**July 2023 Devotions**

*07-01*

“All these things my hand has made, and so all these things are mine, says the Lord. But this is the one to whom I will look, to the humble and contrite in spirit, who trembles at my word.”

— Isaiah 66:2

Humility gets a bad rap. We often confuse it with “humiliation”. It flies in the face of our culture of rugged individualism and pride of self, and we see it as weakness of character. Even when we have deep respect for those who exhibit it, we secretly fear that if we lived as they do, we would never get what we really wanted out of life.

And yet God calls us to humility, not because God wants us to grovel at God’s feet, but because it is only through the practice of humility that we can truly recognize how God shows up in our lives. It is only when we get out of our own way, and God’s, that we fully experience the abundance of God’s grace and the true joy of living.

In what ways to I practice humility in my life?

*07-02*

“Thus he has given us, through these things, his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of lust, and may become participants of the divine nature.”

— 2 Peter 1:4

Main Idea: As people of faith, our prosperity is all about our posture—if we keep Jesus at the center of everything we do, we won’t be able to help but be changed for the better.

Epistles—the collection of letters in our New Testament scripture—can read like instruction manuals when we break them up for the sake of curating lectionary readings. Because they were sent to multiple communities in the Ancient Near East for the purpose of providing centralized teachings in a brand-new religious culture, the focus of many of the Epistles is behavioral. These letters lay out, in terms both broad and specific, how to live a good and faithful life.

2 Peter is no different. What we can sometimes forget, though, and what might be best to bring to the forefront of a reflection today, is the fact that Epistles always dig deeper than the surface level. Sure, they focus on tangible, everyday practices, but they always tie behavior back to its source in their calls to action. And that source is Jesus.

According to the author of 2 Peter, the one and only prerequisite for “never stumbling” in a life of faith is to remain eager. For him, living a life of faith isn’t so much about what you do. It’s about how and why you do it, namely, with genuine excitement and because you know Christ. The author of 2 Peter figures that if Jesus is at the center of your meditations and your motivations, then your actions will naturally reflect Jesus. If you have truly internalized the good news of Jesus—the fact that you are loved without end and that there is nothing that can strip God’s grace away from you or separate you from God—then you can’t possibly be the same person as you were before you knew Jesus. Once you start building and deepening your relationship with God, you will be empowered beyond your normal limits to be excellent. Knowledgeable. Controlled. Focused on endurance. Godly. Affectionate. Loving.

“Never stumbling” doesn’t mean getting everything right all the time. It means being truly engaged and genuinely eager to center Jesus in your day-to-day life. Look at our secondary text from the Gospel of Matthew. The subject of each of those parables made sweeping decisions with abandon, not because they were impulsive or impatient or ignorant or stupid, but because they had great faith in the transformative power of the wealth they had been gifted. They were engaged. They were eager.

*07-03*

“May grace and peace be yours in abundance in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.”

— 2 Peter 1:2

There’s a lot packed into this little greeting. And not just because it’s a long sentence. The writer is extending both grace and peace to the reader. Grace—that outpouring of God’s generosity of spirit that forgives us all our shortcomings before we can even ask, that reminds us who we are and whose we are and promises salvation now and forever in spite of ourselves. Peace—the rest at depth that comes with the acceptance of God’s grace as unearned gift, the utter surrendered trust that God is God and we don’t have to be God and try to run the universe. And not just grace and peace, but grace and peace in abundance—more and better than we could ever imagine for ourselves. And where does this incredible outpouring of God’s presence stem from? The knowledge of God and of Jesus, who is God with us. This isn’t saying that we have to know and understand God in order to receive these gifts. It is, instead, an invitation—a loving call to dig deeper, to reach further, to learn and grow in relationship with our God through scripture and community and the daily practices of our faith.

This greeting is for you, today.

How do I experience grace and peace in my life today?

*07-04*

“His divine power has given us everything needed for life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.”

— 2 Peter 1:3

Jesus is both God with us and our perfect example. The debate as to the nature of who Jesus was and is sometimes holds these two ideas in opposition. Either Jesus is God or Jesus is just the perfect human example of how to live in relationship with God. As usual, God’s truth is filled with both/and, rather that either/or juxtapositions, and this little verse from 2 Peter, points it out. Jesus’ divine power—Jesus who is God—gives us everything we need in order to live our lives according to God’s call to the best of our ability. And Jesus showed us how to do this by his example of following God’s call in his human life. Jesus was not some puritanical paragon of perfection—he was a human being who spoke truth to power, stood up to oppression, and made lots and lots and lots of people angry in his relentless pursuit of God’s justice. This is the “goodness” of Jesus, whether or not it is what the writer of 2 Peter intended. And it is this example we are supposed to follow, which gives us “everything needed for life and godliness.”

