

Some thoughts to start...

Engaging in the practice of faith is not always easy. For some people, sitting down and having an open, in-depth chat with God is not difficult. For many of us, however, it is.

What we're trying to do here is to give people a resource – to help them in their thinking about scripture, and in the practice of personal prayer.

Everything written here is simply a *suggestion*. If you find other practices more helpful, please use them!

Find a bible and head to a place you won't be disturbed. Take a few moments to sit quietly. In that quiet moment you might want to say to God, "What would you like me to hear today?"

Read each of the scriptures. Some people prefer to read silently, while others find it more helpful to read out loud. Take a few moments to reflect on what you've heard. (If you would like, the 'reflection' section is there to help start you off.)

Finally, take a few moments to talk with God. The printed prayer is there as a guide, but there may be other things you want to share. Chat, as openly and honestly as you can. Then, through the day, listen for God's response.

This resource was initiated by St. Andrew's Haney United Church, Maple Ridge, BC and their minister, the Rev. Richard Bott.

The suggested scripture readings are based on the Consultation on Common Text's *Daily Lectionary*.

ST. ANDREW'S HANEY
UNITED CHURCH

Daily Scripture and Prayer Time

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Monday

Scripture:

- Numbers 21:4-9
- Psalm 128
- Hebrews 3:1-6

Reflection:

The letter to the Hebrews compares Moses to Jesus, and the house to the one who "prepared" it. Although the Greek word used actually means "established" or "prepared", the NRSV translates it as "built". As my church struggles with planning and fund raising to refurbish our building, we have to remind ourselves why we're doing it. Remember, the building is a means not an end.

We must ask "What is God's mission, here?" Just as the writer of Hebrews, we must distinguish not just between Moses and Christ, but also between Christ and the "builders" of brick and mortar, between Christ and the church leaders, and between the people and Christ, the one the church is for.

As we "build" our homes, our vocations, and our families, have we got so caught up in the structures and appointments that we've forgotten what they're for? "What is God's mission in this?" It can seem an odd question when we're buying a new TV or building the extension, but asking how it will further God's work of God might keep my feet on the ground. "God, how will this further your work in my life? And if it does – who gets the remote?" Given how much of our lives we spend with the appointments of life – this is not really the frivolous question it sounds.

Prayer:

Spirit of Christ, be present in this place.
Call me to awareness of how
this place, these things, and these hands
may serve you.
Teach me how to include you
in the decisions of my life
so that my life will be a part of your
mission in the world.

Today, I remember and pray for _____,
friends blessed by your love and compassion.

For your grace, with your love,
and in Christ's name, I pray.

Tuesday

Scripture:

- Isaiah 65:17-25
- Psalm 128
- Romans 4:6-13

Reflection:

When I worked in a mission church, several times a week as I gave out sandwiches, someone would remind me that we in the United Church were going to hell! "You let all the wrong people into your church. Gays and lesbians, left wing radicals, and even women "priests"? Then the person would ask for more food, or money for "the bus" or a clean shirt. Sometimes he'd say "I'm not like these people, you know – these addicts, and thieves. I don't belong here – on skid row," he'd tell me, his lips swollen with burns from a crack pipe, arms covered with track marks. And we'd find another sandwich, a clean shirt.

Who is worthy of God's love? Who has the right to come into the church? Who has the right to BE church? The words of Isaiah and Paul to the Romans, speak to people who aren't sure who is deserving of God's love. As I remember my time in mission work, I think also how absurd are some of the ways we divide ourselves from one another and from God. How strange are the ways we measure worthiness. How strange the ways we judge.

Paul reminds us that we are not worthy because of our own efforts, but by God's efforts. I am not more welcome in God's eyes, because I am "clean", but because God loves me. It is only God who "justifies the unjust", only God who "reckons" what we owe, and God who sets it aside and offers love instead.

Prayer:

God of Hosts
We ask for the grace, wisdom and strength
To respond to your invitation,
and to extend that invitation openly to others
Welcoming them in your name with new joy
At the ancient virtue of hospitality.

Today, I remember and pray for _____,
friends blessed by your love and compassion.

For your grace, with your love,
and in Christ's name, I pray.

Wednesday

Scripture:

- Ezekiel 36:22-32
- Psalm 128
- John 7:53-8:11

Reflection:

We live in a culture in which we revel in the sins of others. Standing in line at the grocery store can overwhelm us with iniquity, real and imaginary. If we are to believe the covers of magazines, a misguided fashion "sin" is at least as serious as infidelity, or child abandonment. It makes it hard to take the whole idea of sin seriously.

At the same time many of us struggle under the weight of sins we feel we can't recover from. The sins we don't name. The ones we don't even pray about because we can't bear to think of them. In a culture in which we try not to talk about sin seriously, guilt gnaws at us. We have turned our hearts to stone, and carry them like weights, pressing upon our breath and our spirit. How do we recover from guilt, if we cannot name the sin we feel at the root of it? How do we start again?

