

The background of the entire page is a close-up photograph of a stone tablet. A large, simple cross is carved into the stone, centered in the upper half of the image. Below the cross, there are several lines of faint, ancient script, likely in a Semitic language, which are partially obscured and difficult to read. The stone has a textured, weathered appearance with some reddish-brown staining.

**June 2022**

**Life with Jesus**  
**Ups, downs, in-betweens**

**Readings, Reflections, Prayers**

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## Monday, June 6: Genesis 21:1-7

This month we'll look at life. We are all born, live, and die. Along the way, some of us make faith decisions, some of us may marry, some of us may stay single. We go to school. We work. We retire. We have ups. We have downs. We celebrate. We mourn. How does our faith help us through the realities of life?

To begin, let's consider Isaac. Isaac is the baby-who-should-not-be. Way back, in Genesis 15, God had promised Abraham and Sarah a son. After ten years of being unable to conceive a child with his wife, Sarah, in desperation Abraham had a son (Ishmael) with Sarah's servant, Hagar (Genesis 16). More years went by. Both Sarah and Abraham "*were very old and Sarah was long past the age of having children*" (18:11). Yet, miracle of miracles, Sarah did become pregnant: "*Is anything too hard for the Lord?*" (Genesis 18:14).

Decades after God's original promise to Abraham and Sarah, a child – Isaac – is born.

Isaac is a miracle – a special child – the child of a promise God had made with Abraham. Isaac will be the father of Jacob (also known as "Israel"), and ultimately the great-great-great-add-many-more-greats ancestor of Jesus (Luke 3:23-37). Isaac has a special role to play in the story of God's salvation of all creation.

Every baby is a miracle. We know that intuitively when we see and hold a newborn infant. There is a sense of wonder and awe at the miracle of new life. While medical people may be able to explain all the science behind conception and birth, we sense that there is something more than dispassionate medical logic and cold, hard biochemistry underlying the identity, uniqueness, and personality of a baby.

Something about the birth of a baby gives us all a sense of wonder and miracle. Even those without an explicit faith in God, often have a sense that there is a mystery here that science alone cannot explain.

Today, give thanks to God for babies you know of. Pray for those infants. Pray for any children you know. Or children at the church. And pray for parents, too. Parenting kids of any age is challenging in 2022.

*Our walk with God is never a lonely walk.  
If taken in the company of God's children, it is a family occasion.  
If we lag behind,  
there are those who will turn and offer words of encouragement,  
hold out a hand and offer assistance over stiles and other obstacles,  
share refreshment,  
help us from our knees when we stumble.  
Our walk with God is never a lonely walk.  
It is a joyful experience as others join us along the path,  
attracted by the company of God's children,  
singing the same songs of praise that angels sing,  
following a path worn down by tears, joy, celebration, and sacrifice.  
Our walk with God is never a lonely walk,  
for He walks with us,  
on a track that leads to a glorious destination.  
Amen*

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## Tuesday, June 7: Genesis 21:8-21

Every baby is a miracle. But babies grow up. Problems come. Years ago, one wise person once told Marianne and I: "*When your kids are small you have lots of problems, but they're little problems. As your children get older, the problems get fewer, but the problems get bigger.*" There is truth to that observation.

Abraham has a problem – Ishmael – his older (and quasi-illegitimate) son. Genesis 16 tells the sad story of Sarah being frustrated that she cannot become pregnant. In despair, she gave her maid, Hagar, to Abraham. Abraham and Hagar have a son, Ishmael. God makes it clear, however, that Ishmael is NOT the promised son Abraham should be waiting for (from Genesis 15). How is the problem of Ishmael solved?

Abraham has an ongoing personal relationship with God (which we would call “prayer”). He freely expresses to God his concerns. He hears God speaking to him. Tevya, in *Fiddler on the Roof*, has a similar, wonderful relationship with the Lord. Our challenge is to keep two-way communication with God open, whatever the issues in our life are. Hopefully our lives are not as complicated as Abraham’s. We can talk with God about anything ...

Think of this story from a different perspective. Is there someone who drives you crazy? Someone you just don’t like? Once that person was a miracle of a baby, too. Now, we may see them as annoyances, obstacles, or burdens. We may see them as a problem. We may no longer see difficult “grown up” people as wonderful, unique creations, blessings from God. Abraham could have seen Ishmael that way. However, though Ishmael was no longer a cute infant, Abraham still saw his son as a precious gift of God. Abraham still cared for him.

C.S. Lewis writes, *“There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilizations – these are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub and exploit ... This does not mean that we are to be perpetually solemn. We must play. But our merriment must be of that kind (and it is, in fact, the merriest kind) which exists between people who have, from the outset, taken each other seriously – no flippancy, no superiority, no presumption.”*

Can you see that person who irritates you as still as precious a miracle as a baby? Can you treat others with the same loving care with which you would treat a newborn? It is an interesting way to look at the world. Pray for that person whom you struggle to love and ask for God’s help to see them as special and treat them well.

*Beloved Jesus, look upon me with mercy,  
Weighed down under the burden of my trials and sufferings,  
I cast myself at Your feet.  
While I rest here in Your Presence  
renew my strength and my courage.  
I give over to you all the worries, cares, and burdens I carry.  
Only You can sustain me.  
Only Your love can help me bear my cross.  
O Divine King, Jesus,  
whose heart is so compassionate to the afflicted,  
I wish to live in You.  
If necessary, I will suffer for You.  
Every moment, Lord, be my model and my support,  
my hope, and my refuge.  
Amen*

### **Wednesday, June 8: Luke 9:37-48**

Back in my university days, Queen Elizabeth and Prince Philip visited UBC. As crowds lined West Mall, the Queen zipped past in a limo, dutifully waving her famous wave. Prince Philip, however, leisurely walked along the street with a few other men (probably security). He seemed to enjoy pointing out the loony students who had climbed trees to get a better view. He laughed at some who had dressed in silly outfits to get royal attention. He actually stopped to talk with ordinary Canadian students. It was astonishing that Prince Philip would take time to notice and speak with average Vancouver undergrads.

Today’s passage in Luke shows Jesus taking time with ordinary people, too. This passage happens right after two dramatic revelations of Jesus as the Son of God: He feeds five thousand people (Luke 9:10-17) and He is

gloriously transformed and revealed in glory (Luke 9:28-36). Jesus really is God Himself, in whom and through whom the power and glory of God shines and flows. Yet He has time for everyone. Even ordinary people.

In 9:37-43, the greatness of God in Jesus is shown again. But this time, His greatness comes as He has compassion for a hurting child. We may not be surprised Jesus cares about a child. But in His day, children had no legal status. They were nobodies. A demon-possessed child would be an outcast. Banished from town. An embarrassment. But Jesus doesn't see him that way. He sees this child, like all children (and adults), as a precious child of God.

Do I ever see a person or a crowd of people who may be 'different' than I am and write them off (none could be stranger than this boy)? Do I ever think: "*They'll never amount to anything,*" "*Why does she dress like that,*" "*He needs to get a job,*" "*Kids these days,*" "*Parents these days,*" "*Older people these days*"? How might Jesus see the same person?

Meanwhile, what are Jesus' disciples doing? Despite three overwhelming evidences of Jesus' greatness, they are arguing about which one of **them** is greatest (Luke 9:46-48). Given all they have seen and heard from Jesus, it seems crazy. They may be decent people, but none of them can begin to compare with Jesus' greatness.

Can you identify with these characters at all? Do we ever act in a similar way? Do we think we're so wonderful?

Jesus uses a child (perhaps the one he just healed?) as a metaphor for what a follower of Jesus should look like. In *The Message* translation, Jesus says, "*Whoever accepts this child as if the child were me, accepts me. And whoever accepts me, accepts the One who sent me. You become great by accepting, not asserting. Your spirit, not your size, makes the difference.*" How does that make you think?

*God of healing, God of wholeness,  
we bring our brokenness, our sinfulness, our fears and despair,  
and lay them at your feet.  
God of healing, God of wholeness,  
we hold out hearts and hands, minds and souls  
to feel your touch, and know the peace that only you can bring.  
God of healing, God of wholeness,  
this precious moment in your presence and power  
grant us faith and confidence  
that here broken lives are made whole.  
Amen*

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### **Thursday, June 9: Mark 10:13-16**

Children's moments in church are fun. I love to do them. Give Mark credit, he is way more creative at video children's stories than I am, especially if the story involves Lego. I do still love doing occasional children's stories (in-person) because the kids are so much fun. And I get to be a big kid myself.

Jesus enjoyed children. In a culture where kids were supposed to stay out of sight and had no legal status as "persons," this is surprising. A rabbi, like Jesus, was never supposed to deal with kids. They were a waste of time. Adults – specifically adult **men** – mattered. But Jesus invites kids into His world, gives them His time, values them, and blesses them. He gets annoyed with His disciples when they try to shoo kids away.

For Jesus, children can be our teachers. They are models of the kind of people we ought to be. What is it about kids Jesus is celebrating? What do you think? How does that invite you to reflect on your life?

*"He took the children in his arms and placed his hands on their heads and blessed them"* (Mark 10:16). There is

no evidence in Scripture for baptizing infants or young children (the pattern for baptism is that a person believes and then is baptized). But here is an example of  *blessing*  children.

