

## 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

(June 30<sup>th</sup> to July 5<sup>th</sup>, 2008)

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## Monday

### Scripture:

- Genesis 22.15-18
- Psalm 47
- 1 Thessalonians 4.9-12

### Reflection:

Here are two very different sets of expectations for those who love God: live quietly, mind your own business and work hard (1 Thessalonians 4:11) and be obedient to God even to the point of murder. Not surprisingly, most of us are more successful at following the first list.

Abraham's obedience may be held up as exemplary in terms of its absoluteness, but it's not something to aspire to now. With spanking and all forms of corporal punishment severely frowned upon, and an ongoing debate as to whether it's inherently abusive to raise children in a culture that teaches girls that their worth lies in obeying and bearing children for me, it's hard to read this story with equanimity.

But even given the fact that if the voices in your head are telling you to kill your child you should probably seek help, in the story of Abraham's attempted sacrifice of Isaac Abraham is willing to risk it all and in return gains everything. We count ourselves lucky – or blessed – that such sacrifices are not called for today. But how far will we go to sacrifice what we have for God's sake?

### Prayer:

Generous God, you have given me much. Help me to see it as a gift – to cherish my relationships, to appreciate my life. If sacrifice is required of me, may I prayerfully and thoughtfully face that requirement. Amen.

## Tuesday

### Scripture:

- 1 Kings 18.36-39
- Psalm 47
- 1 John 4.1-6

### Reflection:

Please, read the whole story in 1 Kings 18:1-40. Verses 36-39 give the denouement of a very good tale.

For some reason, these days I hear false prophets all around me and not all of them are religious. In Biblical terms, a prophet is not someone who tells the future, but someone who speaks to the world of God's pain at the state of things. There are people who tell us we can fix what ails us – and the world – with new cars, different beer, the right cleaning products or the perfect cell phone plan. These enemies speak the language of the world where buying things is a way to fix things. There are also the enemies who tell us that our real purpose is to make ourselves happy, to find our own satisfaction in life and never mind the rest.

Do you hear these prophets or am I out to lunch? Are there false prophets who speak a language that appeals to you?

### Prayer:

God of truth and light, open my ears and eyes that I may hear when false prophets are trying to lead me into ways that are not yours. Open my ears and eyes that I may hear your prophets, who point out to me your pain at the world as it is. Open my ears and eyes that I may see ways to help to put things right. Amen.

## Wednesday

### Scripture:

- Isaiah 51.1-3
- Psalm 47
- Matthew 11.20-24

### Reflection:

A severe contrast is presented here between those who pursue God's ways, like Abraham and Sarah, and those who turn away from God's ways, like the people of Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum. In spite of what Jesus has done for them, in spite of what they have witnessed, the people of these towns have not changed their ways.

What does it take for people to change their ways? Abraham and Sarah went off because God told them to. But the people of towns like Chorazin saw Jesus do all kinds of deeds of power, and presumably listened to him preach as well, but were completely unmoved. Why do some things speak to us and others leave us cold?

Are there things you know you should change? Habits you know you should break – or make? What will it take for you to change them?

### Prayer:

God of change, change me. Or, rather, help me to understand how I can change to be closer to you, more open to your ways, more willing to accept your call. And, then, help me find the strength and determination to do it. Amen.

## Thursday

### Scripture:

- Genesis 25.19-27
- Psalm 45.10-17
- Romans 7.1-6

### Reflection:

Both the Hebrew Scriptures passage and the reading from Romans are preludes: the birth of Jacob and Esau to the struggles of two different brothers and the Romans passage to an expose on the law and sin.

I can see how someone listening to Paul's words might have taken them to mean that the Christian convert was not longer bound by laws, but had carte blanche to do as they pleased. If the Spirit is meant to guide you in the right ways, it stands to reason that what your heart wants to do is what the Spirit is leading you to do. The story of Jacob and Esau, as it unfolds, doesn't really tell us differently. Often Jacob does things that seem dishonest or mean-spirited, but in the end things seem to turn out the way they're supposed to.

Are there times in your life when the wrong thing turned out to be the right thing? Looking back, what made wrong turn into right? What might have happened if things had been different?

### Prayer:

God whose ways are often confusing, I listen for your Spirit and sometimes get it wrong. But sometimes when I think I've gotten it wrong, it turns out to be right. I'll keep trying. Keep forgiving me and redeeming my mistakes. Amen.

## Friday

### Scripture:

- Genesis 27.1-17
- Psalm 45.10-17
- Romans 7.7-20

### Reflection:

I have this in common with Paul: when someone tells me to do something (or not to do something) I have a tendency to do the opposite. Or at least to be tempted to it. But it's not the fault of the Law that we have this tendency. It's the fault of "Sin".

It seems to me that in this passage, sin is an entity. Sin seizes opportunities (Romans 7:8, 11). Sin works death in me (Romans 7:13). Sin dwells within me (Romans 7:17). It's sort of like an addiction – overpowering and irresistible. Sin tries to pull us in, and we may struggle to resist, but it works just as hard to overcome us. And so, when we fail, "the devil made me do it."

I've heard evil referred to in this way: a malevolent, powerful force at work in the world. Perhaps sin is just another name for it or perhaps sin is a way of describing the actions that Evil engenders. Do you think that sin and evil are entities? Or are they simply ways in which we describe brokenness?

### Prayer:

God, I pray "deliver me from evil". May I resist sin and its temptations, and do those things which are good and right. Even if sin does dwell in me, may the good that is also in me overpower it. Amen.

## Saturday

### Scripture:

- Genesis 27.18-29
- Psalm 45.10-17
- Luke 10.21-24

### Reflection:

In Isaac's day, a spoken blessing was like an arrow shot towards its goal. Once the words were out there, a power was released and it could not be retracted. Unlike the story of Sleeping Beauty, there was no extra fairy who could mitigate the effects of the spell. We are used to the idea that mistakes happen, apologies are offered and appropriate changes are made. Things are set back on their rightful path.

But once Jacob got that blessing, there was no going back. It could never be Esau's and anything Esau got would be a pale shadow of what Isaac had meant to offer his firstborn son. In spite of the fact that there was a reconciliation of sorts between the two brothers and Jacob did pay for his deceit, this story has never endeared itself to me. Is it because I am a firstborn and I know that younger brothers are tricky? Would I read it differently if I were the younger one who was constantly trying to measure up?

What does it mean to juxtapose this with Jesus' words in Luke 10:21. Is Jacob or Esau the wise one in the end? Where do your sympathies lie as you read this story?

### Prayer:

God of us all, older, younger, wise and foolish, thank you for these stories. They challenge me and comfort me and sometimes I find myself there. Amen.