

First Fifteen: August 30 – September 3

Monday: Isaiah 35:1-4

Going Deeper: These uplifting words from the Hebrew Prophet Isaiah are like a breath of fresh air. They remind us of God's abundant heart that seeks to reveal to us the blessings we will discover in our lives. The images Isaiah uses remind us of rebirth, and resurrection. They are filled with hope and encouragement, but there is also an apparent catch: it is the implied requirement to see them. We must open our eyes; God will not do this for us and in doing so, we allow the wonder of God's blessings even during times when our lives feel dry, and our hearts are weary to help us see and find joy. But Isaiah's call is not only for us to see, he tells us to act by encouraging one another from our experience of God's grace and blessedness.

Prayer: Lord of love and abundant mercy, "Open my eyes, that I may see glimpses of truth thou hast for me... Open my ears, that I may hear voices of truth thou sendest clear... Open my mouth, and let me bear gladly *your warm and wonderful* truth everywhere." Lord in your mercy hear my prayer and fill my heart with joy that flows from the abundance of your love for me. Help me to see, hear, and feel your joy and peace so I may then share it. Amen. (Open My Eyes, That I May See - UMH #454)

Tuesday: Isaiah 35:5-10

Going Deeper: As we finish the reading Isaiah 35 today, I suspect these words may be familiar. They are often read during Advent reminding us of the work and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth, whom we know as our Christ. By this I mean the one who saves us, leading us to the place of redemption and reconciliation. I hear these words not as what God will do for others, but what God is doing within me, and within all who will allow it. In many respects, we are all blind, deaf, and unable to live our lives freely. We all find ourselves held captive to the stress and strain of life in its many forms. These words from Isaiah, although written many centuries ago, reveal a common thread of need and potential danger. "The Holy Way," is less about our place than it is about our practice. Isaiah calls us, just as Jesus did, to live by faith in God, trusting God's gifts and presence to provide for us what we truly need. I encourage you to read Isaiah 35 more than once throughout your day and listen for what you hear within their echo.

Prayer: Guide my steps this day, help me to trust you have already given me what is needed to face any challenges that arise. My God and Savior, I invite you to help me live more freely and more fully, help me to find and embrace the joy and peace you provide for me. Amen.

Wednesday: James 1:16-25

Going Deeper: If you did not know before, you now have a deeper understanding of Glenn's prayer for us as he begins the sermon each week. I encourage you to linger with these opening verses (James 1:16-18), they are filled with hope as they remind us God chooses us, seeking to enrich our lives. It is far too easy to lose track of this in the events of our day. James' image of our reflection within a mirror resonates within me,

as I find myself caught up in events or my emotional responses realizing after the fact that I did not represent my faith well. While at the same time his words encourage and challenge us by reminding us of the enduring effect of God's grace, the implanted word so to speak upon us. They call us to get back up and start each day by trusting God's love and begin again, remembering who we are as God's beloved!

Prayer: Thank you my God, for your love and grace. As I begin this day help me see within the reflection of my mirror the wonder and blessing you see in me. Help me to allow these truths to shape my responses and my choices this day. As I experience moments where I will be challenged or tempted to forget who I am help me remember I am your beloved and you will continue to lift me when I stumble. Amen.

Thursday: Psalm 146

Going Deeper: A few weeks ago, I was in Montana to officiate at the wedding of my finance's youngest son. I had never been to Montana before, and as you may know I am a beach person! I was completely caught off guard by how deeply I was affected by the beauty and majesty of what I saw and experienced there! These verses from Psalm 146 call us to look up and be alert to the wonder and majesty of God all around us. They remind us in whom we truly need to trust and listen to if we are to have a life filled with the blessings of hope, joy and peace. They also reveal the character and desire of God's heart; to lift, to heal, to love, to care for and to reach each and every one of us who inhabit this world created by and filled with God's majesty, beauty, wonder and spirit! I realize there are places where it easier to connect with God in nature and others. While at the same time I also know God's majesty reaches far beyond the beach or any mountain range, in fact I invite you, even challenge you to see it within yourself, as well as those you meet this day.

Prayer: God you are not only a flowing fountain of mercy, you are also the one pure source of truth for our world and our lives. Help me see the majesty you have placed within me. By your grace help me see your majesty within all those I will meet this day. Use me today, even when I am not aware, simply by my willingness to sing your praises within my heart, mind and spirit. Amen.

Friday: Philippians 2:12-13

Going Deeper: It is the end of another week. If yours has been like mine there have been high moments and a few low ones as well. But this is part of the journey. Paul reminds us that faith is a journey, in truth it is a lifetime, each day building upon the last, each week moving forward toward the goal. But what is the goal? What is the final objective or end we seek? I really like his admonition in Philippians 2:12b to "*work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.*" (NRSV) Notice he tells us to focus on our own work, not what others need to do. It is always easier to see the places where others have work to do than see our own clearly. Paul tells us to do this work with a sense of reverence and honor, meaning extend grace to yourself, God has and yet we can be our own worst critic. His words are meant to encourage honest self-assessment,

that we must do always remembering as he tells us *"It is God who is at work in you."*
Take some time today to breath and invite God to guide you to your work of faith, and while you are at it, ask for an extra measure of grace for yourself to accept those places and moments where you simply were not at your best... trusting God is indeed at work in you!

Prayer: Lord Jesus, walk beside me today. If or when I may stumble take my hand to keep me from falling and if I do indeed fall, I thank you for your hand that will help me back to my feet. Remind me of the path you call me to travel, and when the journey gets hard help me to remember I can lean on you, and when I am tired, I can take a break and rest in your presence, love and tender mercy. Amen.