In our tradition we love to bless children and families. We do services of "*Family Dedication*" or, officially, "*Dedication of Parents and Blessing of Children*" in which we invite the parents to

- rededicate themselves to following of Jesus
- commit themselves to teaching their child about Jesus and involvement in the church, and
- seek God's blessing on and wisdom and direction for their home, marriage, and parenting.

We then pray a blessing on the child. The blessing is a prayer for God's grace in the child's life.

We also ask the whole church to commit to praying for and supporting the family as they live for Jesus.

It is a very meaningful service for Christian parents as they dedicate themselves to the (challenging) task of living for Christ in their homes and raising their children in the ways of Jesus. It is also significant for the child as we pray God's blessing on them. And it is important for the whole church community as we commit ourselves to prayer, support, encouragement, and help for the family. It takes a church family to raise a child.

Pray for our families. Pray for parents seeking to raise their kids in God's way. And pray about how you can be an encouragement to a family – through prayer, help, or other form of support. It all helps.

*Unclutter our lives, Lord, we have too much,  
consume too much, expect too much.  
Grant us perspective:  
to see this world through others' eyes than just our own.  
Grant us compassion:  
where there is need to play our part, not turn aside.  
Grant us gratitude:  
for what we have, our daily bread, the gift of life.  
Unclutter our lives, Lord,  
give us space, simplicity, thankful hearts.  
Amen*

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### **Friday, June 10: Matthew 18:1-4**

*"Magic mirror on the wall, who is the fairest one of all?"* The evil queen in *Snow White* is so vain she stares at herself in the mirror all day AND she gets her mirror to tell her who she needs to eliminate. She demands her "slave in the magic mirror" answer her (we'll save discussing forced labor in the Magic Kingdom for another day).

Jesus' disciples don't stare into magic mirrors. But they do regularly argue about who is greatest one of all. They often debate which of them is the greatest in the Kingdom of God (Mark 9:33-34, Luke 9:44-46, 22:24-30).

Jesus typically responds, by calling a little child and putting the child among them.

- In Matthew 18:1-4, Jesus says, *"I tell you the truth, unless you turn from your sins and become like little children, you will never get into the Kingdom of Heaven. So anyone who becomes as humble as this little child is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven."*
- In Mark 9:36-37, He says, *"Whoever wants to be first must take last place and be the servant of everyone else ... Anyone who welcomes a little child like this on my behalf welcomes me, and anyone who welcomes me welcomes not only me but also my Father who sent me."*
- In Luke 9:46-48, Jesus adds, *"Anyone who welcomes a little child like this on my behalf welcomes me,*

*and anyone who welcomes me also welcomes my Father who sent me. Whoever is the least among you is the greatest."*

How is each of Jesus' comments similar? Different?

What is it about children that Jesus values?

What is Jesus saying to me, today?

*God of the high and holy places,  
where I catch a glimpse of your glory,  
above the low levels of life,  
above the evil and emptiness which drag me down,  
beyond the limits of my senses and imagination,  
**you lift me up.**  
In the splendor of a sunset, in the silence of the stars,  
in the grandeur of the mountains, in the vastness of the sea,  
**you lift me up.**  
In the majesty of music, in the mystery of art,  
in the freshness of the morning,  
in the fragrance of a single flower,  
**you lift me up.***

*Awe-inspiring God, when I am lost in wonder and lost for words,  
receive my silent worship.  
Do not let me be content to bear your beauty and be still.  
Go with me to the places where I live and work.  
Lift the veil of reticence behind which I hide.  
Give me the courage to speak of the things which move me,  
with simple and unselfconscious delight.  
Help me to share my glimpses of glory until others are drawn to your light.  
Lord lift me up that I may lift you up.  
Amen.*

Jean Mortimer

### **Saturday, June 11: Ephesians 5:1-21**

We have thought this week about what it means for us to be like children. In Ephesians 5, Paul says, "*Because you are God's dear **children**, imitate him, therefore, in everything you do. Live a life filled with love, following the example of Christ. He loved us and offered himself as a sacrifice for us, a pleasing aroma to God.*"

You are God's dearly loved child. What does that mean? Reflect on that. Celebrate that.

As God's child, how should I live? Reflect on the character traits from 5:1-7. Reflecting on them positively, we should be people of love, sexual morality, purity, and generosity. We should be people of edifying, uplifting words. We worship God, not things of this world.

We now "*have light from the Lord. So live as people of light. For this light within you produces only what is good and right and true ...*" Paul goes on to explore this in verses 8-21.

*The Message translation puts 5:11-21 this way, "Don't waste your time on useless work, mere busywork, the barren pursuits of darkness. Expose these things for the sham they are. It's a scandal when people waste their lives on things they must do in the darkness where no one will see. Rip the cover off those frauds and see how*

*attractive they look in the light of Christ ...*

*"Watch your step. Use your head. Make the most of every chance you get. These are desperate times! Don't live carelessly, unthinkingly. Make sure you understand what the Master wants. Don't drink too much wine. That cheapens your life. Drink the Spirit of God, huge drafts of him. Sing hymns instead of drinking songs! Sing songs from your heart to Christ. Sing praises over everything, any excuse for a song to God the Father in the name of our Master, Jesus Christ. Out of respect for Christ, be courteously reverent to one another."*

Have you ever thought of yourself as a "child of light" before? What does it mean to you? For how you see yourself? For how you live in your home? For how you live at school/work/in the community?

*Dear Jesus, help me to spread your fragrance everywhere I go.  
Flood my soul with your spirit and love.  
Possess my whole being so completely  
that all my life may be a radiance of yours.  
Shine through me and be so radiant in me  
that every soul I come in contact with may feel your presence in my soul.  
Let them look up and see no longer me but only Jesus.  
Stay with me.  
Help me shine as you shine,  
so to shine as to be a light to others.  
Amen*

Mother Teresa

### **Sunday, June 12: Genesis 22:1-19**

Often in these guides we methodically go through an entire book of the Bible. From January through May, for instance, we went through 1 and 2 Corinthians. This challenges me, as the author of these readings, to deal with passages I'd rather avoid. As readers, we can't escape difficult verses. This month, we're going thematically rather than through a book of the Bible. It's still good to deal with an occasional awkward text. This is one of those stories I just don't like. I'd rather not deal with it. But here it is ...

God had promised Sarah and Abraham a son. It looked impossible. Both were *"well advanced in years."* But God knew what He was doing. Eventually they had a beautiful baby boy, Isaac. Now God is asking Abraham to do something awful, to destroy the very miracle they had experienced. It seems horrific. Barbaric.

God knows He is not going to allow Abraham to go through with this sacrifice. But Abraham doesn't know that yet. This is a dramatic test of Abraham's faith. Does Abraham trust God's promise that he and Sarah will be the parents of a multitude of people? Abraham had trusted God before. Will he still trust God now?

Abraham does trust God. God is faithful. God provides a ram to take the place of Isaac, Abraham's beloved child. Everything works out just fine ...

(There is clear foreshadowing in this story of the Messiah, Jesus. Jesus – the Lamb of God, provided by God – will take our place on the cross and will be sacrificed for us. *"For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard. Yet God, in his grace, freely makes us right in his sight. He did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the penalty for our sins. For God presented Jesus as the sacrifice for sin. People are made right with God when they believe that Jesus sacrificed his life, shedding his blood"* (Romans 3:23-25).)

This story in Genesis 22 is about faith, humility, and obedience. Abraham is willing to trust God, even in the face of confusing, disturbing, and emotionally heart-wrenching stress.

What about me? What difficulties, stresses, or challenges am I facing? Will I trust God? Has He ever let me down in the past? Will I trust Him now?

Barnabe Ashohoto & Samuel Ngewa, African scholars who understand something of suffering and stress, write, *"We may not know what tests the Lord may have for us, but if we trust him all the way, we can be sure that what he has planned for us is good and not bad. Sometimes the ways in which he leads us may appear to be very strange, but the Lord sees everything from the beginning to end, while we can see only our own present and past."*

*When my understanding is perplexed by doubts or is on the point of giving up,  
when the most intelligent people see no further than this day's end  
and do not know what must be done tomorrow,  
You grant me the calm confidence that You exist.  
You will always provide one good path to follow ...  
From where I am now, I look back in wonder  
at the path which I alone could never have found,  
a wondrous path that led me through hopelessness and despair, to this point.  
After all I have been through,  
how good it is to live with You, O Lord.  
You have been so faithful,  
now how wonderful it is for me to believe in You.  
May I now help other people see the radiance of Your glory.  
And whatever I can share in this life, may it be You and You alone.  
Amen*

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, Soviet dissident  
(imprisoned in a Gulag, later exiled)

### **Monday, June 13: Hebrews 11:1-19**

"Faith" is hard to define. Perhaps the best definition we have is Hebrews 11:1:

- *"Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see"* (NIV).
- *"Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen"* (KJV).
- *"Faith is the confidence that what we hope for will actually happen; it gives us assurance about things we cannot see"* (NLT).
- *"The fundamental fact of existence is that this trust in God, this faith, is the firm foundation under everything that makes life worth living. It's our handle on what we can't see"* (The Message).

