

Crossroads Daily Guide Week of April 17, 2016



Reading and interpreting scripture is seldom as simple as, “God said it, I believe it, that settles it.” Study and interpretation of the Bible requires that we bring all our intelligence, our education, our intellect, our life experience, and our whole hearts into the process. John Wesley said there are four important parts to seeing God in our everyday lives – Scripture, Tradition, Reason and Experience.

In the Sermon on the Mount we read Jesus saying, “You have heard that it was said of old...” And then he quotes some part of the oral and traditional Law based on the scriptures that had been handed down for generations. And then he says, “But I say to you...”, and then he offers some alternative, more expansive way to see the heart of the scripture.

Jesus sets the example for our own thoughtful reflection on the scriptures. He clearly reminded people that he didn’t come to do away with the Law but to fulfill a fuller understanding of it with a clearer picture of who God really is.

In this regard we look at all scripture through the loving lens of Jesus’ life, death and resurrection. In doing so we see that way of Jesus was never about a rigid adherence to strict rules, but instead an opportunity for us to fully embrace the scope and transforming power of God’s love for all. May that continue to be our transforming experience as we read the Bible with the belief that it is God’s unconditional love that settles it for good.

Sunday, April 17, 2016

II Timothy 2:14-15 *Remind them of these things and warn them in the sight of God not to engage in battles over words that aren’t helpful and only destroy those who hear them. Make an effort to present yourself to God as a tried-and-true worker, who doesn’t need to be ashamed but is one who interprets the message of truth correctly.*

The Apostle Paul told Timothy that scripture was useful for “teaching, for showing mistakes, for correcting and for developing character, so that one can be equipped to do everything that is good.” He did not say that the Bible would answer every possible historical, scientific, financial or philosophical question we might ever have. The Apostle Paul knew that scriptures require interpretation and so he encouraged Timothy to be one who interprets the message of truth correctly. The overriding message of the scripture is God’s all-encompassing love for us and for all of creation. How might your reading and study of the Bible become more inspiring and life giving by focusing more deeply on God’s love?

Breath Prayer: Inhale: *Love...* Exhale: *Wins*

Monday, April 18, 2016

Matthew 5:38 – 45 *“You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I say to you that you must not oppose those who want to hurt you. If people slap you on your right cheek, you must turn the left cheek to them as well. When they wish to haul you to court and take your shirt, let them have your coat too. When they force you to go one mile, go with them two. Give to those who ask, and don’t refuse those who wish to borrow from you. You have heard that it was said, ‘You must love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who harass you so that you will be acting as children of your Father who is in heaven. He makes the sun rise on both the evil and the good and sends rain on both the righteous and the unrighteous.”*

We believe we have come a long way from ancient times. We think ourselves enlightened compared to the people of the ancient world. And yet from sports rivalries to business deals we still speak of getting even. By focusing more on mutual love and service for all people how might our words and actions toward others be transformed? In what ways does Jesus' message of love for all people speak to your heart about the ways you deal with others? Do you believe that love wins? Why or why not?

Breath Prayer: Inhale: *Love...* Exhale: *Wins*

Tuesday, April 19, 2016

Romans 8:38 – 39 *I'm convinced that nothing can separate us from God's love in Christ Jesus our Lord: not death or life, not angels or rulers, not present things or future things, not powers or height or depth, or any other thing that is created.*

The one thing that God says repeatedly throughout the scriptures is that love wins. We are assured throughout the biblical story that nothing can separate us from that all-encompassing, unconditional love that God has for us. God never gives up on anyone. Does this reality settle it for you? If so, why? If not, why?

