

**First Fifteen: September 27 – October 1**  
**Scripture for Sunday October 3 – Hebrews 1:1-4 & 2:5-12**

**Monday: Luke 13:6-9**

**Going Deeper:** Growing up I spent many a Saturday helping my “Granny” dig holes to plant new trees or shrubs or digging up ones I had helped her plant before but now she was moving to a better or at least different spot. I was never sure of the rhyme or reason for the work I was doing, I only knew she had one... and her yard with its flowering trees and bushes seemed to always be in bloom. The one thing I was sure of was that she made me put my hands into the mix of soil which included adding cow manure which I did not like at all! I couldn’t wait to wash the smell off me and often it took more than one washing! In the verses we read this morning, Jesus shared a parable that may be hard to understand. The fig tree was a sign of God’s blessing and favor for the Hebrew people, but this tree was barren, and fruitless. The owner wanted to cut it down, but the gardener persists asking for more time, saying he will add some fertilizer in the hope it will produce fruit next year. The actual word in the Greek is dung or manure. Most of our translations soften the word, but to do so may impact the meaning of the parable. Jesus does not promise a good outcome or resolution for the gardeners’ efforts. The teaching may actually have more to do with the work and at times hardships we undergo to create fruitfulness in our lives with the awareness the benefit may be discovered not in what we had hoped for, but in the struggle, effort and yes maybe even suffering within the process.

**Prayer:** You are the One who is always near, your love always freely given, and yet the work and efforts of our lives does not always yield the outcome we desire. Help me this week to accept the work I do when mixed with faith, no matter how difficult or the results to trust I am learning the lessons that will help me grow closer to you and more like your Son, the one I call my Savior. Amen.

**Tuesday: Habakkuk 1:2-4 & 2:1-4**

**Going Deeper:** As you read these words from this Hebrew prophet were there phrases or a subject that resonated with you. I have been fascinated with the writings of the more obscure, who are often referred to as “Minor” prophets since I was in college. As a young Quaker who felt the call into ministry my heart resonated with their cries for justice as well as, their lament in what felt like God’s absence in the midst of human strife. How long, O Lord, how long must we wait? What I appreciate about these writers, and I would say precursors of the message of God’s Kingdom that Jesus taught, was their call for balance which clearly saw the injustice, even feeling it deep within their bones, was held with a patient knowing trust in God. To them it felt as if God was not engaged, and yet they would not give up in their cry for all who would listen to seek greater awareness, to trust the vision of hope and remain faithful. The last line of these words from Habakkuk still speaks so clearly... (My paraphrase) *“I cannot control the behavior and choice of others. What I must do is live true to my faith in you my God and who you call me to be each day.”*

**Prayer:** Great God of love and patience, I know you see far beyond my understanding. Help me be more patient with myself and others, and more courageous so I may live my faith and allow it to lead me to stand my ground so your love and justice will be evident through the words I say and the choices I make. Help me to hear the cries of the prophets and the teachings of Jesus clearly so I may follow their leading and live this day with grace and honor. Amen.

**Wednesday: Hebrews 12:1-4**

**Going Deeper:** I remember my reaction to these verses the first time they really landed. I heard more than the writer's illustration comparing our faith journey to a marathon. Although this images still speaks clearly, I began to hear the deeper message calling us to understand our faith is not only about endurance but also about the embrace of the struggle by pushing through the pain to experience the joy that runners refer to as "the high" they experience when the endorphins kick in! Jesus is called "*faith's pioneer and perfecter*" in Hebrews 12:2 (CEB), and he becomes this not by or through the resurrection but through his suffering endurance on the cross, knowing the pain of that moment was not the end, but merely a threshold that led him into God's love and joy that is also ours to embrace. When this truth landed a peace began to rise within me, a peace that cut through the difficulty of the moment helping look beyond the struggle of my current situation giving me the will to keep pushing, believing through this moment of hardship God was at work in me.

**Prayer:** Help me this day to realize in those moments when my faith is tested, or I am pushed farther than I desire, maybe even to the point of giving up... that you Jesus are with me and by your witness of faith on the cross help me to find the strength to push through and hold on trusting the way of peace often comes through surrender and endurance found within suffering. Amen.

**Thursday: Philippians 4:4-9**

**Going Deeper:** Decades ago, as I was driving somewhere in North Georgia, I saw a church that declared they were the "Happy Church." Something about that didn't really sit well with me. I wonder if they were merely trying to live into this teaching from Paul. Paul challenges us to be "joy filled" people as the followers of Jesus. But even in these words to the people who were the church at Philippi we see he acknowledges that he was aware that being joyful required intention, even revealing through his teaching his awareness there are times when joy just doesn't make sense given the events or circumstances. What I hear clearly from Paul is an acknowledgement of our worry. He doesn't sugar coat our faith but shares a remedy I suspect learned from his own experiences which are: Let God know your concerns, release them, and trust God. Then lift your eyes, and your heart by focusing on what is good, and true and just and loving and kind and in doing so you may find a growing peace within your restless heart.

**Prayer:** Thank you Lord, for your love for me, my family and all I hold close in my heart. Thank you for the promise of your being near and hearing my concerns and worry. Help me to focus on what is right in my life and in our world today, not on what bothers me, or causes me

concern. I pray your peace would not only fall on me and those I love and care about but upon our community, our state and nation. Walk with me today as I go about the business of my day. Amen.

**Friday: 1 Corinthians 13:11-13**

**Going Deeper:** I suspect these are familiar words, most often heard at weddings, but that was not Paul's intent. He was speaking to people just like you and me. People who are faced with challenges, who feel stress, and carry the weight of the burdens of our lives. We often focus on the last verse, *"Now faith, hope, and love remain – these three things – and the greatest of these is love."* (CEB). I can't argue with him! And yet I am also drawn to his words of wisdom in verse 12... *"Now we see in a reflection in a mirror; then we will see face-to-face. Now I know partially, but then I will know completely in the same way that I have been completely known."* These words call us to stay the course, to keep on going, knowing the journey is truly leading us somewhere even if we can see or understand it right now. As another week has ended, these words remind us no matter the events that have past, we are surrounded by God's love, as people who seek to stay true to our faith, and engaged with others as we are filled with hope from the moment we rise to the time we rest our head on our pillow.

**Prayer:** All knowing and all-seeing God, help me to rest in the knowledge that you see me clearly and know my needs completely. Help me to trust you have given me what was needed this past week, even if the outcome wasn't what I expected. Lord of love help me to trust in these three things, faith, hope and love, and allow the embrace of love, yours and the love I share with others to always be the final word. Amen.