arbitrary command. It was about deciding that God couldn’t be relied on to take care of them—they needed to “have their eyes opened” so they could do it themselves.

Truth be told, I think this is completely understandable. When I look at the state of the world—environmentally, politically, socially, economically—I have a hard time seeing God at work. In the face of instability, when we can see no evidence that God actually cares, it’s easy to turn away and put all our efforts into controlling what we can.

The problem is that it doesn’t work. Jeremiah is yelling that forsaking the fountain of living water will result in shame and punishment, but that’s just bluster, I think. God doesn’t have to punish us. The basic fact is that when we forsake the fountain of living water, we punish ourselves. We cut ourselves off from God—from faith, from hope, from those things that make living in an unstable world possible.

The good news is that the fountain of living water will never forsake us. We are continually invited to return and drink deep of the only thing that truly sustains us.

Where do I put my trust on a day to day basis?

*02-04*

“Your channel is an orchard of pomegranates

with all choicest fruits,

henna with nard,

nard and saffron, calamus and cinnamon,

with all trees of frankincense,

myrrh and aloes,

with all chief spices—

a garden fountain, a well of living water,

and flowing streams from Lebanon.”

— Song of Solomon 4:13-15

And now for something completely different—from Jeremiah’s harangue of Israel’s abandonment of the fountain of living water to the Song of Solomon’s ascribing the metaphor of living water to a bride. There’s disagreement as to whether this is simply a love poem or an allegory for the relationship between God and humanity, but either way, it strikes me as odd to ascribe such a divine image—a well of living water—to a person, rather than God.

But then, this is all a metaphor. The lover is comparing the beloved to all the best that God’s creation has to offer, including God’s living water, the source of life. Sure, it’s over the top, but I don’t think the lover is equating the beloved with God, only acknowledging that the beloved is a sign of God’s love.

What things in my life do I see as signs of God’s abundant love?

*02-05*

“On that day living waters shall flow out from Jerusalem, half of them to the eastern sea and half of them to the western sea; it shall continue in summer as in winter.

And the Lord will become king over all the earth; on that day the Lord will be one and his name one.”

— Zechariah 14:8-9

Now we have a little taste of apocalyptic literature. “On that day” is big in apocalyptic texts. That day some time in the future when God will show up in might, wipe all the evildoers from the earth, and set up a peaceful kingdom forever. Here, God’s living waters flow out of God’s earthly home, Jerusalem, and all the way to the sea in two directions.

I imagine these rivers of living water would drench all the earth in God’s grace, making farmlands rich, forests and grasslands verdant, and deserts bloom. They would fill all creatures with joy and make them to live in peace. They would make all creation to have life, and have it abundantly. That’s an apocalypse I could get behind!

Where do I see God’s living water flowing in the world?

*02-06*

“Jesus said to him, ‘Stand up, take your mat and walk.’ At once the man was made well, and he took up his mat and began to walk.”

— John 5:8-9

Main Idea: Jesus restored more than people’s bodies; he restored all aspects of wellness.

Healing stories are becoming increasingly challenging to preach. Those in the deaf community, for example, do not view themselves as deficient, therefore they don’t need healing. Stories of Jesus healing the deaf, then, will not sit well with hearers in the deaf community. Consider other healing stories of Jesus healing people with disabilities. If people with disabilities are not ill, they may not need healing. Add the notion that, in Jesus’ day, common understanding suggested illnesses and disabilities were caused by sin (theirs or their parents’), and you have a challenge ahead preaching on these.

Consider, then, what it might mean that Jesus healed people. Perhaps the healing was more than simply the fixing of physical problems. The sick and disabled were marginalized people. They were considered unclean and couldn’t work, and were therefore unable to participate fully in the life of the community. When Jesus healed them, he gave them the ability to participate more fully in the community, restoring their social and emotional health. He gave them the ability to work for more financial security. He gave kids the opportunity to learn, restoring intellectual/educational health. Consider the impact their healing may have made on the culture, the arts, and environment.

