

# Devotionals: LifeGroup



St. Paul Lutheran Church

“Your Refuge from the Storm”

Date: May 14, 2023

Text: Acts 17:22-31; 1 Peter 3:13-22

Theme: Reanimated...for loving others

## BELONG

When we think of love we think of the people closest to us, those who stir warm emotional feelings within us. Those warm feelings range from romantic feelings between people in love, to the love between a parent and child, to the love between close friends, all different types of love with an emotional feeling of warmth and closeness. That love comes from somewhere deep inside us and prompts us to do things for the people we love.

Jesus faced a question about love when asked by a Pharisee about the greatest commandment. He answered by saying that the first and greatest commandment is, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind” and that the second is, “Love your neighbor as yourself.” But he didn’t stop there. Jesus finished by saying “All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments” (Matthew 22:37-40). Jesus was telling the Pharisee, and us, that these two commandments are the very foundation of our lives.

Thinking in terms of all the people in our lives, our neighbors, it can be very hard to understand how Jesus’ words of love apply in all situations. Those warm emotional feelings don’t seem to show up when we face people who don’t agree with us, or when we come in contact with people who have hurt us or those times when we simply don’t have the energy to give anything. Knowing that we won’t always have loving feelings toward other people, Jesus still urges us to love our neighbors. This week’s text takes us deeper into the meaning of loving others, helping us to better understand how Jesus’ words apply even in situations that challenge us.

**Prayer...** Heavenly Father, we face situations where we have difficulty responding with love. Our hearts long to follow your words to love each other and we ask you to help us learn how we can connect to the love you’ve placed on our hearts at those times we find most challenging. Amen.

**BELEIVE** Read Acts 17:22-31. This text opens with Paul in Athens speaking to a Greek leadership council. At this point, Paul is on his third missionary journey which began around 50 AD in Antioch and will end some three years later back in Antioch. Before arriving in Athens, Paul and his colleagues have traveled thousands of difficult miles where they have been attacked and chased out of both Thessalonica and Berea. Tired, and possibly a bit discouraged, Paul finds himself in a meeting with these Greek leaders and sees the idols they are worshipping and an altar to an unknown god.

- What do think is going through Paul’s mind?

Paul could have reacted with anger or frustration with the Greeks, chastising them for the idols they worshipped. Instead, recognizing the Greek’s spirituality, he took the opportunity to tell them about the Creator of all, using the words from their poets to show that we are God’s offspring.

• *Why do you think Paul took this approach? How do you think you would react in a situation like Paul faced? How do you think the Greeks reacted to Paul?*

**Read 1 Peter 3: 13-22.** Peter opens with a simple question and adds that if you do happen to suffer for what is right you will be blessed. Peter knows that there is suffering in the world; yet if you look at the verses just prior to this text he is urging us to live in harmony with one another, not repaying evil with evil but instead living as a blessing to others.

• *To what suffering is Peter referring? How can someone be blessed for suffering?*

The theme of suffering flowing through this passage is focused on that which people will endure for their actions based on their faith. Peter knew that as the people he was addressing started to respond to and interact in the world as Jesus did, they would not always be accepted, and sometimes they would face hostility, violence, and death. As human beings, our gut reaction to hostility and violence is driven from fear to protect ourselves and lash back.

• *Have you ever suffered because of your faith? How did you react?*

Peter is urging us to not give in to fear. He reassures us that as we set our hearts on Jesus, we will start to put our fears aside and face the hostility aimed at us with gentleness and respect, leaving no doubt the source of what drives us. Peter takes this one step further by letting us know that when we choose to react through the love that is placed within us by God, we will find something within ourselves and deepen our relationship with each other and God.

• *Can you think of an experience when you responded to anger with love? How did that feel? What was the outcome?*

**BECOME** Many of us have experienced suffering and some of it may have been because of our faith. We all face the prospect of being ridiculed or being dismissed or being taken advantage of when the actions we take in the world have their foundation in Jesus. What we know is that once we allow our hearts to be touched by Jesus and allow the Spirit to guide our lives, we are compelled into action. That doesn’t mean we won’t feel the sting of rejection or be taken advantage of, but it allows us to view the broader picture and know that God’s love will bring us through. In fact, the love God has placed on our hearts will urge us to move toward those who reject us in the hope that they too will experience God’s love.

**Prayer...** Lord God, we desire to connect with the love within us so that we are able to respond to others with gentleness and respect. We hope that as we are able to show love, it will not only allow our hearts to experience you more deeply but also allow those you’ve put before us to experience your love. Amen.