Perhaps it is easier to grasp "faith" by looking at case studies – living examples of faith in action. The author of Hebrews knows this, so he reminds us of faith-full people from the past. These examples may be familiar to you (you can find them in Genesis). In each case, the person was willing to step out and trust God, in faith. This was the kind of faith Abraham modelled. Am I willing to step out and trust God?

11:13-16 give us a glimpse into the inner life of these faithful people. What "makes them tick"?

They knew life here and now is not all there is. In fact, real life only begins once we are with our Lord. This is a very difficult perspective to cultivate and live out. Especially in relatively affluent, comfortable, and safe places like Canada (despite of global problems, inflation, and the stock market). Tertullian, an early Christian writer during brutal days of Roman persecution commented: *"If you are looking for heaven on earth you will never find it: you are a bit of a fool in the bargain as well if you think this is heaven."* We need to remember that our lives, here, are only a shadow of something so much better to come.

Imagine you're living in a desperately poor country. Life is hard – you and your family are hungry, sick, living in



squalid conditions. You know that one day (you don't know when) your visa application will be approved and you'll come to Canada and enjoy a home, health care, ample food, and safety. What would your perspective be? For the moment, you really are a "stranger and alien" in a place of suffering. But you know you're only there for a season. It's not all there is. There is something better to come. The hope of getting to Canada and a new beginning keeps you going.

In the same way, on a scale we cannot imagine, we need to remember life on earth is not all there is. This is only shadows. Something much, much better is ahead of us. The hope of being with Jesus can keep us going.

In the meantime, we can be confident knowing that, even when times are tough, our lives are safe in God's hands. We can hold onto earthly security and comfort a little less tightly, knowing this is not all there is. There is something infinitely more amazing to come. Keep going. Hang in there.

*Thank you, Lord, for being there for me.  
Thank you for allowing me to cry out to you in my times of need.  
It is amazing to me that the Lord of the Universe would take time to listen to me  
and to care about what I say.  
God, there are things happening around me right now that I do not understand.  
Some of these things make me feel weak, helpless, and afraid.  
Even in the midst of this, I know you are the Lord.  
I know every situation is in Your hands. I trust You.  
I pray for strength and for wisdom that I would be able to endure this situation  
and handle it in a way that would bring glory to Your name.  
In Jesus' name.  
Amen.*

## **Tuesday, June 14: Hebrews 11:20-40**

The list of faithful people goes on. You may know many of them. Some you may wish to look up.

- These were not "perfect" people. Joseph had pride issues. Moses was insecure. Rahab was a prostitute. Samson had many problems. David was an adulterer and murderer. God knows we're not perfect. He can still work powerfully through our lives **if** we are willing to trust in Him. How is that encouraging?
- By stepping out in faith, these folks' lives often got harder, not easier. God asked them to do challenging things (David taking on Goliath?). We like to think God's will for us is an easy, comfortable, financially successful, physically healthy, safe life, relaxing in a comfy chair, or by a pool in some tropical paradise. Where does the Bible promise that? It doesn't. These folks had to face lions, battles, assassination attempts, flames ... Being faithful may push us into difficult situations (ask any missionary). God may move us to stretch ourselves in ways that make us uncomfortable. He may make life quite "interesting" as He calls us to serve His Kingdom in different ways. Life may not be "easy," "comfortable," or "safe." It will be fulfilling. How is that challenging to you? Encouraging?
- Faith requires an eternal perspective on things (remember 11:13-16). The Bible promises God's strength, presence, and power to make it through all obstacles, but maybe not as "victory" or "success" **in this life**. Some of these godly folks were martyred for their faith. How do you feel about that?
- From this eternal perspective, we don't always "see" the fulfilment of God's promises in this life (reflect on 11:13 and 11:39-40). The effects of Abraham's faithfulness were only seen generations later. Abraham was promised a great nation. In his lifetime, he only saw one promised son, Isaac, and two troubled grandsons, Jacob and Esau. The effects of our faithfulness, like ripples on a pond, may go far beyond what we ever see in our lifetime. How is that helpful?

Nazi Concentration camp survivor, Corrie Ten Boom, advises, "Never be afraid to trust an unknown future to a known God." How can I live faithfully with God?

*Lord, because you have made me,  
I owe you all my love.  
Because you have redeemed me,  
I owe you all of myself.  
Because you have promised so much,  
I owe you all my being.  
Lord, please make me taste by love what I taste by knowledge.  
Let me know by love what I know by understanding.  
I owe you more than my whole self,  
but all I can give you is all that I am.  
Draw me to you, Lord, in the fullness of love.  
I am wholly yours by creation.  
Make me all yours, too, in love.  
Amen.*

Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109)

### Wednesday, June 15: John 3:1-21

"Faith" is intimately linked to "belief." Jesus' invitation, of course, is that we believe in Him – as our God and Saviour, and follow Him as our Lord. Try to read this familiar passage as if you were reading it for the first time.

- **Read these verses several times** "with the ear of your heart" – listen deeply to what God is saying to you. Listen for God's still small voice speaking to you. What phrase speaks to you the most? What themes resonate with your soul? Read slowly, attentively, listening to God ...
- **Ponder this in your heart.** Reflect on God's Word. Turn it over in your mind. Ruminates on it. Mull it over. What does it mean to you, today?
- **Pray.** As God has spoken to you, personally, offer your life – with all of the changes that need to happen – to God. "Lord, make this part of my life ..."
- **Rest.** Take a moment or two to thank God for transforming you through His word. If a special phrase or thought continues to resonate in your soul, celebrate it before God. Praise Him.

What did you notice in this passage which you may not have seen before?

How do you need to respond to God's love today?

*Our heavenly Father,  
we pray your blessing may rest on each of us who profess to be Christians.  
Lord, help us to love Christ more than we love ourselves.  
Help us to be more like him in our way of life.  
Help us, Lord, to walk humbly, prayerfully,  
consistently on, in the dust of our pilgrimage.  
May no one stumble over us and say,  
"They profess only, but they never do anything."  
God, help us to live up to what we profess.  
Give us compassion for our world.  
May we share the love of Christ with those around us,  
in Word, in Deed, in all ways.  
Amen*

D.L. Moody (1837-1899)

## Thursday, June 16: Matthew 16:13-19

Faith decisions are important milestones in our lives. Do you recall a significant spiritual decision you made? To accept Jesus as Saviour? To be baptized? To recommit your life to Him? To read Scripture more? To pray regularly? To try to read these devotions each morning?

Matthew 16 records such a moment in Peter's life. He knows who Jesus is. He genuinely has faith in Him as the Son of God, God among us. After all, Peter has given up his livelihood as a fisherman and a couple of years of his life to follow Jesus. True, Peter will struggle to live out his faith in difficult times. When Jesus is arrested, Peter will deny Jesus three times. He struggles as each of us would, if our lives were on the line ...

Have you made a decision to believe in Jesus as your Saviour, Lord, and God? If not, what is keeping you from it? Today you can make that decision. Simply pray, affirming your faith to Jesus, confessing your sinfulness, and praying for God's transforming presence. Personalize John 3:16 if you like: *"God, I believe that you loved the world so much that you gave your only Son, Jesus, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. Lord, I believe. Please forgive my sins. Help me to love you with all of my heart, mind, soul, and strength. And help me to live, faithfully, for you. Amen."* Tell someone about your decision. Call one of the pastors. Celebrate. The next step is to publicly affirm that through baptism ...

If you have already made that kind of personal faith decision, remember that time. Draw strength from the commitment you made. Remind yourself of your affirmation. Are you living up to the convictions you affirmed? Does your belief change the way you live your life? How can you keep growing in your faith?

Different traditions mark this time of personal decision in a variety of ways. In Baptist polity, we express our faith commitments through believer's baptism. When a person makes a decision to affirm Jesus as Saviour and to seek to follow Him as Lord, we encourage them to express that publicly through baptism. As they are baptized, people who feel comfortable share a testimony, a short summary of their faith journey. However, even if a person does not feel comfortable telling their story, simply answering "Yes" to the questions, *"Do you believe in Jesus as your Saviour? Do you seek to follow Jesus as your Lord?"* at their baptism is a wonderful witness and affirmation of their faith. In other churches, confirmation is a similar thing; it is an affirmation of personal faith.

Celebrate the new life you have in Jesus. Do you need to pray through your commitment to Him? Speak with Him openly and honestly about your desire to follow and obey Him.

*We are born in hope,  
Raised in hope,  
Nurtured in hope,  
Loved in hope,  
Comforted in hope,  
Suffer in hope,  
Endure in hope,  
Overcome in hope.  
Hope in the One who has endured all things,  
that we might know freedom.  
Hope in the One who has given us his Spirit,  
that we might have power.  
Hope in the One who has loved us beyond death,  
that we might have life.  
Hope in the One who prepares a place for us,  
that we might share eternity with him.  
For hope that endures, we thank you Lord,  
Amen.*

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## Friday, June 17: Galatians 5:16-26

- If I say I believe honesty is an important virtue, you should expect me to be honest.
- If I say I believe treating people fairly is right, you should expect me to treat people fairly.
- If I say I believe in Jesus as my Saviour and try to follow Him as Lord, then you should expect I would live differently than someone who doesn't. My faith in Him should shape my words, the choices I make, the ethics by which I live, my perspective on life and eternity, and so much more.

