

Good News Daily

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Sunday, January 29

Hebrews 11:8-16 *Instead, they were longing for a better country—a heavenly one.* (v.16a NIV)

The writer of Hebrews holds up Abraham’s faith and trust in God as an example for Christians. Yet Abraham would never actually live to see some of God’s promises, such as his descendants that were “numerous as stars in the sky” (v.12). Even so, he believed God would make good on those promises. Also praised by several biblical authors is the faith and trust Abraham showed when God directed him to move to a strange land and he went, not knowing what lay ahead.

A little less than a month ago, following the Lord’s leading, my husband and I picked up and moved to a different state. We left behind a house, jobs, and friends, and had to massively downsize. This process reminded me that we come into this world with nothing, and we leave it with nothing. So the question becomes: “How much do we truly need, in between?” Prayerfully, we realized that we needed a lot less “stuff” than we thought we did. And that faith, God, and family and friends are what we need most. Like our forbears in faith, we, too, are longing for a heavenly country where “things” will no longer matter. In the meantime, we pray to be good and generous stewards of all God has given us, and to be Christ to our new neighbors, and to see him in them.

Isaiah 51:9-16; Psalms 24, 29; John 7:14-31

Monday, January 30

Psalm 56 *When I am afraid, I put my trust in you. In God, whose word I praise—in God I trust and am not afraid.* (vv.3-4a)

Change is never easy. And moving is downright stressful—physically, emotionally, and financially. There are days when I wonder if we’ll ever get settled, there are still so many boxes to unpack. How long until I find that elusive “place for every thing, and everything in its place”? Although my husband has a good new job, I still don’t have another church to serve, and it was hard to leave the congregation I loved so much. All of this could be a prescription for anxiety. But Psalm 56 reminds us that we are to trust in God for everything we need. The lesson from Galatians teaches that we are adopted children of God. And doesn’t every parent want the best for their child?

The Lord has been with us every step of the way during this transition. We need not fear that He will leave us or let us down now. Psalm 57 begins, “Have mercy on me, my God...for in you I take refuge.” The fact that we are adjusting to an unfamiliar place is not as important as making sure that we are living in Christ. 1 Peter 5:7 (NLT) encourages us: “Give all your worries and cares to God, for he cares about you.” Whatever might be making you fearful, nervous, or anxious today, just give it over to the Lord. Speak out loud Psalm 56:3-4a—many times, if you have to. God *will* give you peace!

Isaiah 51:17-23; Psalms 57, 58; Galatians 4:1-11; Mark 7:24-37

Tuesday, January 31

Psalm 61 *I long to dwell in your tent forever and take refuge in the shelter of your wings.* (v.4)

Today’s psalm picks up themes from Sunday and Monday, about longing to live in God’s space and with Christ, whether in heaven or here on earth. Although neither my husband nor I are retired (yet), we moved to a continuing-care community where most of our fellow residents are anywhere from 10 to 30 years older than we are. In fact, one lady living on the same floor of our building is 102! Another gentleman is 98. I imagine that at their stage in life, they may be thinking more about their “forever home” than this one. But the great thing about being a Christian is that we can “take refuge in the shelter of” God’s “wings” and dwell in God’s “tent” forever, starting right now. All we need is faith. The space between mortality and eternity is surprisingly thin, and the heavenly realm is closer than we realize.

I give thanks for our new neighbors who are part of “the Greatest Generation.” They are truly amazing men and women, and I look forward to sharing heaven with them someday—since I don’t share their penchant for Mahjong, bridge, bocce, or jigsaw puzzles. Until God calls all of us home, I pray we can continue to enjoy *friendship*, and the good life God has given us in our new home here on earth.

Isaiah 52:1-12; Psalm 62; Galatians 4:12-20; Mark 8:1-10

Wednesday, February 1

Isaiah 54:1-17 *“Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace removed,” says the LORD, who has compassion on you.* (v.10)

“Ah, what a relief it is!” Remember that old Alka-Seltzer commercial? This verse from Isaiah 54 makes me feel that way. When I read it, I just want to jump up and down and shout, “Thank You, Lord!” He assures us that no matter what happens, nothing can take from us God’s compassion, love, and peace. It’s not just this huge move that could make me feel “shaky,” but as I write, our nation is still in the throes of the contentious 2016 presidential campaign. A headline in today’s paper read: “Latest Polling Shows Nobody Likes Anything.” (That’s partly why our cat is running for president on Facebook!) With so many people forecasting doom and gloom, it’s hard not to feel depressed or anxious about the future. But then, we have that verse from Isaiah, where God tells us not to worry even about a cosmic cataclysm, let alone an earthly election. His love stands forever, and through Jesus Christ He gives us a peace that the world can neither give nor take away. “Ah, what a relief it is!”

