

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

(September 22nd to 27th, 2008)

WRITER FOR THIS WEEK:
Rev. Blake Field, Minister
Wilson Heights United Church
Vancouver, BC

ST. ANDREW'S HANEY
UNITED CHURCH

22165 Dewdney Trunk Road
Maple Ridge, BC V2X 3H7

Phone: 604.463.9611
Email: standrewshaneyuc@telus.net
Web: standrewsuc.com

Monday

Scripture:

- Exodus 16.31-35
- Psalm 119.97-104
- Romans 16.1-16

Reflection:

This part of Paul's last letter is one of those passages we tend to dread when called upon to read it in worship! It's a long list of names that doesn't mean very much on the surface. This passage; however, triggers a number of things for me. It reminds me of a sermon I heard, preached on this 'list,' or one similar to it. The preacher repeatedly declared, "It's not just a list!" His point was that these were real people, living in a particular place and time. They were important, and the fact that they are mentioned by name is significant.

It's a bit like flipping through one of our church directories - each name, or picture represents a person's life, a particular Christian experience and contribution. Each one is sacred. Paul's 'list' strongly affirms this. He uses language that conveys the notion that these people are 'special,' as is their work and the fellowships they form. We see words describing them like "saints," "holy ones," "elect," "called," "beloved and known by God." As we are reminded that we are all of these things, how do we embrace our 'special-ness,' without sounding like God's 'in-crowd?' How can we cherish our identity as Christians and our communities of faith, without setting up corresponding terms like, "outsiders" and "them"?

Prayer:

I have called you by your name,
you are mine;
I have gifted you
and ask you now to shine.
I will not abandon you;
all my promises are true.
You are gifted, called, and chosen;
you are mine.

(Daniel Charles Damon)

Tuesday

Scripture:

- Numbers 11.1-9
- Psalm 119.97-104
- Romans 16.17-20

Reflection:

Yikes! As I was saying! The content and tone of Paul's final chapter turn sharply from greeting to serious warning. The 'suddenness' of the shift that takes place here might lead one to wonder if these three verses actually belong to this letter at all. After all, Paul had never been to Rome. Given the scholarly debate around what is 'authentic' writing by the apostle and what is 'Paul-like,' could it be that this short but strongly-worded section is a fragment that actually belongs to another epistle? Perhaps it was meant for a community that Paul knew personally, the challenges of which he might have known to be true for himself? (Or might we just conclude that Paul 'had the nerve' to assume that all churches face similar issues and challenges?)

In any case, the warnings do relate back to the first 16 verses and our reflection on them. I find the apparent call to distance 'ourselves' from 'those' "smooth-talking-offenders-who-teach-something-other-than-what-we've-learned" particularly interesting and disturbing. What should our reaction be to those whose theology and its implications for Christian life are somewhat (or completely) at odds with ours? In our own congregations? Across our United Church of Canada? In other Christian denominations? Other religions? In society in general?

Prayer:

Teach me, God to wonder,
teach me, God to see;
Let your world of beauty capture me.
Praise to you be given,
love for you be lived,
Life be celebrated, joy you give.

(Walter Farquharson)

Wednesday

Scripture:

- Numbers 11.18-23, 31-32
- Psalm 119.97-104
- Matthew 18.1-5

Reflection:

This is the 'Mēm' ('Hebrew letter M') section of this letter-per-paragraph psalm. Isn't it wonderful how passages of scripture so often complement and shed light on other ones? We were just reflecting on 'us versus them' theology, both within and outside the church in different ways, then along comes this paragraph of the longest psalm which, it seems, extols the virtues of the psalmist over and against the 'enemies!'

As is the case throughout the Psalter, the 'righteous and true way' is contrasted directly with the 'wicked and false path.' Here, the contrast is held until the final few words. Up until that point, God's law/word/precepts/ordinances is/are the subject of the poet's praise and love. But is this fundamentalism? Is the psalmist claiming to possess absolute truth about God, while discounting everyone else's faith in, beliefs about, life in Holy Mystery? I find it striking that the psalmist doesn't ask God for anything in this passage! Also, I find something incredibly inspiring and deeply instructive in what underlies the four assertions that the writer makes. (vv. 99 – 102) Here, we see a prayer of praise to God that the essence of "understanding" go beyond study and meditation, into the territory of "following" and "trust."