In today’s story, Jesus also used the healing experiences as opportunities for people to express their faith. Resist the temptation to make the healings into quid pro quo experiences. (Jesus didn’t withhold healings until people could prove their faith!) But often these experiences did help people grow in faith and communities come together through their faith.

By focusing on the bigger picture of what healing afforded those that Jesus healed, you might have a more powerful word to preach than to imply those with disabilities are “less-than,” or that people had to believe to be healed. You can put the focus back on Jesus, and how his healing stories enhanced more than just physical wellness.

As followers of Jesus, we have been called to do what Jesus did. Many of our social systems and norms have changed, so people with disabilities are no longer as marginalized as they once were. We have already begun the process of effecting change so that people are being restored to all areas of wellness despite their physical conditions.

*02-07*

“Therefore the Jews started persecuting Jesus, because he was doing such things on the sabbath. But Jesus answered them, ‘My Father is still working, and I also am working.’”

— John 5:16-17

Wait. So does God rest or not? Maybe it was just that one time, after creation was finished. Other places in the bible it talks about how God doesn’t sleep, is always with us, etc. And I, for one, would like to think that if there’s a crisis, it’s not going to become catastrophic because God is chilling on a beach somewhere for a couple days. No, God is always working for our good. And Jesus had no time for people who were trying to prevent him from doing God’s work on a technicality. As usual, the establishment clung to the letter of the law while missing the entire point of the law, which is to love God and love our neighbors as ourselves. Arbitrary religious rules should never be used as a way to prevent justice being done. Jesus was crystal clear on that point.

What excuses am I tempted to make for not acting on behalf of another person?

*02-08*

“Jesus said to them, ‘Very truly, I tell you, the Son can do nothing on his own, but only what he sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, the Son does likewise.’”

— John 5:19

I gotta be honest. Sometimes I just find John ponderous. The layers of theologizing make my head spin. I think he is just saying, here, that Jesus has full authority from God to do and say all the things he’s doing and saying. Which was important. Lots of people were questioning just who Jesus thought he was. He was breaking deeply ingrained traditions in his pursuit of healing and justice. He was stepping on a lot of establishment toes. And almost everybody loved him for it.

God calls us to look critically at social norms, economic and political systems, and the status quo, and act decisively against them in pursuit of justice for all God’s children. Who do we think we are? Well, we’re certainly not Jesus. But the work of justice is God’s work, and if we are doing it whole-heartedly, we have all the authority we need.

What do I think about the idea that God gives me the authority to do God’s work in the world?

*02-09*

“How can you believe when you accept glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the one who alone is God?”

— John 5:44

As a culture, we in the U.S. are pretty obsessed with personal glory. It’s not enough that we have a decent job, family, enough money to live on, etc. (Though a whole lot of us don’t have these things at all.) We need to be recognized. Remembered. Immortalized. We have to write the great American novel or be the CEO of a Fortune 500 company or win an Oscar. It originates out of a fear of our own mortality and is exploited by corporations offering a whole host of get-rich-and-famous-quick products and services. We worship celebrities and professional athletes and spend our time wishing we could have what they have. And if, by some miracle, we actually achieve that level of personal glory, we are often left wondering, “Is this it?”

How can we believe in Jesus if we believe in Kim Kardashian? How can we do what God calls us to do if we are obsessed with the things we want to do? How can we have the humility to turn to God for all things if what matters to us is notoriety? Jesus says we can’t. Period. Glory is from God alone, and glory belongs to God alone. When we give up our need for personal glory and turn over our fear of mortality to God, we are set free to be what God wants us to be. And no matter how simple it is, it’s far more glorious than anything we could have wished.

What is my definition of an ideal life? Do I think it’s aligned with what God wants for me?

*02-10*

“When Jesus realized that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain by himself.”

— John 6:15

Jesus had no interest in being an earthy king. The things he was doing—healing, teaching, working miracles—made him loved. A lost and oppressed people were desperate for someone who actually cared about them to take power so they could have justice. But they didn’t understand the nature of Jesus’ reign. Had they made him king by force, he would have been taken out by Rome immediately. And anyway, Jesus was trying to make them understand that earthly kings would always fail them, when God never would.

