

First Fifteen: November 8-12
Scripture for Sunday November 14 – Mark 13:1-8

Monday: 1 Samuel 3:1-11

Going Deeper: The story of the calling of Samuel came during a time when hope appeared to be waning... *“The LORD’s word was rare, and visions weren’t widely known... (and yet) God’s lamp had not gone out yet.”* (1 Sam 3:1-3 CEB) Hope is a foundational element of our lives. Our sense of hope for what the future holds is closely tied to our understanding of meaning and our belief in the purpose of our lives. If or when we feel our sense of hopefulness in decline, we may also begin to lose sight of the important of how we engage the tasks and people we encounter. This story of the call of Samuel calls us to not lose hope, even when we are facing challenging or unrelentingly difficult times. We are reminded of our need to be mindful, allowing for the possibility of God’s call and leading, which often comes not with a loud announcement but a gentle nudge, or a gnawing feeling we simply can not shake. Mindfulness calls us to slow down, and listen not merely with our ears, but also to what we are feeling in our heart, and in our body. Being mindful then helps us to be ready to respond... *“Speak Lord. Your servant is listening.”*

Prayer: Our God of light which never goes out, help me sense your leading today. I acknowledge these words resonate within the times of our lives, and yet I still trust you lead your people, that you will lead me if I will allow it. Help me listen for your gentle nudge, your quiet whisper, and the restless feelings in my own heart. Give me faith to act upon your leading and help me to be a beacon of hope for those around me and in all I do today. Amen.

Tuesday: Malachi 3:1-11

Going Deeper: When we read the words of any of the Hebrew prophets, we either find comfort or concern. This is greatly dependent on how we hear their words based upon which side we feel we are on... I want to encourage you to lean into what you read in the scriptures, especially if what you are reading makes you feel uncomfortable or leaves you questioning where am I in what I have just read. These words from the prophet Malachi were written long ago, and are not directed toward any of us personally, and yet they speak of a timeless truth about God’s love and desire. God’s love for all of us is so strong, when we are hurt, or when we wound another God’s desire is for justice and reconciliation. The purpose of the Hebrew prophets was not so much to condemn as to guide and call the people of God to live into their best or true selves as the people of God. Many people have heard the first three verses of this chapter as a description of the Messiah, whom we know as Jesus. I encourage you to read them and allow them to stir your heart. What do they say to you? Are they hard words of loving correction, or words of comfort and encouragement? Listen to them from a trust in God’s love for you. Hear them as a call to live our lives shaped by God’s love and desire for justice and reconciliation for all of God’s children.

Prayer: Loving God whose mercy is wider than any ocean and whose compassion is deeper than any valley... help me hear and respond to your call to live as a disciple of Jesus. Help me trust your love is so strong you come to all who need you. Help me know your desire is for me to live my life guided by your love for me; knowing there will be times when your word both recorded in scripture or shared by those who are your prophets still... will be lovingly corrective and encouragingly instructive. I trust your love and leading for me today. Amen.

Wednesday: Romans 12:9-21

Going Deeper: In these 13 verses Paul has shared a prescription for how to live our faith in every situation we could ever possibly face. I realize my statement can be challenged, but is that the point? Unfortunately, we find ourselves in a time where challenging one another has become more important than creating community and space to learn from one another. I believe Paul is trying to share in these 13 verses, to us as a community of faith, how to embrace his challenge given to us in Romans 12:2... *“Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”* (NIV) I encourage you to read these verses not merely throughout your day, but to bookmark them in your Bibles! Go back to them when you find yourselves in difficult situations, or in conflicted relationships. Their call and teaching are central to what it means to follow Jesus and to allow the work of God’s Spirit to transform our lives. These verses challenge us to listen to our “better angels” and allow God to shine through our lives into the lives and world around us. One last thing, hear these words as filled with grace, they are not easy to abide by, and God’s grace is always waiting when we miss the mark.

Prayer: Our God of tender mercy, hear me as I pray. Help me to love with sincerity. Help me find hope in every situation and be kind and patient when I am pushed beyond what I feel are my limits. Your mercy and humility are revealed to me through Jesus, and I ask for your grace to help me see those I meet who like me, as well as those who are different as my equal in every way... knowing when I have been hurt by another you see and will seek restoration and balance because that is your way of love. Our God of tender mercy, hear me as I pray. Amen.

Thursday: Matthew 20:1-16

Going Deeper: As you read this parable of the Kingdom of God what gets stirred up in you? Where are you drawn to question the outcome and meaning in this parable of Jesus. This teaching may be hard to hear from our context of production and earning, but I encourage you to not get lost in what is fair and what is right according to our culture. I hope you will allow this parable to get under your skin and cause you to wrestle with what Jesus might be saying to you! Jesus’ parables were meant to stir us up, they were meant to help us consider what we thought we knew and what we often take for granted. This “Kingdom” parable is meant to challenge us to consider what operating system we use, what frame of reference do we center our lives upon. Jesus is asking who or what is the center of your life, what are your priorities? The truth is God is not fair, God’s love is given freely and extravagantly and without our need of approval.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, in you I find both comfort and at times dismay and confusion. Help me to rest in the imbalance of the world we live in and allow the gravity of your love and grace to help me find my footing, my foundation from which to live. Help me to trust you have given me what I need and always will. Help me allow you to do the same for everyone else. Amen.

Friday: 2 Corinthians 5:16-21

Going Deeper: As I read these words the phrase, the end is our beginning comes to mind. I am not sure where this phrase might come from, and yet I hear that message resonating in my heart, mind, and spirit in these words found in 2 Corinthians 5:16-21. Our end is our beginning... Through God's love revealed to us in Jesus we embrace the good news of God's grace! Our past is not held against us, the slate is wiped clean, we are part of God's recreative work seeking to bring restoration and wholeness into our lives. From this ending so to speak, we discover our beginning, ambassadors of God's hope found in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, whom we now know as our "Christ" or savior, teacher, and guide. Jesus changes our frame of reference; he leads us into hope no matter what challenges we face.

Prayer: As this week comes to end, I thank you for all that has happened. Good or bad, joyful, or sad, I acknowledge your presence has been with me... even when I may not have been aware of it. I pray that your creative, restorative work would continue to work both within me and in the lives of others all around me. I rest in your love my God, and I pray that the gravity of your grace will hold me and keep me throughout my day. Amen.