In reality, we always live up to what we **actually** believe, not necessarily what **we profess** we believe. In other words, we may **say** we believe in Jesus, but if we look at our lives, we really don't seem to live any differently than our neighbours who don't believe. What does that say about what we **actually** believe?

What about me? I can **profess** to believe all sorts of noble things. Do I **actually** live up to my beliefs?

One of my favourite TV characters is Father Mulcahy in the old sitcom, M\*A\*S\*H. It's about a frontline army hospital during the Korean War. Father Mulcahy, as a Christian character, is very different from others in the army hospital. Some of the differences are obvious. He is uncompromisingly moral amid the amoral chaos of the camp. He helps orphans. He provides wise Christian counsel. But other differences in Father Mulcahy are more subtle, reflecting a fundamental difference of character than others. Mulcahy models patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, and self-control (not qualities in most of the other characters).

Interestingly, those are all "fruit of the Spirit" (Galatians 5:22-23). Yes, Father Mulcahy is a chaplain who says the right Christian things. But what is more significant is how he **actually lives** his faith. His actions speak louder than his words (one of Mulcahy's memorable lines is, "*This isn't one of my sermons; I expect you to listen*"). Think about the fruit of the Spirit in your life ... are you becoming more and more

- Loving?
- Joyful and joy-giving?
- Peaceful and peace-making
- Patient?
- Kind?
- Good?
- Faithful?
- Gentle?
- Self-controlled?

Pray through each of these virtues. Ask God to help you grow in each of these "fruit" ...

*God of love, we pray you give us love.  
Love in our thinking, love in our speaking, love in our doing.  
Love in the hidden places of our souls.  
Love of our neighbours, near and far.  
Love of our friends, old and new.  
Love of those who we find it hard to bear.  
Love of those who find it hard to bear with us.  
Love of those with whom we work.  
Love of those with whom we take our ease.  
Love in joy, love in sorrow.  
Love in life and love in death.  
In the end, may we be worthy to dwell with you, who are eternal love –  
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – forever and ever.  
Amen.*

William Temple (1881-1944)

## Saturday, June 18: Genesis 24:1-27

As a child of the '70's, one of the great rock anthems was by the band Nazareth: *"Love hurts, love scars, love wounds and marks any heart not tough or strong enough to take a lot of pain. Love is like a cloud, holds a lot of rain. Love is just a lie made to make you blue. Love hurts."* Ouch. We can get cynical about love ...

In the Old Testament, romance/love was different than today. This story is an "arranged marriage." How would we feel about that in 2022? Where's the "love"? From our perspective, the emotion of "being in love" is an important, valued part of marriage. In many arranged marriages, love grew as the couple grew in their relationship. In time, Isaac and Rebekah, do (I believe) sincerely grow to love one another. But marriage is not all about emotion, of course. It's also about covenant, commitment, decisions, and loving words and actions.

Without becoming too clinical, consider some of the things that go into making this marriage work:

- Isaac's wife should be someone from his own "people," not a Canaanite. This is not about race. It is a religious concern. The Canaanites worshipped Baal, Dagan, and fertility goddesses (which led to religious prostitution). Abraham suspects if Isaac marries a Canaanite he will be led away from worship of the true God. For us, too, it is easier if we are married to someone who shares our faith in Jesus. There are extra challenges in a marriage if a couple don't share the same faith. That's not to say that such marriages cannot be good; they do have extra challenges. A marriage between two sincere Christians is based on a common set of values, worldview, ethics, which, in general, helps in marriage.
- The servant prays for wisdom in selecting a wife for Isaac. Praying is a good thing. Pray always, about everything. If you are not yet married, pray about a potential spouse. If you have kids, pray about your children's spouses-to-be (or grandchildren's/nieces'/nephews'/friends'/friends' kids' spouses-to-be). God is actively involved in the "match-making" business. He is also in the business of calling some people to singleness. Pray for those who are single, too. Pray for your single friends and married friends.
- Rebekah displays wonderful qualities of character. She could have ignored the servant. She could have treated him poorly, as a free woman could treat a slave. She could have given him the jar so he could get his own water. But she treats the slave with dignity and respect. She even serves him by getting him and his camel's water. For a good marriage, people need to treat one another with mutual dignity, respect, and a willingness to serve one another.

Pray for a married couple you know. Pray for a dating couple you know. Pray for a single person you know (marriage is not God's plan for everyone). Pray for a young person you know. Pray for a widow(er) you know. *"Always be joyful. Never stop praying. Be thankful in all circumstances"* (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18).

*O God our Father,  
help us all through this day so to live that we may bring help to others.  
May we bring joy to those that love us, and to you.  
Help us to be cheerful when things go wrong.  
Persevering when things are difficult.  
Serene when things are irritating.  
Enable us to be helpful to those in difficulties.  
Be kind to those in need.  
Sympathetic to those whose hearts are sore and sad.  
Grant that nothing may make us lose our tempers.  
May nothing take away our joy.  
May nothing ruffle our peace.  
May nothing make us bitter towards anyone.  
This we ask for your love's sake.  
Amen.*

William Barclay (1907-1978)

**Sunday, June 19 (Father's Day): Genesis 24:28-67**  
**One service at 10 a.m. from today until September 11**

Stanford University professor, Carol Dweck, has examined whether people believe academic ability is fixed and cannot change, or whether they see their abilities as something that can grow with practice. In general, people with a "destiny mindset" are fatalistic and believe you cannot change over time. People with "growth mindsets" see possibilities for improvement. They are keen to take on new challenges. They are better able to handle setbacks. Attempts to promote the growth mindset, applied in a supportive educational environment, seem to increase students' overall achievement. When they are inspired with hope, struggling children advance and grow.

Inspired by Dweck's findings, psychologists have explored the role of mindsets in many other outcomes, including people's health and fitness behaviour, passion in the workplace, and the strength of their romantic relationships.

For instance, if you have a "romantic destiny mindset," you may agree with statements such as: "Potential relationship partners are either compatible or not," "Relationships that don't start well inevitably fail," "There is only one 'right' person for me." You may believe in love at first sight. In contrast, if you have a "romantic growth mindset," you might see love as something that blossoms as you get to know each other. You're more likely to agree with statements such as "The ideal relationship develops gradually over time," "Challenges in a relationship can make love stronger," and "If you commit to relationship and work at it, it can thrive."

Mindsets are important. If we see God as distant and remote, the world as evil, threatening, and going to hell in a handbasket, these attitudes effect how we feel, talk, and live. We may have little hope for the world. We can write people off. We can withdraw. We can give up.

If we believe God is active in our world and He calls us to pray His "*kingdom come and His will be done on earth as it is in heaven*," those beliefs have real consequences for our lives. We have hope. We tell people about Jesus. We try to make the world a better place, in the name of Jesus, today and every day.

Rebekah, Isaac, the servant, and their families all live in hard times. Dangerous times. Evil times. Yet they have a growth mindset. They see God at work in their lives. They have no idea what the future will bring, but they step forward in hope. In faith. They are willing to move ahead, believing God will provide a way forward.

What about me? What's my mindset? Do I believe God is at work in our world? In my life? In our church? How then should I live?

*O God, Our Father, we know our own weaknesses.  
Our minds are darkened, and by ourselves we cannot find and know the truth.  
Our wills are weak, and by ourselves we cannot resist temptation.  
We cannot bring to completion that which we resolve to do.  
Our hearts are fickle, and by ourselves we cannot give to you the loyalty which is your due.  
Our steps are faltering, and by ourselves we cannot walk in your straight way.  
So this day we ask you to enlighten us and strengthen us.  
Guide us, that we may know you, love you, and follow you all the days of our life.  
Fill us with hope.  
Fill us with joy.  
Fill us with love.  
Give to your Church your blessing and protection.  
Guide us in our thinking, that we may walk in faith.  
Strengthen us in our witness, that we may be people of Good News.  
Inspire us in our fellowship, that those who enter may find your love  
genuinely lived out in the lives of us all.  
Amen.*

William Barclay (1907-1978)

## Monday, June 20: Matthew 19:1-12

Many people get married (ideally led to do so by God). Some people do not (ideally led to do so by God). There is no sense in Scripture that marriage is "better" or "worse" than singleness (Matthew 19:10-12 is ambiguous). Jesus was single. Paul was single. Several of the other apostles and early church leaders may (or may not) have been single (it's unclear). Other people are married. Some happily. Some ... not.

For those who are led into committed relationships, marriage is the norm. Abraham is married to (not just living with) Sarah. Isaac marries (doesn't just live with) Rebekah. Joseph marries Mary. Nowhere in Scripture is "living together" (outside the context of marriage) condoned by God.

Intimate sexuality is reserved for a marriage relationship. Isaac and Rebekah did not have sexual relations until after their marriage (the phrase "*he loved her*" in Genesis 24:67, used after their marriage, has sexual connotations). Nowhere in Scripture are sexual relations outside the context of marriage approved.

Of course, people can (and do) fall short of God's standard in all sorts of ways, including sexual purity. If we do get sexually involved outside marriage, God can forgive us and help us move on. But He cannot erase the memories or restore our virginity. Sex, outside of marriage, can be an obstacle to work through when we do find the person we want to marry. If we fall short, it's not the unforgiveable sin. God can help us move on.