Ezekiel says God will sprinkle clean water upon us, and give us a new heart and a new spirit. Recognizing that we're carrying that heart of stone, doesn't mean we need to keep carrying it. For God's own sake, God calls again and again, "Who condemns you?" Like the woman before Jesus, we are surprised when the only one who answers is ourselves. God says, live as though my spirit is within you. You will be my people and I will be your God.

Prayer:

Holy God, Lord of snow and rain,
you have borne your people's pain.
You have wept for love of us.
But we turn away.
Come and break our hearts of stone,
give us hearts for love alone.
Come speak your Word to us,
and put your spirit within us.

For your grace, with your love,
and in Christ's name, I pray.

Thursday

Scripture:

- Exodus 16:1-8
- Psalm 95
- Colossians 1:15-23

Reflection:

I am always struck by the poetry and beauty of this passage from Colossians. "He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of creation, for in him all things were created." This world of beauty in which the presence of the saviour is in all things. Moses also, reminds the Hebrews, wandering in the desert that God sends them bread in the morning, and meat at night. In that place also, the Lord is in every place and everything.

As we enter the wilderness of Lent, wandering in our own way in the desert of our own confusion, we too look around at a world of beauty and complain. Sometimes we look at the wastelands of our cities and wilderness created by poverty and find, in surprise, that the saviour is there also, "the first born of creation..." and "...the first-born of the dead." As we walk in our own wilderness searching for the way, we find that the first-born leads us to many kinds of resurrection and he is there in all its forms - the resurrection of our hearts of stone, of laughter in the midst of pain, of compassion in the midst of fear.

Prayer:

Holy One, our Lord of wind and flame,
is it I who'll tend the poor and lame,
and set a feast for them?
Whose hand will save?
Finest bread you will provide
Till their hearts be satisfied.
You who gave your life to them,
who will you send?

Today, I remember and pray for _____,
friends blessed by your love and compassion.

For your grace, with your love,
and in Christ's name, I pray.

Friday

Scripture:

- Exodus 16:9-21
- Psalm 95
- Ephesians 2:11-22

Reflection:

Years ago, when my children were very small, we sat on a beach as they built walls against the tide. They were joined by two other small children who spoke no English. A small boy ran to help my daughter block the tide from destroying the walls. Together they built new walls. They pointed, laughed, and shared buckets. When the tide had overwhelmed all the defenses and was encroaching on our towels, we waved good bye. A small miracle of time shared, walls destroyed even as walls were built.

We are so good at building walls between people that in the miracle stories, the idea of persuading Gentiles and Jews to work together seems much more radical than feeding thousands in the desert. Once, I listened adults at a community event complain about the youths who had come to help. "They aren't responsible enough." They were responsible enough to come to help. They came hoping for advice on how they could help. But the dividing walls were up.

Paul, saw the same old struggles resurface and he reminds us "[Jesus] came and proclaimed peace to you who were far and peace to those who were near. ... So you are no longer strangers and aliens, but citizens with the saints and members of the household of God."

Prayer:

Jesus Christ, you are the tide of peace that breaks down walls. Your laughter reminds us of the foolishness of building walls that can be washed away. Splash me with your peace, O Christ, that I may lift my eyes and see the drops of peace sparkling in the sun.

Today, I remember and pray for _____,
friends blessed by your love and compassion.

For your grace, with your love,
and in Christ's name, I pray.

Saturday

Scripture:

- Exodus 16:27-35
- Psalm 95
- John 4:1-6

Reflection:

Meeting a woman at a well is rather like a young man speaking to a woman on a balcony. The first hearers of this story expect romance – they expect a tradition story in which the relationships between men and women, between Jews and Samaritans, between Rabbi and woman are observed. The story starts out with all the prerequisites – he asks for water, she responds with a jibe about how deep the well is. But from there, the story takes a sharp turn. The verbal fencing continues. You can hear the laughter, the veiled sensuality in the questions and response. Two people who aren't supposed to be talking to each other at all, unencumbered by disciples or friends, have a conversation that breaks down walls. They transcend the boundaries. The woman has a good grasp of the theological barriers, the barriers of culture and gender, and she plays with them, pushes them, dares Jesus to cross them. He does, but not in the way the audience might expect. This is one of the first, clear examples in the gospel of John, that women and Samaritans are part of the conversation that can take place anywhere. Not just on the temple mount, but by a well in a strange town... and in our lives.

Prayer:

Jesus Christ, our teacher, we sit by the edge of the well afraid to plumb your depths.
We place barriers around
our conversations of faith.
We leave out people and laughter.
We leave out sensuality... and ourselves.
Draw us back into the conversation.
Refresh us with tales of wonder and love.

Today, I remember and pray for _____,
friends blessed by your love and compassion.

For your grace, with your love
In Christ's name I pray.