

Devotionals: LifeGroup Study

Date: May 7, 2023

Text: Acts 7:55-60; Psalm 31:1-5, (14) 15-16

Theme: Reanimated...for selfless giving

Belong

Take a deep breath, focus on the stillness of your being as you think of nothing except your thankfulness to God for the air you breathe. Take another deep breath, feel your body absorb all the goodness of God through the air you breathe. Take another and another, thinking only of the gift of life God has breathed into you. Hear yourself breathe—close your eyes and focus on the name of the Lord (pronounced in Hebrew as Yahweh) as you slowly inhale and exhale. Can you hear it? Yahweh...Yah – weh--Yah – weh--Yahweh. Use each breath as a process of renewal to reanimate the wonders of your life. As we continue the Post-Easter celebration of the life Jesus breathed into us, focus on the renewal of your commitment to Christian living.

Prayer...

Lord, how often we rush through our days, never stopping to hear our breathing or to focus on the gift of life that you have given to us. We pray that we can slow down and hear your name in every breath we take, breathing in your holy goodness, breathing out all the worries we carry, those burdensome weights of the world. Lord, we breathe our burdens out into your hands so that we can refocus on the Holy Spirit who guides us so that we can help others with the burdens they carry. Help us to slow down so we can focus on living our lives for your glory. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Believe

Our Lord is in the air we breathe; he gives us life so we can breathe life into others.

Read Psalm 31:1-5. David asks the Lord for protection and strength, to be his "rock;" David asks as we do for the Lord to save us and protect us as we give ourselves fully to him.

- *Do you ever feel alone, in need of the Lord's comfort?*
- *What do you do to bring yourself into the presence of the Lord?*

Read Acts 7:55-60. Stephen, "a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit" (Acts 6:5) was selected to serve God as a holy disciple. Stephen focused on God's agenda and purpose with a deep connection with the Holy Spirit.

- *Have you ever prayed to God, the giver of life, asking for help, guidance, or forgiveness and seeing Jesus as he enlightens or inspires you in answer to your prayer?*
- *Share how God has shown you love and grace through prayer.*

Stephen knew it was his time using his final breaths to breathe life

into those who were killing him. He could see the Lord welcoming him into heaven. He believed in the truth of the Gospel and remained faithful to Christ to the end of his life.

- *How do you respond to people who are against you or challenge your faith?*
- *What does Jesus teach us about our treatment towards our enemies?*
- *How can you use your faith to deal with the sinful nature of others?*
- *What if someone who is evil enters or is currently in your life; as Christians, what should we do?*

Read Psalm 31:14-17. David renews his earlier words of prayer to the Lord, we can relocate these words into our Creed. Hear David's cry for justice and contemplate how Jesus took evil head on to protect us from our own sinful nature. Trust in the Lord; let him judge those who trespass against you. Forgive the sin of others and ask for forgiveness for your sins. Breathe out the stresses caused by those against you and breathe in the glory of God. Through it all we remain in God's loving hands.

- *How can your life experiences help you grow and confirm your faith in God?*
- *How do you feel God's face shining (God's blessings and protection) on you?*

Become

Jesus breathed out his last breath to breathe life into us. He asks us to reanimate ourselves to be the Christians for whom he died. All through the New Testament we find references to the renewal of life through the love of others (see Mark 12:13); our faithfulness to the Lord (see John 3:16); and our prayer for those who are lost to the temptation of evil (see Luke 6:27-28). Breathe into others the love that Jesus breathes into you. Show faithfulness by giving of yourself to others. Be the person God sees you can be. Rejoice in the glory of the Lord.

Prayer...

Lord, you took the last breath of your only begotten Son to give us life. You are giving us the opportunity to use the air we breathe in bountiful and beautiful ways. Help us to stop and listen to hear your name as we breathe. Guide us to focus on others and their concerns as we give our burdens to you. Give us the strength to live our lives for you so that you can use us to help others grow in their faith. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.



St. Paul Lutheran Church

"Your Refuge from the Storm"

Devotionals: Daily Walk on the Rock

Date: May 7, 2023

Text: Acts 7:55-60; Psalm 31:1-5, (14) 15-16

Theme: Reanimated...for selfless giving

Day 1: Monday —“To Live Is Christ; To Die Is Gain”

Read Acts 6:1-15; 7:1-2a,51-60; 8:1a. Now consider the words, “For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.” Stephen lives these words, but they aren’t his; do you remember whose they are? If possible, read Philippians 1:21 in several translations. For Paul (formerly Saul), Jesus was everything: his reason for living, his hope for eternity, his passion, and his joy. What happened that transformed Saul, who agreed to Stephen’s stoning, into someone whose life was so focused on Jesus that he could write, while imprisoned for his faith, “living is Christ, and dying is gain” (NRSV)? Pray you will be so filled with Jesus’ presence that these words become yours too.