Marriage is intended to be for life. But people can (and do) fall short of God's standard for marriage. Divorce is not the unforgiveable sin. In a fallen world, among fallen people, it happens. God can forgive and help us move on from this, too. But He cannot erase the memories or all vestiges of pain; there are always scars. He can bring us through those hard places, as well. God can always help us move on.

Human relationships are tough, tough, tough. If you are married, pray for your spouse and your marriage. Or pray for someone you know who is married and having a difficult time. Don't be judgmental of those who are struggling. Find ways to encourage them to find God, even in the midst of their challenges.

Being single is tough, too. Especially in churches where the cultural "norm" is that everyone should get married, it can be difficult to be single. Pray for singles you know.

We all need good friends. If you're single, pray for good friends. If you're married, pray for good friends.

What makes a "good" friendship "good"? How can you be a good friend to someone you know?

*May I become, always, both now and forever  
a protector for those without protection.  
A guide for those who've lost their way.  
A ship for those with oceans to cross.  
A bridge for those with rivers to traverse.  
A sanctuary for those in danger.  
A lamp for those without light.  
A place of refuge for those who lack shelter.  
An encouragement for those who are discouraged.  
and a servant to all in need.  
Amen.*

## Tuesday, June 21: 1 Corinthians 7:1-16

We read 1 Corinthians earlier this year. Today we'll review a little bit, because Paul has lots to say about marriage and sexuality in that letter. Remember this is a LETTER, part of an ongoing conversation between Paul and people in a specific church. What we call 1 Corinthians is actually Paul's second letter to them (see 1

Corinthians 5:9). Our 1 Corinthians is Paul's answer to a letter he had received from Corinth (1 Corinthians 16:17). The Corinthians had asked Paul several questions about church order, theology, and life in general.

In the first six chapters of 1 Corinthians, Paul deals with reports of problems in Corinth: the church was divided (chapters 1-4); there were reports of incest, lawsuits, and prostitution (chapters 5-6). Then, in 1 Corinthians 7:1, Paul switches gears: "*Now for the matters you wrote about ...*" In the next few chapters, Paul will talk about marriage and sexuality, food sacrificed to idols, worship, the Lord's Supper, spiritual gifts, and resurrection.

The Corinthians had questions about these things. Paul is setting out to answer them. 1 Corinthians 7:1:

- "*Now for the matters you wrote about: It is good for a man not to marry*" (footnote: Or "*It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman*" (original NIV).
- "*Now concerning the things whereof ye wrote unto me: It is good for a man not to touch a woman*" (KJV).
- "*Now regarding the questions you asked in your letter. Yes, it is good to abstain from sexual relations*" (NLT).

The second half of the phrase literally reads (in Greek) "*it is good for a man not to touch a woman*" – in Greek the phrase "*to touch a woman*" is a synonym for sexual relations. So the phrase literally does mean, "*It is good for a man not have sexual relations with a woman.*" The NIV footnote is absolutely correct; the original NIV translation is misleading. This is not about marriage. At the same time the literal English translation "*to touch a woman*" does not accurately convey the meaning. The Greek phrase has clear sexual overtones.

The bigger question is this:

- Is it **Paul** saying, "*It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman*"? (Should even married people avoid sexual relations? Is celibacy best?).
- Or is he quoting what **the Corinthians** had written? Were **the Corinthians** saying "*It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman*" (were the Corinthians were arguing for celibacy and even abstinence for married people?). Is Paul responding to "*the matters they had written about ...*"?

Unfortunately, in Greek there are no punctuation marks. It makes a difference if we read it: "*Now for the matters you wrote about: It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman*" (Paul teaching this) or "*Now for the matters you wrote about: 'It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman'*" (the Corinthians saying this). Commentators work hard to figure this kind of thing out.

Reading ALL of 1 Corinthians 7, it is **some of the Corinthians** saying **all** sexual relations – even amongst married people – ought to stop. Not Paul. There appears to have been two extremes in the church in Corinth:

1. those who argue "*everything is permissible for me*" (see 6:12) including sexual amorality (Corinth was a city with a lot of sexual promiscuity [not unlike our culture]. Paul is opposed to sexual relations outside the context of marriage. In 1 Corinthians 6:12-20, he rails against those who believed in no sexual morality (including visiting prostitutes, the accepted "religious culture" in Corinth).
2. those who taught that all sexuality is evil. Therefore, even those who're married should abstain for any sexual relations. They should separate or get divorced so they can stay "pure." All sex is evil.

In Chapter 6, Paul spoke to the first group. In Chapter 7, Paul is speaking to this second group. In the verses that follow, Paul is not anti-marriage. He is not anti-sex-within-marriage. In fact, he encourages married couples to have a healthy sexual relationship and **discourages** abstinence within marriage. Marriage, with a healthy sexual component, is great. Healthy sexual relations are part of God's plan for a healthy marriage.

But Paul is ambivalent about which is better: marriage or singleness. He is not negative toward singleness. He is not negative towards marriage, either. Neither is he negative toward sexual relations within marriage.



Are you single? It may well *"be good to stay unmarried"* (v.8). But marriage is good too. If you are married, work at making your marriage the best that it can be. Continue to pray for single and married folks you know.

*With great devotion  
we pray that we may be servants of Jesus in all we do.  
May we console others, with Christ the consoler.  
May we share God's love, with Christ the redeemer.  
May we bring hope, with Christ the healer,  
the liberator,  
the enricher,  
the strengthener.  
Through you, may we, your church, help many.  
May we console, liberate, and give them courage.  
May we bring light not only for their spirit  
but also for their bodies.  
May we be blessing to each and every one of our neighbours.  
We ask this through Christ our Lord.  
Amen.*

Pierre Favre (1506-1546)

### **Wednesday, June 22: Mark 12:28-34**

Of all God's commandments, which is the most important? If you were to answer off the top of your head, without reading Mark 12:28-34 first, how would you answer?

If you were to ask people on the streets of Lethbridge, how do you think they would answer?

This is a familiar passage. It speaks to our relationship with God. Throughout the Bible, relationship with God is described as a covenant. The old covenant was God's promise *"I will be your God and you shall be my people"* (Genesis 17:7). God made this promise, expecting His people to be faithful to Him in return. They failed.

God established a new covenant through Jesus. God still promises to be our God. But He also saves us from our sin and faithlessness. He demonstrates His love for us through the death of Jesus. He removes all barriers between Himself and us. Through the gift of the Holy Spirit, He empowers us to live more faithfully for Him. He realistically makes it possible for us to be His people, by saving us, forgiving us, and filling us with His Spirit.

He still calls us to faithful living. But when we fail, we are forgiven. We are blessed with the ongoing, personal presence of His Holy Spirit. He never leaves us.

The covenant God establishes with us is not unlike the covenant of marriage. Just as a wife and husband pledge their covenant promises to love each other unconditionally, God covenants to love us unconditionally. He invites us to make the same commitment to Him. Of course, God can – and will – keep **His** side of the covenant. There is no doubt of that. We are not always so faithful. But just as (in a good marriage) both spouses **try** to do the best for one another, we do our best to love God with all our heart, mind soul, and strength.

Will you make this commitment to God: *You are my God, whom I will have and hold from this day forward, for better or for worse, for richer or for poorer, in sickness and in health, in joy and in sorrow. I promise to love you and cherish you and to be faithful to you alone. I promise, to the best of my ability, to love you, honor you, and keep you as my God through all the circumstances of life, and forsaking all other gods, keep only to you as long as I shall live?*

How does that kind of commitment shape the way you live, today?

*Father, we come into your presence in prayer and praise.  
 We thank you for our health and happiness,  
 for forgiveness and healing,  
 for our talents,  
 and for our friends.  
 We thank you for the wonderful world you have given us  
 to explore and to use to your greater glory.  
 We thank you for the gift of Jesus Christ, your Son,  
 who died that we might have life and live it to the full.*

*Send your Spirit to accompany us on our daily journey.  
 Give us wisdom that we may find you in all things.  
 Give us understanding that we may learn from your Word and your world.  
 Give us compassion that we may show your face to those we meet.  
 Give us generosity that we may share the gifts you have given us.  
 Give us faith that we may have confidence in ourselves.  
 Above all give us love that we may bring joy into the lives of those around us.  
 We ask this through Christ our Lord.  
 Amen.*

#### **Thursday, June 23: Ephesians 5:21-33**

These are verses with which we may struggle. They seem to imply a hierarchy within marriage which makes us uncomfortable. If we read the **whole** section carefully, there actually is a profound equality and mutuality in this passage. **Both** husbands and wives are called to **mutual** sacrificial love, one for another.

Remember this was written in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century. Women had no rights and no vote (not for 1900 more years!). Women could not testify in a court of law. A Roman wife could not leave her home without a male escort. A man could divorce his wife for any reason at all, but a woman could not initiate a divorce no matter what. Women were not “real” people. Paul’s teaching about mutual submission was RADICAL teaching 2000 years ago. It’s radical teaching in much of the world still (tragically, including some Christian churches).

5:21 is the place to start: “Submit to **one another** ...” There is mutuality here. The same thing – submission to one another – is expected of **both** wives and husbands. “... *out of reverence for Christ.*” We do this because we love Jesus. We want to follow His model of sacrificial love for us in our relationships with one another.