Sometimes we put too much faith in our political leadership. We vote and then think we’ve done our part and they’ll make sure we get everything we want. That’s not how it works. Never has. The only way real change has happened is when mass movements of individuals have put pressure on the powers that be. Our leaders will always fail us if we do not hold them accountable.

Our trust needs to be in God, for it is God who calls us to this work of justice, and God who sustains us in the struggle.

Do I put too much faith in my elected officials?

*02-11*

“When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the lake and coming near the boat, and they were terrified. But he said to them, ‘It is I; do not be afraid.’”

— John 6:19-20

I am sometimes one of those disciples in that wind-tossed boat before Jesus is there. I’m just doing my thing and maybe it’s not going so well. I think I know where I’m going, but I’m plagued by doubts. Fear sits cold in my gut like the water splashing over the prow.

Then Jesus shows up and it’s a whole different kind of fear. Suddenly I have absolutely no idea what’s going on when I was pretty sure I knew what I was doing. I’m called to look at things in a completely different way, step outside my comfort zone, and above all, trust God. And it’s terrifying. I mean, the dude is walking on the water for crying out loud!

But Jesus says, “Do not be afraid,” and reassures me that I am exactly where I need to be. Even if it’s not the right boat, even if it’s not with the right people right now, Jesus is there with me. I can look honestly at my life and ask God where God wants me to be, and I will know that I am never alone.

Which is scarier, when everyday life is challenging or when Jesus shows up?

*02-12*

“Jesus said, ‘For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.’ They said to him, ‘Sir, give us this bread always.’”

— John 6:33-34

I’m in recovery for food addiction. When I was in my addiction, I ate constantly as a way to numb out from the emotional pain in my life. I was not equipped to deal with reality, and there was a giant, gaping, God-shaped hole in the center of my being. I was hungry all the time, but the hunger wasn’t physical—I was getting way more food than I needed. I didn’t need any more actual bread. I was desperate for “the bread of God that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.” I just didn’t know it.

In recovery, my fellow addicts helped me figure this out. Fortified with the bread that is God, I learned how to deal with my reality in healthy ways, and I’m grateful to say that I haven’t eaten compulsively in nearly seventeen years.

Are there other kinds of “bread” I seek after for my comfort, rather than the bread of God?

*02-13*

“Jesus said to them, ‘I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.”

— John 6:35

Main Idea: Jesus’ words, though hard for some to hear, were filled with love: Jesus is the bread of life!

Despite Jesus’ repeated attempts to explain himself, many simply failed to understand. They were so hung up on the literal meaning of Jesus’ claim to be “bread from heaven,” that they missed the point completely. Further complicating Jesus’ message was the messenger. Wasn’t Jesus the same little boy they knew years ago?

I have a good friend who is a pastor in a local congregation. She came to professional ministry late in life, and so had many years to develop friendships as a lay person. Once ordained, she was surprised when she encountered those friends again, and they were shocked and tickled that she had become a pastor. They knew her when she was just a child, a teen, a young adult, and she was, let’s say, a little wild. Now in middle age, she had left that lifestyle behind to follow a more purposeful calling. But those old friends could never really see her in the role of pastor because they “knew her when.”

The funny thing is that people change. But it’s hard, sometimes, for others to acknowledge and accept the change. For some reason we want to believe that people don’t change much. Maybe it’s because it’s scary when someone we have counted on to be a particular way is suddenly no longer reliable in that way. It throws us off our game. So we pretend they are the same, resisting acknowledging that they are a new person with new interests, values, and behaviors. Maybe we just don’t like the change because it shines a spotlight on the things about ourselves that we know we ought to change but don’t.

If Jesus can become someone his old friends and family hardly recognize, then we can, too. We can change the things about ourselves that will haunt us when our old friends remind us of who we used to be. We can become the person God has created us to be. But only when we work at it: when we accept the changes within ourselves, when we accept the changes inside others, and when we can stand up and be genuinely, authentically ourselves, even when others refuse to see or accept it.