How is Jesus both a source of strength and an example of call for me?

*07-05*

“For if these things are yours and are increasing among you, they keep you from being ineffective and unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

— 2 Peter 1:8

Effective and fruitful. These are what we get to be when we practice “these things” the writer of 2 Peter delineated in verses 5-7: faith, goodness, knowledge, self-control, endurance, godliness, mutual affection, and love. Whew. That’s a laundry list. Luckily we’re not expected to just be there. We’re only asked to “make every effort.” They are “increasing” among us, which means we aren’t there yet. And probably we’ll never get there in our lifetimes. But the gifts of effectiveness and fruitfulness are still ours for the trying as long as we keep inviting Jesus to guide us along our way.

Where do I feel effective and fruitful in my life?

*07-06*

“And I will make every effort so that after my departure you may be able at any time to recall these things.”

— 2 Peter 1:15

I am so grateful for all those who have made such an effort as this. Just think about the wealth of personal experiences and written accounts of people throughout history who have lived lives of faith. In seminary I read the works of Martin Luther and Martin Luther King Jr., Dietrich Bonhoeffer, J. Deotis Roberts, and Elizabeth Johnson. Beyond theologians, I have been deeply influenced by the faith stories of the people in my own family, including my great uncle, Pr. Robert Koenig, who published the book Except the Corn Die, a historical novel of the original German settlers who founded the Missouri Synod (from whom I am only a handful generations descended.) Of course, there are plenty of inspiring stories that go unrecorded, deep spiritual experiences that go unwritten, people whose faith is not remembered. These are no less beautiful and important in our collective life of faith than those who we still read today, which means that your story and my story of faith are precious and beautiful just as they are, because God knows and remembers. That being said, maybe we can take this as encouragement to take a moment to record our own understanding of faith in order to pass it on to those who might learn from it ‘after our departure.’

What faith stories do I find most inspiring? Have I ever considered writing my own?

*07-07*

“For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we had been eyewitnesses of his majesty.”

— 2 Peter 1:16

I wasn’t there when Jesus died and was resurrected. I imagine you weren’t either. Nor did we have the benefit of hearing in person from the still-living witnesses of these events as the recipients of this letter did. We weren’t in the upper room when Jesus showed them his hands and side and said that we were blessed if we believed even without having seen for ourselves.

And yet I, for one, have seen and experienced the presence and power of God directly in my life in myriad ways great and small. I may not have had Jesus standing in front of me in the flesh, but I’ve met him on more occasions than I can name, sometimes in dreams, sometimes in moments of clarity so intense it took my breath away, sometimes in what seemed at the time a simple interaction with another human being which only later registered as a direct encounter with the living Christ. I know I’m not the only one, because others have witnessed to me—they were not following “cleverly devised myths” but relating actual events which made clear the presence of God in the here an now.

This is our call, too—to bear witness to others about all that we have heard and seen and experienced, so that those who may not realize they, too, have had these encounters might recognize them for what they are.

How have I been an eyewitness to the majesty of God?

*07-08*

“First of all you must understand this, that no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation, because no prophecy ever came by human will, but men and women moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.”

— 2 Peter 1:20-21

Ooh. Careful there. I realize the writer of 2 Peter is teeing up to call out false prophets in the next passage, but I can’t let this go without taking issue with his condemnation of interpretation. Absolutely every single piece of scripture can and must be interpreted in light of cultural context, present happenings, and a host of other variables. This is what makes scripture dynamic and alive, relevant to us in the here and now, and draws us into the narrative. The words of the prophets in the Bible would be incomprehensible taken at face value and forced to fit into our modern context.

Still, that is exactly what so many people try to do and that, I believe, is where the true danger of false prophecy comes in. Not in simply making up terrible things to say and attributing them to God (though there’s an awful lot of that going around) but in taking what’s written and twisting it—interpreting it, dare I say—in a way that condemns anyone who deviates from the sociocultural norms of a society that no longer exists, and which have led and continue to lead to oppression on a global scale. It is trying to force us to adhere to the letter of the (culturally irrelevant) law, rather than to the spirit of the law, which is the gospel of liberation, justice, and equity for all people whether or not you think they’re worthy.