Day 2: Tuesday —A Living Sacrifice Stephen was willing to live and to die for Jesus. Most of us have not had to seriously contemplate dying for Jesus (though many have), but we might ask ourselves, “Are we willing to live for Jesus?” Ponder Paul’s words in Romans 12:1-2, then read about what was happening in the early church: Acts 5:27-6:15 and 7:54-60. What did living for Jesus look like for these early Christians? What did you observe about Stephen, the first Christian martyr? Did you notice that he is described as “full of the Holy Spirit” (6:5; 7:55)? Paul helps us understand what this means in Ephesians 4:30-5:2 and 5:8-10,15-20. Tell Jesus you want him to be Lord of your life.

Day 3: Wednesday —With Eyes Fixed on Jesus!

Read Hebrews 12:1-3 and Acts 6:15; 7:54-60. The writer of Hebrews tells us to fix our eyes on Jesus; what evidences do we see that Stephen lived this to the fullest? How do you account for the radiance of Stephen’s countenance (Acts 6:15)? Do Exodus 34:29 and Psalm 34:5a add insight? Consider how the witness of our lives would be transformed if we fixed our eyes and hearts on Jesus. Ponder how abiding in Jesus’ presence is necessary if we are to bring his love to a hurting world. Let Jesus’ words in John 15:4-5 guide your prayer.

Day 4: Thursday —Light and Dark-ness

Consider what John says about light and darkness in John 3:19-21 and 1 John 1:5-7. Now read Acts 6:15 and 7:54-60. Do you think, perhaps, Stephen’s countenance, as well as his words, angered those who wanted him dead? When the men covered their ears (7:57), were they trying to silence the truth they didn’t want

to hear and eradicate the glory that exposed their darkness? Do we ever turn our backs on light and truth? Run to the Light (John 8:12) as you pray Tim Hughes’ lyrics: “Light of the world, you stepped down into darkness, opened my eyes, let me see. Beauty that made this heart adore you, hope of a life spent with You” (2000 Thankyou Music).

Day 5: Friday —Last Words...A Lasting Legacy...A Glorious Welcome

Stephen’s life was short but full and purposeful; he left a legacy rich in faith and love. Read Psalm 31:5; Luke 23:34,46; and Acts 7:55-60. Stephen died, as he lived, with Jesus’ words on his lips and in his heart. God had breathed into Stephen the breath of life, and Stephen offers back that which God had first given. What does Stephen see as he is dying? Contrast his vision of Jesus’ position (Acts 7:55-56) with the more usual description (Ephesians 1:20; Colossians 3:1; Hebrews 1:3; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2). Does this fill you with awe? Stephen beheld God’s glory! Ponder how he spent the breath of life he was given. Pray you’ll spend your breath of life for Jesus.

Day 6: Saturday —“The Blood of the Martyrs Is the Seed of the Church”

Some, like Stephen, die for their faith. We are called to live, and if necessary die, so that others might know Jesus. Read Genesis 50:19-20; Psalm 31:1-5,14-16; Daniel 3:16-18; 23-26; Acts 7:54-60; 8:1,4; and Romans 8:28. Sometimes God delivers believers, and others are brought to faith; sometimes believers die, and their deaths kindle the fire of faith. Read Romans 14:8, and sing/pray Faber’s lyrics: “Faith of our fathers! living still, in spite of dungeon, fire, and sword...we will love both friend and foe...and preach thee, too, as love knows how...”

Day 7: Sunday —Reanimated for Self-less Giving

Stephen suffered and gave his life, because his passion was serving and loving people and proclaiming God’s truth (Acts 6:1-6,8-10; 7:55-60). Is our deepest desire to love, serve, and share the story of Jesus? Is Jesus our greatest joy and heart’s delight? Consider Jesus’ words in Mark 12:29-31 and John 15:9-13; 17:25-26. In prayer, tell Jesus you want to love him with your heart, soul, mind, and strength. Ask him to fill you with love for others and create in you a willingness to offer yourself in selfless service/sacrifice. Sing/pray Havergal’s lyrics: “Take my life and let it be consecrated, Lord, to Thee...Take myself, and I will be, ever, only all for Thee.”



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