Breath Prayer: Inhale: *Love...* Exhale: *Wins*

Wednesday, April 20, 2016

John 1:14 – 18 *The Word became flesh and made his home among us. We have seen his glory, glory like that of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. John testified about him, crying out, "This is the one of whom I said, 'He who comes after me is greater than me because he existed before me.'" From his fullness we have all received grace upon grace; as the Law was given through Moses, so grace and truth came into being through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. God the only Son, who is at the Father's side, has made God known.*

The Bible tells us that while God spoke through the prophets in many ways and at many times, God's final word was not a book, but a person: Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus said if you have seen me you have seen my Father. The unifying thread that runs through our entire Biblical story is of God's radical love reaching to us throughout history. When we see Jesus' everyday life as God's pure love in action, we see that this love is the truest reflection of God's nature. How might you be love in action for others? How might your loving actions for others reveal the true nature of God?

Breath Prayer: Inhale: *Love...* Exhale: *Win*

Thursday, April 21, 2016

Ephesians 3:18 – 19 *I ask that you'll have the power to grasp love's width and length, height and depth, together with all believers. I ask that you'll know the love of Christ that is beyond knowledge so that you will be filled entirely with the fullness of God.*

Here is one more example of the Apostle Paul trying to show the earliest disciples that the love of God as revealed in Jesus is so vast and immeasurable that we really cannot fully comprehend the magnitude of it. How do you describe a love that is truly without boundaries? How does your reading and study of the Bible help you to have a greater understanding of Jesus as the pure image of God's love? How does following Jesus make you a more loving person?

Breath Prayer: Inhale: *Love...* Exhale: *Wins*

Friday, April 22, 2016

John 8:2-11 *Early in the morning he returned to the temple. All the people gathered around him, and he sat down and taught them. The legal experts and Pharisees brought a woman caught in adultery. Placing her in the center of the group, they said to Jesus, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of committing adultery. In the Law, Moses commanded us to stone women like this. What do you say?" They said this to test him, because*

they wanted a reason to bring an accusation against him. Jesus bent down and wrote on the ground with his finger. They continued to question him, so he stood up and replied, "Whoever hasn't sinned should throw the first stone." Bending down again, he wrote on the ground. Those who heard him went away, one by one, beginning with the elders. Finally, only Jesus and the woman were left in the middle of the crowd. Jesus stood up and said to her, "Woman, where are they? Is there no one to condemn you?" She said, "No one, sir." Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you. Go, and from now on, don't sin anymore."

Instead of upholding the letter of the Law Jesus often took the opportunity to teach a new understanding of the law that is greater than just rigid rules. This law is the law of God's compassion, justice and mercy at work in the lives of people. Jesus didn't want to throw any stones at the woman and when confronted with a fuller understanding of God's love, neither did anyone else. Clearly in this story Jesus did not assume that "God said it, I believe it, that settles it." Rather Jesus taught that there was a new and greater way to understand and interpret the laws of God. That new way was always and still is, love, love, love. How might you apply the law of God's unconditional love in your life today?

Breath Prayer: Inhale: *Love...* Exhale: *Wins*

Saturday, April 23, 2016

Luke 15:11 – 13, 20 – 24 *Jesus said, "A certain man had two sons. The younger son said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the inheritance.' Then the father divided his estate between them. Soon afterward, the younger son gathered everything together and took a trip to a land far away. There, he wasted his wealth through extravagant living... While he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was moved with compassion. His father ran to him, hugged him, and kissed him. Then his son said, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I no longer deserve to be called your son.' But the father said to his servants, 'Quickly, bring out the best robe and put it on him! Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet! Fetch the fattened calf and slaughter it. We must celebrate with feasting because this son of mine was dead and has come back to life! He was lost and is found!' And they began to celebrate."*

The Old Testament Law demanded that a rebellious son should be put to death, but that didn't settle it for Jesus. Instead he told this story about a rebellious son whose father welcomed him home with a heart full of compassion. In this way Jesus wanted people to see God with different eyes. He wanted to show a God who didn't focus on just the erring ways of a son but instead as a father/parent who would drop everything and run down the road to be the first to embrace the beloved son as he returned home. This is one of Jesus' most vivid pictures of what God is really like. What does it teach you about how you should respond to others? Do you believe that love wins in this story? If so, how? If not, why?

Breath Prayer: Inhale: *Love...* Exhale: *Wins*