

First Fifteen: October 18-22
Scripture for Sunday October 24 – Hebrews 7:23-28

Monday: Psalm 119:1-8

Going Deeper: If you have more than one translation of these verses, I encourage you to look at them. These words of the Psalmist are honest, and I hope you will hear them as such. They are not meant to condemn or cause us to feel ashamed, instead they remind us that we are all prone to stray from the course of God's desire for us. They don't revel in our waywardness they simply acknowledge how we are all and by all, I mean both the sinner and the saint, find it hard to live up to God's call and intention for our lives. The Psalmist reminds us of what we already know, when we pursue the path of God's desire, we find peace. In pursuing the way of God's instruction, we find what we need to bring our lives into alignment with God, others and even within our own heart! As I read these words, I hear the heart of one who knows both the love of God, as well as God's mercy that meets us when we stray. I hear a longing to stay close to God and the realization God's presence is always near.

Prayer: A new week has begun, and I pray my God with the heart of the Psalmist... *"Oh, that my steps might be steady, keeping to the course you set."* (Ps 119:5 – The Message) Knowing you hear my prayer and know my needs. I ask for your love and grace to both lead and follow me this week, from day to day and moment by moment knowing there will be times when I will become distracted by other desires, including my own... and they will pull me away from your desire. In knowing this I ask for mercy, as well as faith trusting your gentle love and strong hand through it all. Amen.

Tuesday: Mark 12:28-34

Going Deeper: Yesterday we heard the Psalmist cry out about the truth of God's instructions and guidance without giving us any specific indication of which instructions and guidance was meant. In these words, from Mark's gospel we find an interesting exchange between Jesus and an individual whose only description was someone who was known as a teacher of the law. As I listen to this story, I am not sure if this teacher's question was meant to challenge Jesus, or if they were so intrigued by Jesus they asked from a place of true desire. We don't really know, although by the response of the teacher they truly do seem pleased with Jesus' answer. The teaching Jesus quoted is from Deuteronomy 6:4-9. They called for this teaching to be on the hearts and minds of God's people with the understanding they would help them stay close to God's desire. As this exchange ends in verse 34 Jesus' words call me to come closer to the story. *"You are not far from the kingdom of God."* (NIV) *"Right on the boarder of God's kingdom."* (The Message) What do you hear in his words? What might he have meant and what might he be saying to you and me?

Prayer: Jesus, your love for us cuts through our own self-deception calling us to see both you and ourselves with clear vision and intention. Help me hold your instructions on what is most important and how I can stay close to you in my heart and upon my mind... So I may live and

respond to those around me from a place of love, mercy and compassion remembering God's desire for each of us. Amen.

Wednesday: John 1:35-39

Going Deeper: The faith we proclaim is more about following a path than a set of beliefs. Yes, we say we believe certain things about God and Jesus, but faith is about the practice of what we say we believe. Following God has always been about finding and staying on the path that leads us home. By this I mean we discover "home" as a place of abiding with God through living into the love we have experienced, allowing it to shape and guide us. Home becomes a practice that invites God's love to reveal to us the blessings of our lives and how to share them. This is Jesus' motivation to the question, "What do you want?" (NIV) Or "What are you looking for?" (CEB) They respond by asking "Where is your home..." or, "Where are you staying?" They wanted to know where Jesus abided, where he found home to be, so they could join him. Faith has always been about being and becoming alongside of what we say we believe.

Prayer: Jesus, our teacher, our friend, and our Savior, open my eyes to trust you walk with me, open my ears so I can hear your gentle nudge, help me open my heart and lead me to find my home with you. Throughout this day my Lord, help me live what I say I believe. Guide me so my behavior and my beliefs align, and when I stumble or find myself drawn off your path lead me back with your gentle and yet firm call. Amen.

Thursday: Romans 5:1-5

Going Deeper: *"Since we have been made righteous through his faithfulness combined with our faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."* (CEB) As Methodists we believe God is the initiator, God is the one who comes to us through Jesus. We call this prevenient grace, God initiates, God moves closer to us before we choose to respond and move toward God. Then our response, our trust, or belief in God's love combined with God's grace pours into us the blessings of peace, hope and connection with God here and now and forever! But what the Apostle Paul is also teaching us here is that this does not mean our lives will be free of struggle. He encourages to embrace these moments as opportunities to enrich our faith by trusting God is both present and uses everything to help us become who God desires us to be... children of God who are free of fear and at peace within ourselves and others. As children of God, we not only know God's love, we also recognize we are being made whole through God's leading within each day and all its adventures... (I use this word loosely because I recognize not everything we experience feels like an adventure and yet if we trust God's love and movement God is leading us on the adventure of becoming our full selves.)

Prayer: O God, your love never fails, even when my faith and trust sometimes wains. Grant me a deepening trust in you so I can live by faith... knowing you have given me what I need, and you will use the events of this day to help me grow stronger and more at peace no matter what

I must face. My God who is ever present, help me know you work within and alongside me always! Amen.

Friday: Zephaniah 3:14-17

Going Deeper: These words from this Minor Prophet call out to us as the people of God, reminding us of God's love and care. Again, they do not promise the absence of hardship, but they do declare God is with us, and that God is not only "mighty to save," but more than willing to save us! What does that look like for you, "being saved?" I suspect we often think of this as something that transpires in the next life, or after our death. But these words of the Prophet Zephaniah tell us salvation happens now, and it comes to us as the absence of fear, trusting God's love to forgive, and that God "*takes great delight in you.*" (Zephaniah 3:17 – NIV) I find great comfort in this verse... knowing God's desire is to quiet our heart with God's healing love. My heart is lifted by the thought, imagining that God rejoices over you and me with singing. I pray as this week comes to an end that you have felt God's love and presence with you. I trust you will lean into God's loving presence today and you find rest, joy and peace this weekend.

Prayer: Our Singing Joyful God, fill me this day with peace. Ignite my heart with joy knowing you delight in me, even when I find it hard to see how this can be! Help me trust your love that will not let me go, knowing, believing, and then acting in faith to live into this promise that you give to me through your Son Jesus my Christ. Amen.