Maybe Jesus’ message is not as complicated as they made it. God sent Jesus to be bread—nourishment—for people’s hungry and weary spirits. People can truly grasp the depth of God’s gift when they fully consume everything that Jesus brings. And Jesus—the bread—must give everything of himself for God’s people—his spirit, his mind, and even his flesh and blood. Jesus had to be all in—and so he was. We have to consume Jesus fully—and so we strive.

You can be new and improved. Give everything of yourself for God and God’s people. Find your passion and purpose, and give yourself fully to it. Be all in.

*02-14*

“O taste and see that the Lord is good;

happy are those who take refuge in him.”

— Psalm 34:8

The Bible is full of food imagery. Food is life-giving, after all, and the act of sharing food in community is sacred. A particularly tasty meal is a proclamation that God, the maker of all food plants and animals and spices, is good. And how good a meal tastes can be influenced by situation. Coming through a period of illness, getting long-awaited good news, or being freed of a challenging situation can make everything taste sweeter. The psalmist is celebrating after being delivered from trouble. I can imagine that first meal was the best thing he’d ever tasted, all the more proof that God delivers and sustains.

What’s the best meal I’ve ever eaten? What made it so good?

*02-15*

“Simon Peter answered him, ‘Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life.’”

— John 6:68

One of the jokes we tell in recovery is that it’s the like mafia: we can never leave because we know too much about our disease. It’s not that I stay because I live in fear of what happens if I leave. I stay because I love the life that recovery gives me. But there are moments of frustration, when I just don’t feel like going to another meeting or making another phone call or writing another personal inventory and I think, “Fooey. Why am I bothering with all this effort?” and suddenly I wonder if maybe I should just leave. And then the words of this verse come to me. Because where else could I go? I have no more illusions about what my disease can do to me, and I know that my recovery gives me a life worth living. It’s the same with following Jesus. It’s not easy. It can be frustrating and demanding. But I’m just not going to find what Jesus gives me anywhere else in all of existence. So why would I want to go looking?

Have I ever walked away from Jesus? When and how did I come back?

*02-16*

“Jesus said to them, ‘The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify against it that its works are evil.’”

— John 7:7

The truth is wildly unpopular. Always has been. The people in power throughout history and across cultures hold onto that power at all costs, even if it means hurting the people they are supposed to be protecting and defending. If you stand up and point out this fact, it’s an invitation to violence. Jesus had no illusions about this. He says point blank that the world hates him because he speaks truth to power. And, yes, it got him killed by the state.

Despite this, we are called by God to follow in the way of Jesus—to call out the powers that be for trampling on the powerless. Speaking the truth is not going to make us popular. (I sometimes wonder about wearing my political heart on my sleeve in my devotions...) It might even get us into trouble. But we can’t let fear keep us from standing up for what is right.

When has speaking the truth gotten me into hot water?

*02-17*

“Those who speak on their own seek their own glory; but the one who seeks the glory of him who sent him is true, and there is nothing false in him.”

— John 7:18

Jesus was pointing to God. The people were astonished at his teaching and wondered exactly how he’d become so articulate and learned (apparently they’d known him as a kid). And they wanted to know if he was for real—if he was really speaking the truth of God. Jesus gave them a pretty simple answer: If I’m preaching for my own glory, I’m not from God. If I’m pointing to God with everything I do and say, well, then I’m from God. It ain’t rocket science.

When my more biblically conservative friends challenge me by saying, “You can’t just pick and choose what parts of the Bible are literally true, because how do you know what’s true and what’s not?” I have a similarly simple answer. If it shows love of God and neighbor, if it’s committed to the flourishing of all creation, then it’s of God. If it causes harm to anyone (i.e. by justifying slavery or the oppression of women or the murder of LGBTQ+ folk or the destruction of nature) then, nope, not from God. They still may not agree, and that’s fine. It’s just what works for me.

How can I tell whether something in my life is from God or not?

*02-18*

“Now some of the people of Jerusalem were saying, ‘Is not this the man whom they are trying to kill? And here he is, speaking openly, but they say nothing to him! Can it be that the authorities really know that this is the Messiah?’”