Let me leave you with this (perhaps irreverent) thought. If we are the salt of the earth, let us be the “grain of salt” with which ancient law and prophecy need to be taken in light of God’s vital and active presence in the here and now.

How do I understand the role of interpretation in reading Biblical prophecy?

*07-09*

“But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive opinions.”

— 2 Peter 2:1a

Main Idea: Knowing Jesus means knowing how to interpret warning signs along our faith journeys.

Anyone who has driven through mountainous terrain knows that there are a few important signs to pay attention to along the way: speed reduction signs before sharp turns, “Caution: Falling Rocks” signs along jagged cliff faces, and the unnerving couple of lines underneath a semi truck indicating a sandy, uphill ramp that drivers can use to put a stop to out-of-control momentum. None of these signs is meant to suggest that every driver should move like molasses for every mile, terrified and looking to the sky for rogue boulders the entire time they’re behind the wheel. These signs are simply in place to warn people about the most extreme risks—the worst-case scenarios—that are possible in their circumstance. Really, then, these signs are meant to encourage the safest, most informed and most enjoyable journey possible. A journey that’s worthwhile.

Both of our texts this morning work in a similar way. The author of 2 Peter is speaking to other early Christians, and Jesus to his disciples. Both are giving warnings about the danger and the inevitability of false prophets, not to distract Jesus’s followers or instill any unnecessary anxiety in them, but to make sure that they have safe, informed and enjoyable experiences evangelizing. Jesus names the fact that not everything they will endure is low-stakes. Not everything they will go through will be easy or fun or comfortable. But if they know the realities they are collectively facing, Jesus’s followers will be able to figure out how to navigate those realities well and internalize just how worthwhile a life of faith is.

There are three imperatives between these two texts: “be attentive,” “beware” and “do not be alarmed.” That means that we modern readers aren’t supposed to get hung up on bad doctrine. We aren’t supposed to spend too much of our time or our energy on false prophets—who they are or where they come from or what they say. Rather, we’re supposed to recognize that false prophets exist, reorient ourselves toward God’s Word despite them, and keep going in our pursuit of God’s call to kingdom building. After all, God’s truth is so unique and so powerful that nothing can touch it or bend it or corrupt it. Not misinterpretation; not misappropriation; not manipulation; not even bastardization.

In our faith journeys, we might encounter some rough conditions. But because we know Jesus, we also know how to interpret risks and surprises. We know that signs aren’t meant to scare us, but rather, to keep us focused on what matters most.

*07-10*

“Even so, many will follow their licentious ways, and because of these teachers the way of truth will be maligned.”

— 2 Peter 2:2

Even so. Plenty of people are out there making outrageous claims about what God’s will is for our country (well, my country, the U.S.), twisting and stretching the words of God’s prophets and the biblical writers in order to justify an agenda of privilege for a small set of people who are of a similar mind. Plenty of them don’t even believe a word they are saying—they are simply telling people what they want to hear in order to gain and/or hang on to political and economic power. They behave in ways that are obviously, even incredibly counter to the religious mores they are supposed to be holding up as unassailable. “Even so” many follow their ways, somehow willing to set aside these egregious acts of “licentiousness” (among other things), and because of this the truth is maligned.

Of course, nothing is ever that simple, and I am too often tempted to judgment (clearly) to stop myself from saying things like “these people” and “those people”, which makes any kind of productive discourse impossible. I need to be attentive to the log in my own eye. Yet, that being said, it is important for all people of faith to be attentive to how God’s word is being wielded in the world—is it a means of achieving justice for all of God’s beloved children and creation itself, or is it being coopted as a means of shoring up human power? Let any who have ears listen

Have I been tempted to justify my own bad behavior with spiritual or scriptural ideas or passages?

*07-11*

“The Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trial, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment.”

— 2 Peter 2:9

This passage is grim. If you read the whole thing, it talks about God consigning angels to “hell” and “chains of deepest darkness” until the day of judgment, about God wiping the “ungodly” off the face of the earth in the flood, and utterly destroying Sodom and Gomorrah. Of course, God spared Noah and Lot, and therefore “the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trial.”

This is, frankly, terrifying, if you have to somehow prove your “godliness” in order to be spared. Because here’s the thing. I don’t know about you, but I fall short on the daily. I’m like Paul, who does the thing I don’t want to do and fails to do the thing I want to do. Anyone else relate?