# Devotionals: Daily Walk on the Rock

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## Day 1: Monday - The Call...Then and Now

Our theme texts provide glimpses into the lives and ministries of Peter and Paul, but before we read these, let's backtrack a bit and consider what happens when God calls people into relationship, or deeper relationship, with himself. Some calls, like Moses', Isaiah's, and Saul/Paul's, are very dramatic; others, like Simon Peter's, are quite ordinary (*Exodus 3:1-6,10-15; Isaiah 6:1-8; Mark 1:16-18; and Acts 9:1-6*). What are some ways people are called into relationship, or deeper relationship, with God today? As you read Acts 17:22-31, ponder Paul's approach to inviting people into relationship with God through Jesus. Let Revelation 3:20 guide your petition or praise.

## Day 2: Tuesday - The Sending...Then and Now

Moses, Isaiah, Peter, and Paul responded to God's call, and all learned that the call was not just to blessing and relationship, but also to service. What moved Moses to lead Israel out of Egypt, Isaiah to take God's message to God's people, and Peter and Paul to travel, preach, write, and die for doing so? Consider that by responding to God's call and receiving God's grace, they were also bowing before God's authority and command to love God and others (*Deuteronomy 6:4-6; Mark 12:29-31*). Read John 17:6-26, Jesus' prayer for his disciples and for us. How do Peter and Paul live out this prayer (*Acts 17:22-31; 1 Peter 1:1-5*)? Pray, "Here am I; send me!" (*Isaiah 6:8*).

## Day 3: Wednesday - The Empowerment...Then and Now

In Acts 17:22-31, Paul is in Athens; he is on his third missionary journey and has suffered rejection, beating, imprisonments, and much persecution, yet he perseveres. Peter also has suffered and writes to people who are suffering; read 1 Peter 1:6-9; 3:13-22. What motivates Peter and Paul? Why are they so passionate in spite of hardship? What and/or who gives them the strength to persevere? Read John 13:34-35; 15:5; Acts 1:8; 2:32-33,38-39; Philippians 4:13,19; 2 Timothy 4:6-8,17-18; and 1 John 4:9-11,16-21. Have you opened your heart and life to the Spirit's work in and through you? Pray the Spirit will fill you with holy passion and love for God and others.

## Day 4: Thursday - [Ascension Day] The Cost...Then and Now

Jesus told his followers they would suffer persecution (*John 15:18-21*); we see this fulfilled throughout Acts and the Epistles. Today,

many still suffer persecution for their faith. For most of us, however, the cost of discipleship is usually subtler: issues in employment because of our integrity or ridicule/rejection because of our beliefs. Today is Ascension Day on the Church calendar; as we reflect on Jesus' ascension, we remember that there is more to his story, and ours, than our temporal lives tell. This is our confident hope and joy. Read Acts 1:6-12; 17:29-31; Ephesians 1:17-23; and Philippians 3:7-11,20-21. Tell Jesus you have counted the cost and will follow him.

## Day 5: Friday - Spiritual Hunger and Spiritual Food...Then and Now

Both Jesus and Paul encounter spiritually famished people who are in need of God's love and grace. As you read John 4:1-26 and Acts 17:22-31, notice how both Jesus and Paul use the common ground of spiritual hunger to engage others in conversations about faith. Observe their respectful attitudes and sensitivity to their audiences (*see also 1 Peter 3:15*). Our theme thought this week is "We love our neighbors by meeting them where they are and providing them with what they truly need for life." Ask Jesus how you might live this out today. Go out in faith!

## Day 6: Saturday - Suffering Redeemed... Then and Now

Jesus sent his early followers into the world with a message of grace, hope, and love; they lived and died sharing this message. Are you passionate about telling others about Jesus with your life and with your words? Remember Stephen (*Acts 6:1-8:4*); because of the general persecution that followed his death, the Gospel was taken to the world. Read Acts 17:22-31 and 1 Peter 3:13-22. How did Stephen, Peter, Paul, and others endure suffering without retaliation; how did they live selflessly in the midst of persecution? They knew Jesus and trusted his unconditional love and ability to redeem even their suffering. Read Romans 5:1-8 and 8:18,28,31-39; pray.

## Day 7: Sunday - Reanimated for Loving Others!

Listen to Jesus speak as you read Mark 12:29-31 and John 13:34-35. What do the exhortations in 1 Peter 3:15a and Revelation 2:4 suggest? In 1 John 4:8-16,21, John reiterates the importance of loving God, our brothers and sisters in Christ, and the world. How are we able to do this; how are we "reanimated" to love (*1 John 4:13*)? Has the Spirit kindled this flame of love in your heart? The Spirit also gifts Jesus-followers with boldness, wisdom, grace in suffering, joy, and so much more. Tell Jesus you want him to fill you to overflowing with his abiding love.