Psalm 72; Galatians 4:21-31; Mark 8:11-26

Thursday, February 2

Psalm 71 *Even when I am old and gray, do not forsake me, my God, till I declare your power to the next generation, your mighty acts to all who are to come.* (v.18)

My denomination does not require me to officially retire for another 10 years. So I’m hoping and praying to serve another parish as Rector for at least that long. In this verse from Psalm 71, the writer petitions God for an opportunity to share His truth with the coming generation—children and youth who need to hear the gospel. In the 25 years I have served as a pastor, in addition to occasional “teaching sermons” I’ve preached, I have taught adult Bible study, Sunday school, vacation Bible school, Confirmation classes, deacons in training, and religion and ethics to college students. None of us was born a Christian. We had to be taught the Bible and about who God is—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We had to learn the creeds, doctrines, and liturgy of the church. While it’s important for the priest to teach, all church members should instruct the next generation through their words, actions, and example.

I am deeply grateful to the older generation—many more of whom I now encounter as fellow residents—who taught me. They shaped my Christian faith and discipleship through Sunday school, children’s sermons, VBS, church camp, and seminary. God willing, I won’t have to retire any time soon ...and thanks to “Miss Clairol,” my hair won’t go gray, either!

Isaiah 55:1-13; Psalm 70; Galatians 5:1-15; Mark 8:27—9:1

Friday, February 3

Isaiah 56:1-8 *“Blessed is the one who does this—the person who holds it fast, who keeps the Sabbath without desecrating it, and keeps their hands from doing any evil.”* (v.2)

Back in the 1990’s, a TV ad declared: “Sundays are made for The New York Times.” It showed a family in their pajamas with breakfast in the background, as everyone read the paper. That ad always bothered me because, starting in childhood, I had been taught, “Sundays are for worshipping God—and for resting.” However, it wasn’t until later adulthood that the Lord strongly convicted me about how seriously He takes Sabbath-keeping. An in-depth study of both the Old and New Testaments showed me that means no shopping, yard work, or bill-paying on Sundays. Just church, resting, relaxing, and/or enjoying family and friends (and, just possibly, “fasting” from the computer, Internet, or TV).

When my husband and I began “keeping the Sabbath without desecrating it,” we drew closer to God, found more quality time together, and gained greater renewal for the week ahead. Now I understand why Jesus said, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath” (Mark 2:27). It is God’s free gift to us, one that we are to make use of rightly for our own good, as well as to bless God. For those who must be employed on Sundays, choose another day to rest and re-focus on Him. You *will* be blessed!

Psalm 69; Galatians 5:16-24; Mark 9:2-13

Saturday, February 4

Mark 9:14-29 “*But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us.*’ *‘If you can?’ said Jesus. ‘Everything is possible for one who believes.’*” (vv.22b-23)

As a Christian who sincerely believes in Jesus’ compassionate desire for our wholeness and his mighty power to heal, I don’t know whether to laugh or cry when I hear this desperate father asking for Christ’s help, opening with, “If you can do anything.” If he’s a devout Jew, doesn’t he know Jeremiah 32:27 (ESV): “Behold, I am the LORD, the God of all flesh. Is there anything too hard for me?” Oh, wait. Maybe this man just doesn’t know that Jesus is “the God of all flesh” in the flesh! One has to wonder about Jesus’ answer, too. Is he being sarcastic by repeating, “If you can?” We can’t really know. But we can identify with the father’s response to Jesus’ teaching on faith: “I do believe, help me overcome my unbelief!” (v.24)

Some days, even believing Christians need to cry out, “Lord, I believe, help thou my unbelief” (the King James Version I grew up on). Faith is a fluid thing that seems to ebb and flow with the tides of our circumstances, as well as our physical, cognitive, and emotional states. A spiritual director once helped me by sharing that faith isn’t something we *have* or don’t have. It’s a *relationship*—with Jesus. The father in today’s reading took the first step toward that relationship. You can, too.

Isaiah 57:3-13; Psalms 75, 76; Galatians 5:25—6:10

by The Rev. Dr. Nina George-Hacker, FHC

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