Prayer:

God, should the powers of the earth
and the heavens be shaken,
Grant us to see you in all things,
our vision awaken.
Help us to see,
thou all the earth cease to be,
Your truth shall never be shaken.
(Herbert O'Driscoll)

Thursday

Scripture:

- Isaiah 48.17-21
- Psalm 78.1-4,12-16
- James 4.11-16

Reflection:

I am drawn to this short passage because of how it ties into the previous reflections - the first two verses in particular. This very powerful message speaks to me even more about how we live our faith - with others, around others, even in spite of others sometimes. "Speaking evil" is equated with "judging;" they are not God's will. They contravene God's "law." What does it mean to speak evil? To judge? How do we challenge, or even flat-out disagree with and reject the views, position, morality, theology of another in a 'faithful' manner? At what point does it become judgment and speaking evil? Again, there is a point of profound grace here for me today. This goes beyond 'faith' being either what we talk about, recite in creeds, sing about in hymns and what we believe to be true (ie. what we 'believe in'). Being a "doer of the law" is flat-out inconsistent with being a 'judge' and a 'speaker of evil!' There's something powerfully beautiful and faith-revealing in watching someone or something live in a clearly, undisputedly God-filled way - no matter how simple or even mundane it may seem, either to the agent or the observer. "What is your life?" the writer asks. May my life (ie. who I am and what I do) reveal more about my theology than my sermons do! (D.V. *Deo volente*. "God willing.") (v. 15)

Prayer:

God be in my head,
and in my understanding;
God be in mine eyes, and in my looking;
God, be in my mouth,
and in my speaking;
God be at mine end,
and at my departing.
(From *The Book of Hours* 1514)

Friday

Scripture:

- Numbers 20.1-13
- Psalm 78.1-4,12-16
- Acts 13.32-41

Reflection:

The setting is the desert; thirst is the issue. Although the connection is obvious, it is worth acknowledging. Wouldn't scripture be far less significant if it failed to witness to the 'rough times' in our lives? Wouldn't it be a far less meaningful and authoritative Bible if everything went 'according to plan' all the time in it? That is certainly not the case in this passage.

The people complain that their lives were better when they were still in captivity - at least they had water back there! This isn't atypical behaviour, for 'People on their way to the Promised Land,' is it? We shouldn't be surprised at all by it, should we? We see it all the time - in ourselves and in others. Nor should we be surprised at the fact that their 'unfaithful living,' their short-sightedness and annoying self-pity get them nowhere - literally. They are denied access to their 'holy destination!' They get exactly what they deserve. Serves them right. Right? But... if you read verses 10 and 12 again, a different side to the story begins to emerge. Perhaps it isn't the 'sin of being human' that constitutes the 'blockage by God,' but rather the sin of trying to take too much credit for what God is doing. Who are the "rebels" in the passage? What is the source of God's sadness with them?

Prayer:

Shepherd, show me how to go,
o'er the hillside steep.
How to gather, how to sow,
how to feed thy sheep.
I will listen for thy voice,
lest my footsteps stray.
I will listen and rejoice -
all the rugged way.
(Mary Baker Eddy)

Saturday

Scripture:

- Numbers 27.12-14
- Psalm 78.1-4,12-16
- Mark 11.21-33

Reflection:

The first verse of Psalm 78 is an urgent invitation to listen. The words are spoken as if by a wise teacher about to give a most important lesson. The form in which the lesson will be told and its purpose are interesting: it will be a 'parable,' or 'meaningful story' that will contain 'ancient mysteries,' or 'riddles;' it will pass along important truths about 'God's glorious deeds' to the next generations. The list of these deeds, (vv. 12 – 16) is familiar to us, particularly so if your congregation has been following the lectionary, as they are the stories that punctuate the Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt.

There are quite a number of psalms that deal with and respond to individual and communal issues - human problems, situations and conditions of all kinds. They take the form of praise or lament. This psalm is different; it is much larger in scope. This psalm is about the relationship between God and God's people as it has endured and unfolded over the centuries. How do we pass along God's story to our children? To others? Have we got an urgent, age-old, mysterious story of God's salvation to tell that is worth 'listening to?'

How often are you asked to stop what you are doing and really, really pay attention to someone? Really concentrate and reflect deeply on what someone is saying, rather than thinking about what you're going to say next at the same time? Spend some time praying verse 1. Read it over and over again. Let the words wash over you. Open yourself to the meaning of it, that God might, somehow, be revealed through it...