The good news is that whatever the writer of 2 Peter says, God has made us all godly—holy, sanctified, forgiven, saved, fill-in-your-favorite-word-here. We don’t have to do or be anything to know that we are not subject to any sort of divine trial that could wind up sending us to hell (with or without a handbasket).

Do I ever find myself worried that I’m not good enough for God’s love?

*07-12*

“These people, however, are like irrational animals, mere creatures of instinct, born to be caught and killed. They slander what they do not understand, and when those creatures are destroyed, they also will be destroyed, suffering the penalty for doing wrong.”

— 2 Peter 2:12-13a

Yikes! More grim words from 2 Peter. Culturally-embedded questionable attitudes toward animals aside, I get the feeling that nothing is more evil in the writer’s eyes than being a false prophet. And while I don’t hold to the harsh punishment language, I think I might agree with the general sentiment.

The fact is that God speaks to us and through us and when we share God’s words we are, all of us, prophets to one another. So if we deliberately twist God’s words in order to build ourselves up at the expense of others, if we wield God’s words as weapons of oppression rather than tools of liberation, then we are false prophets, and, well I can’t imagine God would be pleased, to put it mildly.

But rather than go looking for all those out there who seem to be so clearly engaged in this kind of false prophecy, we’d do best to start looking in our own back yard. Are there times and places where we are tempted to use God’s words to release us from accountability to our neighbors rather than hold us to it? Do we ever go looking for passages in scripture to justify some action or failure to act that might harm someone else? Not that we ought to beat ourselves up in the way that the writer describes the punishment for false prophets in 2 Peter. But we ought to be completely honest with ourselves about our motives any time we share with another person what we think God might be saying to and through us.

How do I make sure I am speaking from a place of honesty when I share my understanding of God’s words?

*07-13*

“They have eyes full of adultery, insatiable for sin. They entice unsteady souls. They have hearts trained in greed. Accursed children!”

— 2 Peter 2:14

How steady is your soul? The writer of 2 Peter put pen to paper long before there was anything so insidious and pervasive as social media, mass marketing, and the constant bombardment of information we experience today. Most of these outlets have “hearts trained in greed”, looking to amass wealth for the few at the expense of the many. Most of these outlets take no responsibility for the misinformation and hate their platforms enable.

It's on us to decide how much of this information we will consume, how much effort we’ll put into fact-checking sources to affirm the truth of any claims made to us. It’s on us to make sure our souls are steady, so that we are not enticed to go down the rabbit hole, following the voices that tell us what we want to hear rather than being open to differences of experience and willing to take action to address the wrongs in which we might find ourselves complicit.

In other words, false prophets are bad, but they only continue to operate so long as we follow them. It’s on us to discern the true from the false prophets, and act accordingly.

How do I determine what is true and what is false in my media consumption?

*07-14*

“They promise them freedom, but they themselves are slaves of corruption; for people are slaves to whatever masters them.”

— 2 Peter 2:19

This is the essence of addiction. The addictive substance, whether alcohol, hard drugs, food, sex, or money, promises us freedom. Freedom from the discomfort of life, something we addicts never learned to deal with constructively for one reason or another. Because life is uncomfortable a lot of the time. It just is. And I have this belief in me that it shouldn’t be. So when I can’t just will things to go the way I want them to go, and I wind up uncomfortable about it, I just want the pain to go away now. The solution? Well, for me, it was food, but as I said above, you can pretty much insert any substance or behavior you want and the formula still works. So long as I believed food was my solution, I was a slave to food. I would always put it first, to the detriment of everyone and everything around me.

Maybe it’s a stretch, but I suppose one could say that any addictive substance is a false prophet. It promises ease and comfort, tells us what we want to hear, absolves us of our responsibility for our actions, and ultimately kills us, sometimes quickly, sometimes slowly. The question remains whether we will follow such false prophets or take whatever action is required to free ourselves from their influence. For me that was recovery.

What substances in my life act as a false prophet, promising ease and comfort? How do I counter their message?

*07-15*

“For it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than, after knowing it, to turn back from the holy commandment that was passed on to them.”

