

**First Fifteen: October 4-8**  
**Scripture for Sunday October 10 – Hebrews 4:12-16**

**Monday: Isaiah 52:7-12**

**Going Deeper:** These words from Isaiah are often associated with the liturgical season of Advent as we prepare ourselves for the celebration of the coming of the Christ Child. Although their message is timely no matter what the season! Isaiah reminds us of God's comfort in our time of need. They encourage us to keep watch even when we are weary. They proclaim that the God of all people sees our plight, knows our need, and will provide for us rescue and redemption. But what does that really mean – to provide us with rescue and redemption? These words are crucial to our faith, but I wonder how we understand them in the day-to-day reality of our lives. For Isaiah's listeners they heard the message of the return of God's presence to the holy city of Jerusalem, but what do you hear? The people of Jerusalem heard an echo from their story of the Exodus... *"But you will not leave in haste or go in flight; for the LORD will go before you, the God of Israel will be your rear guard."* (Isaiah 52:12 NIV) Coupled with the opening statement... *"How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news"* (Isaiah 52:7) these words from Isaiah remind us of the One whose message was God's love for us all, and whose life revealed how far God would go to create the way for each of us to know we are never alone. So, I ask again how do you know and experience God's rescue and redemption in this present moment and throughout your day?

**Prayer:** My God, and my Savior, I thank you for this day and the week before me. Help me not only proclaim peace but also look for ways to create peace. Help me not only share your good news with others, but also seek to embody it through my daily activities. Help me to slow down when I am feeling rushed so I may be more aware and attentive to all the blessings and opportunities you provide for me. My God and my Savior, thank you for this day. Amen.

**Tuesday: Isaiah 53:1-6**

**Going Deeper:** As you read these verses where does your mind wander? Are you drawn to a conclusion about whom they may refer? For those of us who follow the Christian faith we hear the prophet describing the Messiah we know and understand to be Jesus. The images are clearly there as they are viewed through the lens of our faith. Although within the teachings of the Jewish faith they hear these words describing the servant of God, who they identify as the nation, or people of Israel. It is impossible for me to truly separate my faith from these words, and yet I can also see the connection within the teaching of the Rabbinical tradition. What matters most is what you hear in these words and their description of the servant of God... *"Who can believe what we have heard, and for whose sake has the LORD's arm been revealed?"* (Isaiah 53:1 – CEB)

**Prayer:** Almighty God, full of mercy and grace, help me throughout this day allow the work of the suffering servant to guide me. Help me to consider what I hear within these words, and

better yet help me take them to heart so I can answer the question posed by the prophet...  
"Who can believe what we have heard?" Amen

### **Wednesday: John 15:9-17**

**Going Deeper:** In Monday's reading I asked you to consider your understanding and experience of God's rescue and redemption. I wonder if we don't find some help with this from these words from Jesus in John's Gospel. Jesus was talking with his followers and shared with them his desire for "*my (or his) joy will be in you and your joy will be complete.*" (John 15:11 CEB) I suspect another way to understand this might be we will experience joy through our realization of God's acceptance, as we grow within the embrace of God's love. What I hear in this teaching is a path that directs us to the source of joy, peace and ultimately what I would call our redemption... the awareness that we are loved, and God's desire that we become vessels through which God's love is shared. Our rescue and redemption are not a solitary experience or event, it is a call or invitation to join the community whose desire and purpose is to discover how we as Jesus's "friends" fulfill his ministry through our lives together. I encourage you to read John 15:15-17, take some time before you start or continue your day to consider what do you hear Jesus saying in these words to us, his friends.

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, to be called your friend is not only an honor, it can also feel like a burden. I know my heart and my thoughts do not always align with your love for me and your call for me to love others. Yet your desire is for me to know your joy, and to experience your love and know I am accepted, whole and joyful in all areas of my life. Help me remember throughout this day that you call me your friend, and as my friend you are there when I stumble with an outstretched hand. Amen.

### **Thursday: 2 Corinthians 5:13-19**

**Going Deeper:** I know, Paul the author of much of what we know as the New Testament, can be hard to follow and at other times when his writing is not complex it is hard to accept; and yet I have found if we will stay with it, keep reading and wrestling with Paul's writings understanding he was just like us, trying to figure out how to live into this new life that is ours in Christ Jesus, he might become a cherished friend! In these verses from 2 Corinthians, we hear Paul wrestling with how Jesus's life, death and resurrection reveal God's message and desire for us all! Simply put, our faith is a journey where we grow in our awareness of God's desire to use our lives to impact the lives of those around us. For many of us this may create more than a little push back. We may have questions or worthiness, or qualification. We may believe if we are not all together, our lives might do more harm than good. I understand these feelings even though I have degrees and an ordination. Even so I invite you to consider Paul's words in verses 17-19... Specifically the latter part of 2 Corinthians 5:19 "*He has trusted us with this message of reconciliation.*" These words imply the work of reconciliation, working out the differences between us, is ongoing. Paul knows as well as we do that the primary and most significant aspect of this work is our willingness to trust God is with us and what God began through Jesus, God will continue through us.

**Prayer:** “Lord, make me an instrument of your peace. Where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; and where there is sadness, joy. O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console; to be understood as to understand; to be loved as to love. For it is in giving that we receive; it is in pardoning that we are pardoned; and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen.” (Prayer of Saint Francis of Assisi)

**Friday: Psalms 121**

**Going Deeper:** This beautiful Psalm is often overshadowed by the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm. But its words of comfort speak deeply into our heart. They remind us that God is our companion, and as Jesus encouraged us in John 15, to remain in God’s love trusting God’s love will surround and hold our lives. As your week is ending, I encourage you to keep these words from the 121<sup>st</sup> Psalm with you this weekend. Mark them in your Bible or pull them up on your phone so you can turn to them to remind you of God’s tender and steadfast care for you. As you read them if a verse, word, or phrase catches your attention stay there inviting the Holy Spirit to help you understand what about this word or phrase is a message for you. Most of all take some time to reflect about the week that has past to recall moments of blessing, learning and to be thankful.

**Prayer:** Loving God, thank you for this day, another week and all that has happened and will yet today. Thank you for your abiding presence and mercy that both leads and follows me everywhere I go. Help me as I follow through on the tasks and projects of my day, but most importantly help me stay focused not only on the task at hand but how you may use me within it and how my life can lift the hearts and minds of others as we work together. Amen.