Paul has **three** sentences to say to wives. He encourages them to love their husbands with all their hearts, minds, souls, and strength as they love the Lord. Think about the metaphor he uses. The church is called to love God, seeking God’s best and the growth of His kingdom. The church is to be Christ-centred, or it is in trouble. In the same way, wives are called to love their husbands, seeking their best and their welfare. A wife cannot be self-centred, or the relationship is in trouble.

Paul has **seven** sentences to say to husbands. Because Paul’s culture is so patriarchal, he is emphasizing the radical new type of marriage relationship that ought to exist in the kingdom of God. He challenges men to love their wives as sacrificially as Jesus loves us, the church. How much does Jesus love His people? He loves us so much He was willing to take upon Himself our sins and the punishment we deserve. He is willing to endure horrible suffering and pain for us. He gives His all, giving His life for our sake. As a husband, am I willing to love my wife like that? Am I willing to give myself – emotionally, mentally, physically – to love, care for, and do the best for my wife? Am I willing to give my all to my spouse? To suffer for her? To die for her? A husband cannot be self-centered either: following Jesus’ example, a husband’s priority is the welfare of his wife.

Marriage is not about power. It is about loving, self-sacrificing service. For husbands, the call of marriage is to loving, self-sacrificing service. For wives the call is to loving, self-sacrificing loving service. While Paul uses

different metaphors to describe what this looks like in each case, the bottom-line is the same: "*submit to **one another** out of reverence for Christ.*" Real power is the power of self-giving, sacrificial love. That is the power Jesus modeled. That is the power He encourages us to cultivate in our marriages.

In fact, this is great advice for all relationships – if you are not married, widowed, single, whatever – the maxim, "*submit to one another out of reverence for Christ,*" is always the best approach. When we seek the best for our friends, parents, kids, colleagues at work, classmates, etc., we discover the joy of living Jesus' way. And we discover that there really is a transformative power that comes by love.

Alfred Lord Tennyson once wrote, "*More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of.*" There is a lot of truth to his words. It would be just as true to say, "*More things are wrought by love than this world dreams of*" ... including great relationships. Who can you love, in the name of Jesus, today?

*Lord, as we go to our work this day,  
help us notice your presence within it.  
May we take pleasure in your presence with us.  
Show us clearly what our duty is,  
and help us to be faithful in doing it.  
May all we do be well done, working as if we were serving you.  
Give us enthusiasm to attempt and patience to perform.  
When we cannot love our work,  
may we think of it as a task offered to you.  
Make what is unlovely beautiful through loving service,  
done in the name of Jesus.  
Amen*

George Dawson (1821-1876)

### **Friday, June 24: 1 Corinthians 13**

This is one of the most familiar passages in the Bible. We often read it at weddings. In fact, it was not written about romantic love at all. While 1 Corinthians 13 works just fine for weddings and is a great description of the kind of love to which married people ought to aspire, it was not originally written about marriage. It was actually written to describe the ideal for all relationships, between all believers in the church.

Look back at 1 Corinthians 12: "*Now about spiritual gifts ...*" (remember, 1 Corinthians is a letter in which Paul is answering questions believers in the Corinthian church have about different issues – in chapter 7 it was marriage and celibacy – now it is about gifts). Peek ahead to chapter 14: "*eagerly desire spiritual gifts ...*"

1 Corinthians 13 is about how we live as God's people – a community of people with spiritual gifts which God gives us "*to equip God's people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ. This will continue until we all come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God's Son that we will be mature in the Lord, measuring up to the full and complete standard of Christ*" (Ephesians 4:12-13).

1 Corinthians 13 describes the kind of love we ought to have for one another in the church. How are you doing on each of these characteristics?

Richard McBrien encourages me to pause and reflect: "*If **love** is the soul of Christian existence, it must be at the heart of every other Christian virtue. Thus, for example,*

- *justice without love is legalism;*
- *faith without love is ideology;*
- *hope without love is self-centeredness;*
- *forgiveness without love is self-abasement;*

- *fortitude without love is recklessness;*
- *generosity without love is extravagance;*
- *care without love is mere duty;*
- *fidelity without love is servitude.*

*Every virtue is an expression of love. No virtue is really a virtue unless it is permeated, or informed, by love."*

Reread 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 slowly, reflectively, prayerfully. Does love – 1 Corinthians 13 kind of love – permeate me life? How can I make that happen?

*One night a man had a dream.  
He dreamed he was walking along the beach with the LORD.  
Across the sky flashed scenes from his life.  
For each scene he noticed two sets of footprints in the sand:  
one belonging to him, and the other to the LORD.  
When the last scene of his life flashed before him, he looked back at the footprints in the sand.  
He noticed that many times along the path of his life there was only one set of footprints.  
He also noticed that it happened at the very lowest and saddest times in his life.  
This really bothered him and he questioned the LORD about it:  
"LORD, you said that once I decided to follow you, you'd walk with me all the way.  
But I have noticed that during the most troublesome times in my life,  
there is only one set of footprints.  
I don't understand why when I needed you most you would leave me."  
The LORD replied:  
"My son, my precious child, I love you and I would never leave you.  
During your times of trial and suffering,  
when you see only one set of footprints,  
it was then that I carried you."  
Amen*

attributed to Mary Stevenson (1922-1999)

### **Saturday, June 25: Genesis 23**

Abraham and Sarah had a pretty good marriage. Neither was perfect. Abraham made mistakes: he had his moments of doubts, fearfulness, and downright stupidity that compromised Sarah's safety (Genesis 12:10-13, 16, 20:1-2). But Abraham clearly loved God with his whole heart. He clearly loved Sarah, too.

Sarah, too, had her moments of doubt (Genesis 18:12). At times, she is mean-spirited and vindictive (Genesis 16:5, 21:9-10). But she also loved God with her whole heart (Genesis 21:6). She loved Abraham, as well.

Who knows how many years they were married – a lot. No wonder Abraham mourned and wept when she died (23:2). *"A happy marriage is the union of two good forgivers,"* says Robert Quillen. That would be true of all relationships – not just marriage: *"Any good friendship is the fellowship of two good forgivers"*

Mother Teresa has much to teach about living a life of love: *"Do not imagine that love must be extraordinary to be true. No, what we need in our love is the continuity to love the One we love. See how a lamp burns, by the continual consumption of little drops of oil. If there are no more of those drops in a lamp, there will be no light. What are those drops of oil in our lamps? They are the little things of everyday life: fidelity, the words of kindness, just a little thought for others, those little acts of silence, of look and thought, of word and deed.*

*"We must reach the heart. To reach the heart we must do – love is proved in deeds. People are more attracted by what they see than by what they hear. Come and see; come and do – the reality is more attractive than the abstract idea."*

Are there ways you can live your love in the little things of everyday life? To live your love in deeds?

*My soul glorifies the Lord,  
my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour.  
For he has blessed me lavishly  
and makes me ready to respond.  
He shatters my little world  
and lets me be poor before him.  
He takes from me all my plans  
and gives me more than I can hope for or ask.  
He gives me opportunities and the ability to become free  
and to burst through my boundaries.  
He gives the strength to be doing, to build on him alone,  
for he shows himself as the ever greater One in my life.  
He has made known to me this:  
It is in my being servant that it becomes possible.  
For God's kingdom to break through here and now.  
Amen*

Translated from German by Olga Warnke

### **Sunday, June 26: Genesis 25:1-11**

There is always a twinge of sadness when someone dies, even when they have lived a rich, full, and fulfilling life. However, there can also be a sense of profound joy and celebration. *"Abraham died at a ripe old age, having lived a long and satisfying life. He breathed his last and joined his ancestors in death ..."*

Abraham was not a perfect person. He tried to live faithfully with and obey God. But he stumbled now and then. Yet, at the end of his life, despite his blunders along the way, there is a profound sense of peace in his passing.

Abraham had a hard life. He was uprooted from his own country, and endured famines, travels, betrayals, dangers, disappointments, wars, and tests. Through it all he grew in his faith (true, often taking one step backward for every two steps forward).

He looked forward to *"a better place, a heavenly homeland"* (Hebrews 11:16). I almost sense a sigh of relief as he dies. In this fallen world, life is hard. Our bodies falter and fail. Difficulties come. Abraham models for us a faith that recognizes that, in the end, there is something much better than life as we now know it ...

Although death is an enemy (originally God did not intend for humanity to die), it has been overcome through the death and triumphant resurrection of Jesus. We do not need to fear death. It serves God's purpose of taking to Himself those who believe in Him. We can face death with God's peace; He is with us even through that dark valley and will lead us, through death, to eternal life with Himself. We are free of sickness and pain. We have life – full life with Jesus. Life as it was meant to be.

*Almighty, eternal, just, and merciful God,  
grant us the grace to do for You alone what we know You want us to do.  
May we always desire what pleases You.  
May we follow in the footprints of Your beloved Son,  
our Lord Jesus Christ,  
inwardly cleansed, enlightened, and inflamed by the fire of the Holy Spirit,  
By Your grace alone, may we make our way to You, Most High,  
Who live and rule in perfect Trinity and simple Unity,  
and are glorified God all-powerful forever and ever.  
Amen.*

## Monday, June 27: Genesis 25:19-34

Comedian Jeff Foxworthy once said, *"If you ever start feeling like you have the goofiest, craziest, most dysfunctional family in the world, all you have to do is go to a state fair. Because five minutes at the fair, you'll be going, 'You know, we're alright. We're dang near royalty.'"* You don't have to go to a state fair (or Whoop-Up Days) to see goofy, crazy, dysfunctional families. Just read Genesis (or any other biblical book).