— 2 Peter 2:21

The plot thickens. What makes these false prophets even more condemnable is the fact that at one point they knew the truth, and were even on the right path, but at some point made a conscious decision to turn away from it and pursue their own agenda. In other words, spewing negativity about God from a place of ignorance of who God is and who we are in relationship to God is forgivable. Knowing the truth and deliberately twisting it for your own ends is not. (Well, okay, everything is forgivable—that’s what God does. That’s who God is. But you get what I’m saying.)

Of course I can’t pretend to know everything about God and what God wants. But I know enough to be aware of when I am tempted to turn away from what I know to be true simply because it doesn’t suit my ambitions in the moment. I might sometimes still act out of genuine ignorance, and that’s okay, as long as I can own it when it’s called out. But I have to be honest about when I might be deliberately forgetting to avoid discomfort or accountability.

Have I said or done something I regretted out of genuine ignorance? Have I deliberately ‘forgotten’ what I know in order to justify a wrong action? In either case, how did I rectify the situation?

*07-16*

“But do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day.”

— 2 Peter 3:8

Main Idea: God calls us not to be prepared, but to be ready.

St. Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Society of Jesus, is famous for having crafted a faith tagline of sorts: ad majorem dei gloriam. AMDG. Translated into English, it reads, “For the greater glory of God.” This is the posture that he and the rest of the Jesuit order assumed. This is the spirit in which the Society of Jesus wanted to live; the spirit in which they felt compelled to build community. To this day, AMDG remains a core tenant of Jesuit teaching and life. Everything the Jesuits do, they do for the greater glory of God. Everything.

And that is because the Jesuits believe that God is in everything. Physically. Metaphysically. Everything. All the time and everywhere. God is inescapable; God is unavoidable. God is not some distant, judgmental onlooker, checking in on us periodically to see if we’ve figured things out. No—God is supercharging every fiber of our world in real time, coming to life alongside us every day, bestowing grace on us again and again and again. So, anything we do will necessarily involve God. As far as the Jesuits are concerned, we had better be sure that we glorify God instead of any of the alternatives—not because we should, but because there’s no reason why we shouldn’t. We had better be sure that we glorify God, not because we fear the ramifications of failing to glorify God, but because we mourn the loss or the squandering of any opportunity to shout from the rooftops how amazing and how truly awesome God is.

What a beautiful parallel to the way that we understand God’s grace. According to the author of 2 Peter and the author of the Gospel of Matthew, anticipating Jesus’s coming should be an AMDG venture. The way they’re laying it out, readiness means living in a constant state of recognition that God is, indeed, in all things—that our status quo is already miraculous. That God has loved on us not because we deserve it, but because that’s what God is all about. We know from our biblical witness and from the words of Jesus, himself, that it is impossible for us to imagine what Jesus’s return to our world will look like. It is impossible for us to prepare for the second coming. But we can always be ready for it by basking in—and helping to grow—God’s grace in our everyday lives.

A Jesuit prayer: Suscipe, or “The Radical Prayer:”

Take, Lord, receive—all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, my whole will, all that I have and all that I possess. You gave it all to me, Lord; I give it all back to you. Do with it as you will, according to your good pleasure. Give me your love and your grace; for with this I have all that I need.

*07-17*

“This is now, beloved, the second letter I am writing to you; in them I am trying to arouse your sincere intention by reminding you that you should remember the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets, and the commandment of the Lord and Savior spoken through your apostles.”

— 2 Peter 3:1-2

One letter is not enough. We need to be constantly reminded who we are and whose we are. As human beings our attention span and memory are as ephemeral as our time on this planet, and it can be so easy to fall back into our old ways of being in the world, of coping through our own force of will or, failing that, through escapism in one form or another. We can experience God in our lives in intense, vital, visceral ways one moment, and the next find ourselves wondering if there even is a God.

This is why we can never read the Bible as a static, past-tense piece of literature. Like this letter of 2 Peter, all of scripture is alive. It’s dynamic. God calls us into it again and again, invites us to struggle with it not alone, but in community, so that God might speak to us through one another, and remind us to “remember the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets, and the commandment of the Lord and Savior spoken through your apostles.”

And what a wonderful invitation! It’s not just about holding the line against sin and backsliding. It’s about blowing the line right out of the water and fully experiencing communion with God in our exploration of God’s word. How awesome is that?

What things in scripture remind me of God’s real and vital presence working in my life?

*07-18*

“First of all you must understand this, that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and indulging their own lusts and saying, ‘Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since our ancestors died, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation!’”