— John 7:25-26

Sounds like Jesus’ is calling the people’s bluff. Honestly, I don’t recall ever having read this passage before, and it kind of made me go, “Oh, snap!” The authorities have made a big stink about Jesus and threatened his life, but here Jesus stands, preaching and teaching in the middle of the festival of booths and no one is doing a darn thing to him. Maybe the authorities are just creating a smoke screen because, deep down, they know he is who he says he is. What would it mean if that was really true? John tells us all about Nicodemus, a Pharisee who believes, and later, of Joseph of Arimathea, same basic story. Were there more in the upper echelons of Jewish society who actually believed Jesus was the messiah but said otherwise to avoid trouble with Rome? Is that why Jesus was allowed to preach as long as he did (three years, in John’s version) before he was killed? Something to wonder about, anyway.

Have I ever hidden the fact that I am a Christian? Why or why not?

*02-19*

“Jesus then said, ‘I will be with you a little while longer, and then I am going to him who sent me. You will search for me, but you will not find me; and where I am, you cannot come.’”

— John 7:33-34

Oddly, the officers don’t actually arrest Jesus. The Pharisees send them, but literally nothing happens. It’s one sentence, and then Jesus is talking about going away. The people are as confused as I am. Where is he going? Greece? What is he talking about? They didn’t know, of course, that he was going to die, be resurrected, and go hang out with God. And as usual, he wasn’t explicit. It would have raised more questions than it answered, never mind the fact that it would probably have gotten him into a whole lot of trouble right then and there, and he still had a lot of work to do before he’d be ready for that to happen. All of which makes me wonder why he said anything at all. Maybe it was a way to take some of the pressure off—make the authorities think he’d be gone soon enough so they could feel safer to leave him alone. Maybe that’s why the officers didn’t actually arrest him. We, in hindsight, know exactly what Jesus meant, yet even so, we have a lot to wonder about, just like the people at the time.

Do I enjoy wrestling with the meaning of Bible passages? What ways are the most fruitful for me?

*02-20*

“Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, ‘Out of the believer’s heart shall flow rivers of living water.’”

— John 7:37b-38

Main Idea: We can be living water…alive and flowing.

In the region in which Jesus preached, there was a sea called The Dead Sea. It was considered dead because nothing could survive in those heavily salted waters. Nearby was the Sea of Galilee, which was thriving and teeming with life. The main difference between the two was that water flowed into and out of the Sea of Galilee freely, while water flowing into the Dead Sea pooled there, with no outflow. In other words, the sea that ceased to move water was dead.

While preaching, Jesus spoke, “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me.” He invited people who desired more for their lives to follow him. Jesus then quoted scripture, “Out of the believer’s heart shall flow rivers of living water.” If “living” water is water that moves, and if living water comes from the believer’s heart, then followers of Jesus rise to the occasion when they move and flow. To be a follower is to act.

Many who heard Jesus didn’t like what he had to say. Leaders were threatened by his words, and also by his actions. Jesus was not one to remain stagnant. Jesus was alive—active, moving, flowing, changing the world.

We are invited to believe, follow, and flow with rivers of living water. We are invited to act, flow, and change the world.

*02-21*

“Sing to the Lord with thanksgiving;

make melody to our God on the lyre.

He covers the heavens with clouds,

prepares rain for the earth,

makes grass grow on the hills.

He gives to the animals their food,

and to the young ravens when they cry.”

— Psalm 147:7-9

I love nature imagery in the Bible. Seldom does it show up without connection to joy. Creation praises God. God’s ongoing creation is met with thanksgiving by the people. The writers of these passages understood on a deep level the interconnectedness of nature, and the complete reliance of humanity on its health. The Israelites were unusual at the time because they didn’t worship nature itself, or gods that were manifestations of nature. But they worshiped the God who created all things and they understood that God had called them to live in harmony with the earth.

It’s so sad that this deep understanding got lost along the way. Humans used—and continues to use—tiny scraps of scripture to justify the mass destruction of God’s creation and live in complete denial of their impact.