We sometimes think the Bible only describes perfect people. So we wonder if God's Word really is relevant to our lives. After all, we're not perfect. In fact, most of the people in Scripture, including most of those "heroes of the faith" we read about in Hebrews 11 a few weeks ago, are far from perfect. Yet God is able to build His Kingdom through these "interesting" people, despite their goofiness, craziness, and dysfunction.

Isaac and Rebekah's family is certainly goofy, crazy, and dysfunctional. We never read that God approves of Jacob's shenanigans. Jacob can be downright evil. But God's will **IS** done DESPITE Jacob's bad choices.

Musician Rich Mullins, writes, *"I think that of all the diseases in the world, the disease that all humankind suffers from, the disease that is most devastating to us is not AIDS, it's not gluttony, it's not cancer, it's not any of those things. It is the disease that comes about because we live in ignorance of the wealth of love that God has for us and the wealth of love we are to show to one another."*

Despite our "issues," how can we love one another in the name of Jesus?

*Father in heaven,  
you have given us a mind to know you,  
a will to serve you,  
and a heart to love you.  
Be with us today in all that we do,  
so that your light may shine out in our lives.  
When our time comes to leave this life and be with you forevermore,  
may our legacy be one of faithful service to you, our God and King.  
Through Christ our Lord.  
Amen.*

Thomas More (1478-1535)

## Tuesday, June 28: 1 Corinthians 15:1-12

Back to 1 Corinthians. Remember Paul is dealing with some of the questions and issues that are causing problems in the church. He has answered questions about marriage/celebrity, spiritual gifts, and worship. We read this passage back in April, just after Easter. It is good to review it again.

An issue causing controversy in the Corinthian church is around death and the resurrection of the dead. Paul asks, *"Why are some of you saying there will be no resurrection of the dead?"* (15:12). People seem to believe in the resurrection of Jesus (15:1-2, 11), but are struggling to believe in the resurrection of the rest of us who believe in Jesus. Paul wants us to know there is resurrection life for all who believe. This is an essential part of the good news we have through Jesus.

He begins by emphasizing the historical fact of the resurrection of Jesus. As we remember every Easter season, Jesus did rise from the dead. There were plenty of witnesses to the resurrection. As Paul was writing this letter, many of those people were still alive. The Corinthians could send investigative journalists to find them. The evidence for Jesus' resurrection was beyond dispute.

The same is true today. The evidence for Jesus' resurrection is still convincing (read Lee Strobel's *The Case for Christ* or *The Case for the Real Jesus*, or Josh McDowell's *Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, or – for a more

academic challenge – try William Lane Craig’s *Assessing the New Testament Evidence for the Historicity of the Resurrection of Jesus* or N.T. (Tom) Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*.

Our God has power over everything – even death. At some point in our lives, we all face our own mortality. Like Abraham, we will *"breathe our last and join our ancestors in death,"* but we also know that we have life – everlasting life with Jesus – thanks to His death and resurrection. For us, death is not the end. It is the doorway to something greater.

At the end of C.S. Lewis’ *Narnia* series, Aslan (the Jesus-character) says to his friends, *"There WAS a real railway accident. Your father and mother and all of you are – as you used to say in the Shadow-lands (our reality) – dead. The school term is over. The holidays have begun. The dream has ended. This is the morning.*

*"And as He spoke ... the things that happened were so great and beautiful that I cannot write them. And for us this the end of all the stories and we can most truly say that they all lived happily ever after. But for them it was only the beginning of the real story. All their life in this world and all their adventures in Narnia had only been the cover and the title page: now at last they were beginning Chapter One of the Great Story, which no one on earth has read: which goes on for ever: in which every chapter is better than the one before ..."*

Real life hasn’t begun yet. We look forward to Chapter One of the Great Story which goes on for ever ...

*Lord, may nothing separate me from You today.  
Teach me how to choose only Your way today  
so each step leads me closer to You.  
Help me walk by your Word and not my feelings.  
Help me to keep my heart pure and undivided.  
Protect me from my own careless thoughts, words, and actions.  
Keep me from being distracted by MY wants, MY desires,  
MY thoughts on how things should be.  
Help me to embrace what comes my way as an opportunity ...  
rather than a personal inconvenience.  
Help me to rest in the truth of Psalm 86:13, 'Great is your love toward me.'  
You already see the ways I will fall short and mess up.  
I consciously tuck Your whisper of absolute love for me into the deepest part of my heart.  
I recognize Your love for me is not based on my performance.  
You love me warts and all.  
That's amazing.  
But what's most amazing is that the Savior of the world would desire a few minutes with me today.  
Lord, help me to forever remember what a gift it is to sit with You like this.  
Amen.*

Lysa Terkeurst

### **Wednesday, June 29: 1 Corinthians 15:12-34**

Paul’s argument proceeds along these lines ...

*"If the dead are not raised*

- *then Christ has not been raised either.*
- *your faith is futile; you are still in your sins.*
- *Those who have fallen asleep (died) in Christ are lost.*
- *If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men.*
- *'Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.'"*

Without God – without the resurrection—our faith is misplaced. Life is empty. It’s hopeless. We’re helpless.

But think about the alternative ... if there **IS** a resurrection

- *then Christ has been raised – in victory and glory.*
- *your faith is NOT futile; your sins are forgiven.*
- *Those who have died in Christ are NOT lost but are in His presence, eternally.*
- *Our faith is not only about this life, but we live in the certain hope of eternal life with God.*
- *It's not just a case of 'Eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.' Today has meaning and purpose – to love and serve God; to share His love with others; to bless others. And tomorrow has even more potential – as we anticipate a glorious reunion with God and with our loved ones.*

Death is doorway to an amazing future with God. That is something to look forward to.

But the certain hope of the resurrection also gives purpose today. We are called to God's mission of bringing hope, healing, love, and care to this broken world. "Eat, drink and be merry" is too shallow a creed by which to live a meaningful life. We have a deeper purpose: to make the world a better place in Jesus' name.

*"Love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength' and 'Love your neighbour as yourself."*  
Those are convictions worth living – and dying – for.

- How can I love God with all MY heart, mind, soul, and strength, today?
- How can I love my neighbour, in the name of Jesus, today?

*Most holy God, give each of us a pure heart.  
May our living and speaking shine out the faith we profess.  
Give us right purpose.  
Powers of reasoning unhindered by passions.  
Conduct that suits those who love You.  
Knowledge of Your commandments.  
Wisdom to apply them to our lives.  
Love for all people.*

*May we enjoy health in body and in spirit.  
Grant us a life of peace,  
genuine faith, living hope,  
sincere charity, bountiful generosity,  
patience that knows no bounds,  
and the light of Your truth.  
Forever and in all things, may we place our trust only in You.  
May we abound in every good work.  
For to You belong all glory, honor and majesty,  
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,  
now and ever and unto ages of ages.  
Amen.*

#### **Thursday, June 30: 1 Corinthians 15:35-58**

John Donne (1572-1631), Dean of St. Paul's Cathedral, London, wrapped himself in his funeral shroud to pose for a portrait. He then hung this morbid picture on his wall to remind himself of the transience of life. He wanted to remember that life, here and now, is not all there is. Donne may have been a bit eccentric (even by seventeenth century standards), but he does have a point: this life is not all there is. Resurrection is something to look forward to. Donne's most famous poem builds on Paul's words to the Corinthians:



*Death, be not proud, though some have called thee  
Mighty and dreadful, for thou art not so;  
For those whom thou think'st thou dost overthrow,  
Die not, poor Death, nor yet canst thou kill me.  
From rest and sleep, which but thy pictures be,  
Much pleasure; then from thee much more must flow,  
And soonest our best men with thee do go,  
Rest of their bones, and soul's delivery.  
Thou art slave to fate, chance, kings, and desperate men,  
And dost with poison, war, and sickness dwell;  
And poppy or charms can make us sleep as well  
And better than thy stroke; why swell'st thou then?  
One short sleep past, we wake eternally,  
And death shall be no more; Death, thou shalt die.*

(Note, people in Donne's day pictured death as a person ('the Grim Reaper'). But Donne argues that death is nothing. Death has no real power. God is the really powerful One. For Donne, rest and sleep are "pictures" of death: if rest and sleep are pleasant, how much more enjoyable must resurrection-life be?)

The Bible doesn't answer all our questions or tell us everything we want to know about death, heaven, or our resurrection bodies. We do know we will have physical bodies, we will recognize one another, and our bodies will be perfect, without sickness or disease. Resurrection life is pictured as a feast. That's enough for me.

There is a danger that we can become "*so heavenly minded that we are no earthly good*" – but the opposite danger also exists – we can be "*so earthly minded we are not heavenly good.*" The tension we are called to live in is holding loosely to our lives here on earth (so we are not obsessed with comforts and pleasures here) recognizing we are truly citizens of heaven. At the same time, we are called to be God's hands, feet, and witnesses in our world. We are committed to serving our broken world and needy people.