— 2 Peter 3:3-4

Sometimes I’m a scoffer. I hate to admit it, but there it is. Despite all my experiences of the inbreaking of God’s reign into the world here and now, I am so quick to discard those experiences as somehow all in my mind when I am confronted with all the ways God doesn’t seem to be showing up at all. It’s easy as a woman of incredible privilege to chalk up all the good things that happen to me to God’s presence. But when I recognize how those without privilege experience oppression and trauma (in which I am complicit) I go right to the place where I think they have been utterly abandoned by God. I am the one saying, “Where is the promise of his coming?” Everything seems to continue as they always have, with those in power doing whatever they have to in order to maintain that power.

Those are moments that call for humility and prayer, moments when I have to remember that I am not God, and that God’s got this. I can be open to the ways in which God is calling me to set aside my scoffing in favor of decisive action to prove myself wrong—to show up just as God is showing up. It’s easy to stand on the sidelines and scoff. When you’re up to your eyeballs in it, doubt tends to slip away.

Do I find myself scoffing at God’s promises? What action can I take to change my attitude?

*07-19*

“The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance.”

— 2 Peter 3:9

God will wait for us. And it’s a good thing, too. I don’t know about you, but I, for one, can be pretty slow on the uptake when it comes to recognizing God’s call in my life on a day to day basis. I think I have it all together, that I have a pretty good idea of my purpose and what makes life worthwhile, and then something happens to remind me just how little control I have over anything. In those moments I find myself angry at God or questioning whether God even exists. If I had to arrive at some kind of complete peace and surrender in order to be ready for “the Lord’s coming,” whatever and whenever, exactly, that is, I’d be sunk.

God is not slow about fulfilling God’s promise to us. God is fulfilling it day by day in the here and now. Sometimes it’s just hard to see. But God is patient with us—loving and gentle and kind even in the midst of our doubt and frustration. We can rest assured that we are enough, that we are ready as we are in spite of ourselves for the ultimate fulfilment of God’s promise.

What spiritual practices help me to trust God’s timing in my life?

*07-20*

“But, in accordance with his promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home.”

— 2 Peter 3:13

A new heaven and a new earth. When I try to imagine what this might be like, I keep coming back to C.S. Lewis’ The Last Battle when at the end, as the heroes fly through the new Narnia the cry keeps going up “Higher up and farther in!” and there are new worlds upon new worlds in which all is as it was meant to be at its creation. It’s an exhilarating image, honestly, and one that gives me so much hope for this planet upon which we have visited so much irreparable harm—species extinctions, habitat destruction, climate change, pervasive pollution, and on and on. Not to mention the harm humans visit on one another—war, greed, oppression, you name it. All of this will pass away. All of this will be peeled back to the beginning of time when everything was exactly as God intended, and we will enjoy the unadulterated beauty of creation for all eternity. I, for one, can’t wait. But, of course, that’s all any of us can do.

How do I envision the redemption of creation?

*07-21*

“So also our beloved brother Paul wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, speaking of this as he does in all his letters. There are some things in them hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other scriptures.”

— 2 Peter 3:15b-16

I love that the writer of 2 Peter namechecks Paul here. Not only namechecks him, but calls him out for his dense and sometimes incomprehensible theological discourse. Honestly, I laughed when I read this. But what I love most about it is that it humanizes everyone involved. These were not angels or pure, saintly dispensers of wisdom. These were men putting pen to paper and sharing the good news of God’s promise with the early believers and, centuries later, with us.

I also love the clear warning in this text: Paul’s writings are hard to understand and therefore can be easily twisted, as they have been in the years since. What springs to mind first for me is the way his writing has been used to justify the oppression of women to the exclusion of them from being pastors and teachers in the church—when he himself counted women among the apostles and gave them leadership roles. Stripped of their original contexts, his words have given rise the oppression of women, the justification of slavery, hatred toward the LGBTQ+ community, and more.

It can be so hard to hold in tension the damage done by Paul on the one hand, and the liberating understanding of grace he describes, which underlies my whole understanding of God. Today I choose to see that damage as wrought by those who would twist his words to justify hatred, and maybe just let Paul off the hook a little for it.

What are my feelings about the writings of Paul which have led to oppression and hatred? How do I square those with the message of grace?

*07-22*

“But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”

— 2 Peter 18a

We can always grow. Not in the sick, insidious, cancerous way we are indoctrinated by capitalism to see as the only worthwhile course. That paradigm would have us constantly berating ourselves for any lack of progress and/or trying to force spiritual growth through self-will, which in my experience doesn’t work.