How can anyone read this and not see the mother raven nurturing her young and know that God’s fierce love is for everything, not just us?

What is my favorite nature-related passage in the Bible? Why?

*02-22*

“When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, ‘Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.’”

— John 7:7

First of all, this passage has nothing to do with the woman in question. But I don’t want to discard her out of hand, simply because she is a device to try to entrap Jesus. She is a woman. A human being who, by an accident of birth, is consigned to be seen as property as long as she lives. She is oppressed. She is held to unbelievable double standards in the area of sexual activity. And her life has absolutely no value for its own sake. This is injustice to the highest degree, and Jesus knew it. Women still struggle, even in highly educated, wealthy countries that supposedly “know better”, to be given a value equal to men, which they deserve. So I just want to say unequivocally that the charge against her was unjust.

That being said, the scribes and Pharisees didn’t care one way or the other about her other than as a way to put Jesus to the test. They knew he knew the law was unjust. They also knew that if he spoke out against the law, they could get rid of him. So they put him in a position where he either had to condone the cold-blooded murder of a human being or break the law.

Jesus, of course, was way too smart for them. He didn’t say a darn thing. He took a stick and doodled in the dust. Then he just said, “You can stone her, but only if you have no sin of your own.” The shoe was on the other foot now. The scribes and Pharisees had to choose between making a proclamation of their sinlessness, which all would know to be a lie, and slinking off with their tails between their legs which, in fact, they did. And Jesus looks around with feigned surprise and says, quite snarkily, I imagine, “Where did everyone go? Didn’t they condemn you?”

Jesus didn’t condemn that poor woman, just encouraged her to do better. And he didn’t condemn the scribes and Pharisees either, but through cleverly pointing out their hypocrisy, encouraged them to do better, too. And guess what? Jesus doesn’t condemn us for our sin either. But he sure does encourage us to do better.

Are there times I am tempted to condemn others for their behavior without being honest about my own?

*02-23*

“Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, ‘I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.’”

— John 8:12

We have to be careful about equating darkness with bad things. That kind of bias is so deeply ingrained in white majority culture that we automatically associate darker skin with negative personality traits and, conversely, immoral acts with darker skin. This can make many biblical passages deeply problematic, and there is much work to be done in addressing that.

As I read this particular verse (and I’m not offering a simple fix, because I have no idea how one could actually write this succinctly) I am thinking about the idea of darkness not as a literal color or lack of light, but as a complete unawareness of the truth—kind of like white people who don’t believe racism actually exists. In fact, Whiteness (with a capital “W”) is far more unaware of reality than any darkness.

So maybe I could just attempt to rewrite this Bible verse as: “I am the full awareness of truth and reality. Whoever follows me will never walk in ignorance, but will be fully alive to God’s truth.” You know? I kinda like that.

How can I be more intentional about using unbiased language in my faith?

*02-24*

“‘I told you that you would die in your sins, for you will die in your sins unless you believe that I am he.’ They said to him, ‘Who are you?’ Jesus said to them, ‘Why do I speak to you at all?’”

— John 8:24-25

This just made me laugh out loud. Seriously. Can you not hear Jesus’ expansive eye-roll? He’s been going on and on about who he is, his relationship to the Father, and his purpose in the world and they just do. not. get it.

I wonder sometimes just how often Jesus is rolling his eyes at me. I think I’ve got my stuff pretty well together. I’m a reasonably intelligent person. I’m passionate about racial and environmental justice and compassionate towards other people. And then I think or do or say something so mind-numbingly ignorant it’s a wonder I can walk and breathe at the same time.

Luckily, Jesus died for these chuckleheads just as sure as for me. We’re all forgiven when we inevitably blow it. Thank God.

When have I seriously stuck my foot in my mouth or betrayed my ignorance? Have I forgiven myself yet?

*02-25*

“Then Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, ‘If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.’”

— John 8:31-32

Freedom isn’t a simple thing. Contrary to popular belief, true freedom isn’t being able to do whatever you want whenever you want however you want without regard for any other human being or part of creation than yourself. That, quite simply, is selfishness.