- How can I live out Paul words to "*be strong and immovable*"?
- How can I live out Paul words to "*always work enthusiastically for the Lord, knowing that nothing you do for the Lord is ever useless*"?

*O Lord, help us meet this day in peace.  
Help us rely upon Your holy will.  
Give us peace, knowing Your will governs all.  
In each hour of every day, reveal Your will to us.  
Bless our dealings with all who surround us.  
Teach us to treat all who come to us throughout the day with love.  
In all our deeds and words, guide our thoughts and feelings.  
In unforeseen events, let us not forget that you are with us.  
Teach us to act firmly and wisely, with love and grace.  
Give us the strength to bear the challenges of the day, filled with your Spirit.  
Direct our wills.  
Teach us to pray.  
Be our Lord.  
Be our Saviour.  
Amen.*

### **Friday, July 1 (Canada Day): Psalm 80**

Psalm 80 is a "national psalm." It is a prayer on behalf of an entire country. The nation (Israel) had fallen away from God. The psalmist comes as an intercessor, praying on behalf of his people ...

Have you ever prayed for our country? Do you pray for our government?

It is a good thing to pray for nation and for our leaders. Writing to Timothy, Paul says, *"I urge you, first of all, to pray for all people. Ask God to help them. Intercede on their behalf. Give thanks for them. Pray this way for **kings and all who are in authority** so that we can live peaceful and quiet lives marked by godliness and dignity. This is good and pleases God our Saviour, who wants everyone to be saved and to understand the truth"* (1 Timothy 2:1-4). Paul wrote this when Nero, the epitome of evil, was emperor in Rome.

What can you pray for Canada? Psalm 80:18-19 are a good place to start: *"Revive us so we can call on your name once more. Turn us again to yourself, O LORD God of Heaven's Armies. Make your face shine down upon us. Only then will we be saved."*

The National House of Prayer in Ottawa has these prayer suggestions:

#### **What to pray for, for the nation**

- Pray that Canada will be a country that honours and serves God.
- Pray that Canada will be a nation which demonstrates righteousness, justice, compassion, and generosity.
- Pray that the Holy Spirit will bring a spirit of individual and national repentance across our land.
- Pray that individuals and leaders will seek and demonstrate forgiveness.
- Pray that Canada will be a nation of diverse people accepting, forgiving, sharing, and working together for a better Canada.
- Pray that Christians would have both grace and the courage to be bold.
- Pray for the Spiritual Strength of the nation.

#### **Who to pray for, in the nation**

- Pray for the Governor General, Prime Minister, cabinet, senate, party leaders, and caucuses.
- Pray for premiers, mayors, and provincial/municipal governments.
- Pray for the Supreme Court, judges, and the judicial system.
- Pray that God will protect our land and pray for military, police, fire, and emergency services.
- Pray for the healthcare system and healthcare workers.
- Pray for educators, teachers, students.
- Pray for the media and the arts.
- Pray for Canada's leadership in international relations and policy.

*Father God,  
As we raise high and wave our flag with pride today,  
fill us with gratitude for the blessings we enjoy.  
Fill us with compassion for those who do not know what it is to live and speak and worship freely.*

*As we meet with family and friends around a heavily-laden table,  
may our grace include a moment of silent reflection  
for those who don't know how they or their children will eat today.  
May we show them respect, not only by exhibiting restraint,  
but by resolving to take one step, however small, to alleviate their suffering.*

*As we raise our glasses in salute to a dominion that has,  
as its foundation, a deep and abiding trust in you,  
give us an appreciation for the almost unparalleled access to health care and clean water that we enjoy.  
Remind us that one person,  
obeying your command to give water to the thirsty and food to the hungry,  
can change the world.*

*As we stand and gaze up at the heavens,  
in awe of the breathtaking display as fireworks streak and blaze across the night sky,  
may we be overwhelmed by the beauty of creation.  
May we be sobered by the realization that we all have a responsibility  
to do what we can to take care of and save it.*

*And above all, as we celebrate this great country today,  
may we be grateful for all the blessings we have received.  
And, even more, may we give thanks to you,  
the one who has blessed us so that we, in turn, might be a blessing to others.  
God, keep our land glorious and free.  
Amen.*

Sara Davison

## **Saturday, July 2: 2 Corinthians 5:1-10**

The Corinthians struggle to “get it.” In a further letter to them (2 Corinthians), Paul tries to encourage them that death really is the doorway to something better. He argues we all live in tension between living in this tangible, physical world and having a sense there is something more and greater.

Eugene Peterson’s translation of this passage says, *“We know that when these bodies of ours are taken down like tents and folded away, they will be replaced by resurrection bodies in heaven – God-made, not handmade – and we’ll never have to relocate our “tents” again. Sometimes we can hardly wait to move – and so we cry out in frustration. Compared to what’s coming, living conditions around here seem like a stopover in an unfurnished shack, and we’re tired of it! We’ve been given a glimpse of the real thing, our true home, our resurrection bodies! The Spirit of God whets our appetite by giving us a taste of what’s ahead. He puts a little of heaven in our hearts so that we’ll never settle for less.*

*“That’s why we live with such good cheer. You won’t see us drooping our heads or dragging our feet! Cramped conditions here don’t get us down. They only remind us of the spacious living conditions ahead. It’s what we trust in but don’t yet see that keeps us going. Do you suppose a few ruts in the road or rocks in the path are going to stop us? When the time comes, we’ll be plenty ready to exchange exile for homecoming.*

*“But neither exile nor homecoming is the main thing. Cheerfully pleasing God is the main thing, and that’s what we aim to do, regardless of our conditions. Sooner or later we all have to face God, regardless of our conditions. We will appear before Christ and take what’s coming to us as a result of our actions, either good or bad.”*

In the meantime, *“make it your goal to please him” – “cheerfully pleasing God is the main thing”* (5:9). Seek to grow in the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23). Be loving. Be joyful. Be a peacemaker. Be patient. Be kind. Be good. Be faithful. Be gentle. Be self-controlled. Be faithful with the blessings God has given you.

Share God’s love with those around you.

*May God the Father, and the eternal High Priest Jesus Christ,  
build us up in faith and truth and love.  
Keep us in the family of all those who believe on our Lord Jesus Christ.  
We pray for all saints,  
for kings and rulers,  
for the enemies of the Cross of Christ, and for ourselves.  
We pray that our fruit may abound  
and that we may be made perfect in Christ Jesus our Lord.  
Amen.*

Polycarp (martyred 155 AD)

### Sunday, July 3: 2 Corinthians 5:11-21

We can yearn to be with Jesus. We can look forward to that time so much we disengage with the world around us. We spend lots of time reading the Bible, watching Christian YouTube videos, and visit (only) with Christian people. We don't want to be "polluted" by the world. The sooner Jesus returns and it all burns, the better ...

Just in case we're becoming too "heavenly minded" to be any "earthly good," Paul immediately follows up his discussion about heavenly life (5:1-10) with a passionate call to live for God here and now. We have a ministry of reconciliation – we are Christ's ambassadors – we are those whom God has asked to be His messengers of love. We have to be involved in the world. We want others to know the life-changing love of Jesus. We want to bring justice, mercy, healing, hope, peace, and love to our broken world. We want to see His kingdom come and His will be done on earth – now – as it is in heaven.

This is the "mega-purpose" for our lives: *"We don't evaluate people by what they have or how they look. We looked at the Messiah that way once and got it all wrong, as you know. We certainly don't look at him that way anymore.*

*"Now we look inside, and what we see is that anyone united with the Messiah gets a fresh start, is created new. The old life is gone; a new life emerges! Look at it! All this comes from the God who settled the relationship between us and him, and then called us to settle our relationships with each other. God put the world square with himself through the Messiah, giving the world a fresh start by offering forgiveness of sins.*

*"God has given us the task of telling everyone what he is doing. We're Christ's representatives. God uses us to persuade men and women to drop their differences and enter into God's work of making things right between them. We're speaking for Christ himself now: Become friends with God; he's already a friend with you.*

*"How you ask? In Christ. God put the wrong on him who never did anything wrong, so we could be put right with God"*(2 Corinthians 5:16-20, *The Message* translation).

Jesus is our hope. Our only hope. Jesus is our world's only hope. The only way people will know about Jesus is if we share His love, mercy, grace, and forgiveness ... Who can I share His love with?

German-Dutch Jewish diarist, Anne Frank, wrote, *"How wonderful it is that nobody need wait a single moment before starting to improve the world."* How can I, through my acts of love, grace, and justice, help His kingdom come on earth, just a little bit?

*Lord our God, teach us, we pray.  
Help us to ask you in the right way for the right blessings.  
Please steer the ship of our lives towards yourself,  
the tranquil haven of all storm-tossed souls.  
Show us the course in which we should go.  
Renew a willing spirit within us.  
Let your Spirit curb our wayward senses.  
Guide us toward that which is our true good,  
to love you with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength.  
In all we do, may we rejoice in your glorious and joyful presence.  
Help us to love others.  
Help us to care for others.  
Help us to bless others.  
Build your Kingdom through us.  
For yours is the glory and praise from all your saints, forever and ever.  
Amen.*

Basil of Caesarea (330-379)