So what does growing in the grace and knowledge of Jesus mean for us? It means having the humility to be teachable. It means recognizing that we cannot possibly ever reach a point where we know everything about God and seeing that not as a reason to give up, but as an invitation to dig deeper. It means reading, discussing, praying, meditating, and above all having grace for ourselves when we forget to do all of these things, when our growth stalls, when our faith feels stagnant. Jesus waits patiently for us to re-engage, always extending the invitation into relationship with him.

How do I grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus on a daily basis?

*07-23*

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight.”

— Proverbs 3:5

I feel like I’m a pretty insightful person. I spent years relying on my own insight to try to figure out the meaning of life and how to get whatever it was that I was certain would make me perpetually happy. For a while it seemed to work. But then it didn’t, and my life became so unmanageable I was passively suicidal.

I had to completely change the way I understood God and God’s presence and action in my life—as in, God actually was both present and taking action in my life, which beforehand I didn’t really believe. I had to learn to trust in God with all my heart and not rely on my own insight. The fact of the matter is that no matter how intelligent and insightful I might be, I am a human being and therefore incapable of seeing the big picture—God’s picture—for my life. When I allow myself to trust God, I have such peace and gratitude. That doesn’t mean my life is easy. It just means that I know God is right there with me, and together we can get through anything.

How do I put my trust in God rather than my own insight?

*07-24*

“How long, O simple ones, will you love being simple?

How long will scoffers delight in their scoffing

and fools hate knowledge?”

— Proverbs 1:22

How long will fools hate knowledge? Wow is this a loaded question in our current political climate. The temptation is to go on a rant about “those people” and miss the log in my own eye.

How long will I fail to recognize that I don’t already have all the answers? How long will I delight in my scoffing instead of being teachable? How long will I insist that my own “simple” interpretation of how the world ought to work is the correct one and that if only everyone thought as I did, we’d be living in paradise?

Wisdom calls me into her presence and challenges me to be open to the truth of what I don’t know. She invites me into a lifelong relationship with her and promises to lead me in the right paths if I’m willing to follow. God, grant me the humility to be teachable today.

In what ways do I relate to the simple ones, scoffers, and fools of this passage?

*07-25*

“If you indeed cry out for insight,

and raise your voice for understanding;

if you seek it like silver,

and search for it as for hidden treasures—

then you will understand the fear of the Lord

and find the knowledge of God.”

— Proverbs 2:3-5

Who wouldn’t like to find hidden treasure? Of course, when I think of that concept, it’s the financial variety of treasure I always want to find—jewels, gold, priceless artifacts, items that would give me worldly wealth and security. I can’t help but think about the movie The Goonies and how one little pouch full of gems solved the problems of an entire neighborhood. This is fantasy, of course, but a fun one to contemplate.

Proverbs paints a different picture of what is truly valuable: the wisdom to grow in our relationship with God. Wisdom invites us to seek her out, to go on a spiritual treasure hunt that will yield satisfactions far greater than any pouch of gems. It’s a treasure hunt that can be as fun and exciting as the one depicted in The Goonies, and the rewards far more astonishing than all of One-Eyed Willie’s pirate riches.

Do I find my spiritual journey exciting and rewarding?

*07-26*

“Happy are those who find wisdom,

and those who get understanding,

for her income is better than silver,

and her revenue better than gold.”

— Proverbs 3:13-14

We are a society obsessed with ‘income’ and ‘revenue’ and ‘wealth.’ The fact is that we all need to be able to support ourselves, so we have to be somewhat concerned about our income and expenses. There are so many who struggle—or fail utterly—to cover basic needs, and I cannot discount that reality and just proclaim, “Oh, wisdom is way more important than all of that.” Let me be frank: you can’t eat wisdom.

This passage from Proverbs isn’t saying that wisdom is a substitute for basic needs. Instead, it is calling out all of us whose primary focus is the pursuit of financial wealth—that is, having way more than we need—and schooling us in what really constitutes wealth in God’s eyes. That is, wisdom and understanding, which is also humility and teachability, the deep desire to be in relationship with God, to know more, dig deeper, and be transformed. To have life and have it abundantly in ways we could not begin to imagine. How amazing is that?

What are my thoughts about ‘wealth’?

*07-27*

“Get wisdom; get insight: do not forget, nor turn away

from the words of my mouth.”

