



DEVOTIONS FOR LIFE

Aldersgate Church ~ St. Louis Park, MN

Week of February 19, 2023 (Matthew 16:17:8)

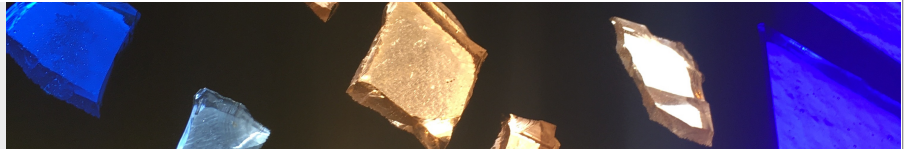
Prayer for Groups & Personal Devotion:

God, we thank you that you do not dwell on the mountaintop but walk among your people: sometimes dazzling white, sometimes incognito grey, sometimes drawing attention, sometimes fading into the background.

You point to a great tradition of priests and prophets but also present a new vision for all who walk by faith today. May we be so altered by journeying with you that we change lives and communities for good.

May we feed the hungry, bind the broken hearted, set prisoners free, heal the sick, find shelter for the homeless and share what we have with the poor. May we be changed in and by our service.

And, as though we had been on the mountaintop, may we find renewed vigour to take up our cross and journey on with you changing the



Devotions for Life

Context: Last week we explored some of Jesus' parables on what the Kingdom of Heaven is like from Matthew 13. Today we skip over some big stories, as we land on the last Sunday before the sacred season of Lent.

In Chapter 14 we learn that John the Baptist has been assassinated, and this deeply grieves Jesus. As he seeks some solitude to grieve, masses of people show up in need of food, which leads to the famous Feeding of the 5,000. Still desiring solitude, Jesus sends the disciples on a boat across the Sea of Galilee. As a violent storm begins at sea, Jesus walks on water to the boat, where he calls Peter to walk on the water to him. Peter does, but then is frightened and needs to be rescued. The storm calms, they get to shore, and they travel around with Jesus challenging the religious authorities, healing the sick and demon-possessed, and even feeds a group of 4,000 in addition to the earlier 5,000.

In Chapter 16 Jesus turns to his disciples and asks two huge questions: "Who do people say that I am?" And "who do you say that I am?" Peter responds saying, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God" (16:16). Jesus affirms Peter's answer, and then tells him that he is rock on which Jesus will build his church ("Peter" is from the Greek word for "rock", which is "petros").

Then things take a huge turn, which is that Jesus begins explaining to his disciples that he must suffer by being arrested, turned over to the authorities and killed.

...landscape through which we travel. May we be led from lofty to lowly, from the past to the present and may we hear echoes of our calling in baptism to listen and serve you now. Amen.

Compassion & Justice

Black History Month: Last we we gave you a list of movies for Black History Month. This week we have a list of fiction for you.

- *Brown Girl Dreaming* (Jaqueline Woodson)
- *The Underground Railroad* (Colson Whitehead)
- *The Hate You Give* (Angie Thomas)
- *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (Zora Neale Hurston).
- *Dawn: The Xenogenesis Trilogy Book 1* (Octavia E. Butler)
- *The Invisible Man* (Ralph Ellison)
- *The Good Lord Bird* (James McBride)
- *Dark Matter: A Century Speculative Fiction from the African Diaspora* (various)
- *Beloved* (Toni Morrison)
- *The Bluest Eye* (Toni Morrison)

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Peter assures Jesus that they will protect him, and Jesus rebukes Peter saying "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me..." In the span of four verses Peter goes from Jesus' rock to Jesus' stumbling block.

It's at this point that we pick up this week's reading. The context leading up to it is vital to understanding what's happening in this passage. And it is because of this turn to Jesus speaking of his suffering and what follows in today's reading (including the Transfiguration) that the Transfiguration and its broader context are always the reading on the Sunday before Lent.

Questions for Reflection & Discussion:

1. What words, phrases, or images stand out to you in these verses? Which of the three parables strikes you the most?
2. Why do you think the lectionary includes the verses at the end of chapter 16 with the transfiguration narrative?
3. Keeping in mind that it is God's desire to be our truest selves, what do you think Jesus means by "deny yourself"?
4. What does he mean by "take up your cross and follow and me", especially since to "take up your cross" in that time would not be understood metaphorically. To "take up one's cross" to them necessarily means crucifixion and all the suffering, humiliation, and pain that comes with it.
5. What do you think the transfiguration is about? Why does it happen? How is it to be understood, if at all? Why do you think Jesus is with Moses and Elijah specifically?
6. Have you ever had a "mountain top" experience? Describe it. And did you not want it to end? Did you do anything to try capture it, preserve it, or make it last as long as you could?
7. Where have we heard "this is my Son, the Beloved..." before? Why do you think it's repeated here? And what is significant about the addition, "listen to him"