True freedom is the ability and desire to choose what is good. That means recognizing the sacred interdependence of all of God’s creation, and desiring its flourishing as God does. It means giving up selfishness for the benefit of others. It means complete and total trust that God—not the world—can and does provide everything needed for a rich, satisfying life for everyone.

As long as we are slaves to our selfishness, we cannot possibly choose what is good, nor even want to. Jesus can free us from our selfishness through the truth. And the truth is that the entirely of creation was redeemed because Jesus rejected selfishness for our sake. And if Jesus’ truth has made us free, we shall be free indeed.

How do I define freedom?

*02-26*

“Jesus said to them, ‘Very truly, I tell you, before Abraham was, I am.’ So they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple.”

— John 8:58-59

Them’s fightin’ words. After all, the Jews’ entire identity existed in being descendants of Abraham. For Jesus to say he was around before Abraham was, well, claiming to be God. Which…you know…he was. So I guess it’s not surprising that people grabbed the nearest rocks (did they keep them stockpiled in the temple somewhere?) and chucked them at Jesus.

I think it’s a little like the way some people react when you criticize the United States. Their whole identity is so wrapped up in an idealized view of this country that pointing out its flaws—you know, like 400 years of chattel slavery followed by Jim Crow followed by the school-to-prison-pipeline—is paramount to blasphemy.

News flash. Jesus was making the point that national identity is irrelevant where God is concerned. What matters is our relationship to God, and our willingness to live in love and service to God and our neighbor. Sometimes that means taking a hard look at the evils of human society which seem inevitable in the concept of “nation,” and being willing to ask God’s forgiveness, and the forgiveness of those we’ve harmed.

Do I hold my memberships in certain groups more sacred than my relationship to God?

*02-27*

“Jesus answered, ‘Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him.’”

— John 9:3

Main Idea: We can be brought to sight when we are willing to consider that we might be wrong.

It is no accident that this healing story is about blindness. The events following the man’s healing exposed the blindness of the Pharisees to see the truth of God and the truth about Jesus. The blind man was brought to sight; the seeing Pharisees were left blind.

The whole episode caused quite a confusion among the Pharisees. Jesus exposed holes in their thinking that they could not reconcile. They believed people with disabilities were disabled because of sin—either their own or their parents’. It was unthinkable that a man born in sin could be healed, and that he could attempt to teach them anything about God. They also believed it was unlawful to do anything on the Sabbath, and that no one could heal apart from God. Yet here was Jesus healing—and on the Sabbath! None of those things seemed to be able to work together. The Pharisees’ blindness remained because they were unable or unwilling to consider that what they believed might be wrong.

I have often seen bumper stickers that say, “Don’t believe everything you think.” How often do we remain blind to truth because we are unwilling or unable to consider that we might be wrong? Are we so certain we know all there is to know about Jesus? Are we sure we’ve got it all right? There is a gift to accepting that we might be wrong. There is freedom in letting go of what we think we know to explore and learn things that we don’t yet know. It is difficult to behold, but in acknowledging what we don’t know, the scales of our blindness start to fall, and we can begin to see the magnificence of what Jesus wants to show us.

*02-28*

“The Lord is my light and my salvation;

whom shall I fear?

The Lord is the stronghold of my life;

of whom shall I be afraid?”

— Psalm 27:1

There are a lot of valid things to be afraid of. I could list a dozen off the top of my head. But I won’t. Because that’s not the point of this devotion. The point is that we have a choice. We can choose to be afraid of all kinds of things over which we have absolutely no control, or we can choose to trust God. Mind you, just because we choose trust doesn’t mean the worst won’t happen. What it does mean is that we believe at the core that no matter what happens, God will be there, and it will ultimately, in God’s time, be “okay.”

That kind of trust gives us the freedom to actually live, rather than scrambling to amass wealth and status and possessions that only give us the illusion of security. God is our light and our salvation, the stronghold of our lives. Go and live!

What is keeping me from letting go and fully trusting God?