— Proverbs 4:5

I don’t think my parents ever really gave me advice. Not in the direct way the writer of Proverbs is doing. Sure, they helped me out with whatever issues I might have been having at any given time. And they gave me guidance. But as far as this idea of getting wisdom and insight, they never directly said, “This is what you should do.” Instead, they showed me (and continue to show me) by their example. They live this idea of getting wisdom and insight, of walking closely with God, of living out their faith in action on a daily basis. I have always been inspired by them, and have learned from watching them just how important wisdom and insight—as gifts from God—really are. And truth be told, how many children are open to listening to verbal advice? How much more powerful to see it in action, and be inspired to follow in their footsteps?

Who in my life has inspired me to seek after wisdom, insight, and God?

*07-28*

“Keep hold of instruction; do not let go;

guard her, for she is your life.”

— Proverbs 4:13

I am a lifelong learner. I maintain that if I had inexhaustible resources, I would just be in college for the rest of my life. Since I don’t have said resources, I engage in deep conversations, read and write, and listen to what is going on around me. I love this image of instruction—“for she is your life.” If I don’t continue to learn, to be teachable, I stagnate and, at least intellectually and spiritually, die. Seeking after wisdom is not just about having the right answers or knowing more or better than anyone else. It’s about growing closer to God one day at a time.

How do I continue to learn and grow in my faith each day?

*07-29*

“Say to wisdom, ‘You are my sister,’

and call insight your intimate friend,

that they may keep you from the loose woman,

from the adulteress with her smooth words.”

— Proverbs 7:4-5

Can I just say how much I abhor the phrase ‘loose woman’? It just stinks of patriarchy and double standards and the repression of women’s sexuality. I’m not saying women can’t be adulterers or lead people astray any more or less than men can. But the juxtaposition of the perfect chaste, sisterly, friend, “Woman Wisdom” against this idea of the harlot who will lead you (men) astray from wisdom and understanding and God just doesn’t sit well with me.

That being said, as a woman, I cherish my female friendships and I love this idea of hanging out with Wisdom, learning from her, being inspired and sometimes (lovingly) pushed out of my comfort zone in order to go deeper and learn more. And to be fair, I am equally inspired by my male friends, and would love to hang out with “Man Wisdom” just as much! May you be inspired by Wisdom however she—or he—shows up in your life today!

Who inspires me most in my life?

*07-30*

“The Lord created me at the beginning of his work,

the first of his acts of long ago.”

— Proverbs 8:22

Wisdom was there at the beginning. Before any physical creation out of matter, God brought into being this incredible gift with which to frame everything that is. Wisdom fills creation, shows up in every single aspect of it. I was a biology major and over and over and over again I was left stunned by the way the natural world reflects this wisdom—a logic, a beauty so exquisite it boggles the mind. As creations in God’s image, this gift of Wisdom is in our makeup, too. And while we don’t always act wisely or seek after wisdom—in fact, it feels like a lot of the time we don’t—we are always invited back to connect with the gift of Wisdom that is in innermost core of our being. How do we reconnect? Well, I, for one, get out into nature and witness the presence of Wisdom in everything around me. But there are as many ways to dig into that connection as there are individual people, and however you seek to connect, Wisdom will be there waiting for you.

How do I connect to God’s presence in my life and the world around me?

*07-31*

“Come, eat of my bread

and drink of the wine I have mixed.

Lay aside immaturity, and live,

and walk in the way of insight.”

— Proverbs 9:5-6

Lay aside immaturity. That’s an interesting concept, considering that if one is truly immature, they probably aren’t capable of even recognizing it. This passage seems to indicate that on some level, immaturity is a choice, and maybe there’s some truth to that. I know that for all my efforts to grow emotional and spiritually every day, there are times I just want to dig in my heels and be mad at God for not making my life easy or act as though I’m the center of the universe and I can do whatever I want. Immaturity, to be sure! And yet I think it’s just a normal part of the ebb and flow of being human. So Wisdom invites us to step back and recognize those times and places when we are behaving in an immature fashion, so that we can bring ourselves back into reality. As difficult as that reality might be in the moment, when we lay aside our immaturity, Wisdom promises us that we will “live.” The kind of living that happens when we are in reality and seeking after wisdom despite challenges is far more satisfying than when we are making childish demands of perfection.

How do I recognize my own immaturity? How do I lay it aside?