

of us should ask ourselves, do they trust me? Can you see how vital this is in our life in community? We are meant to be different. We are meant to be trustworthy, reliable, persons of our word. We are to be the salt of the earth, right? Another gem from my friend who got this on the Internet: “When you make a commitment, you build hope. When you keep it, you build trust.” Nice?

Friday – The Golden Rule Played Out

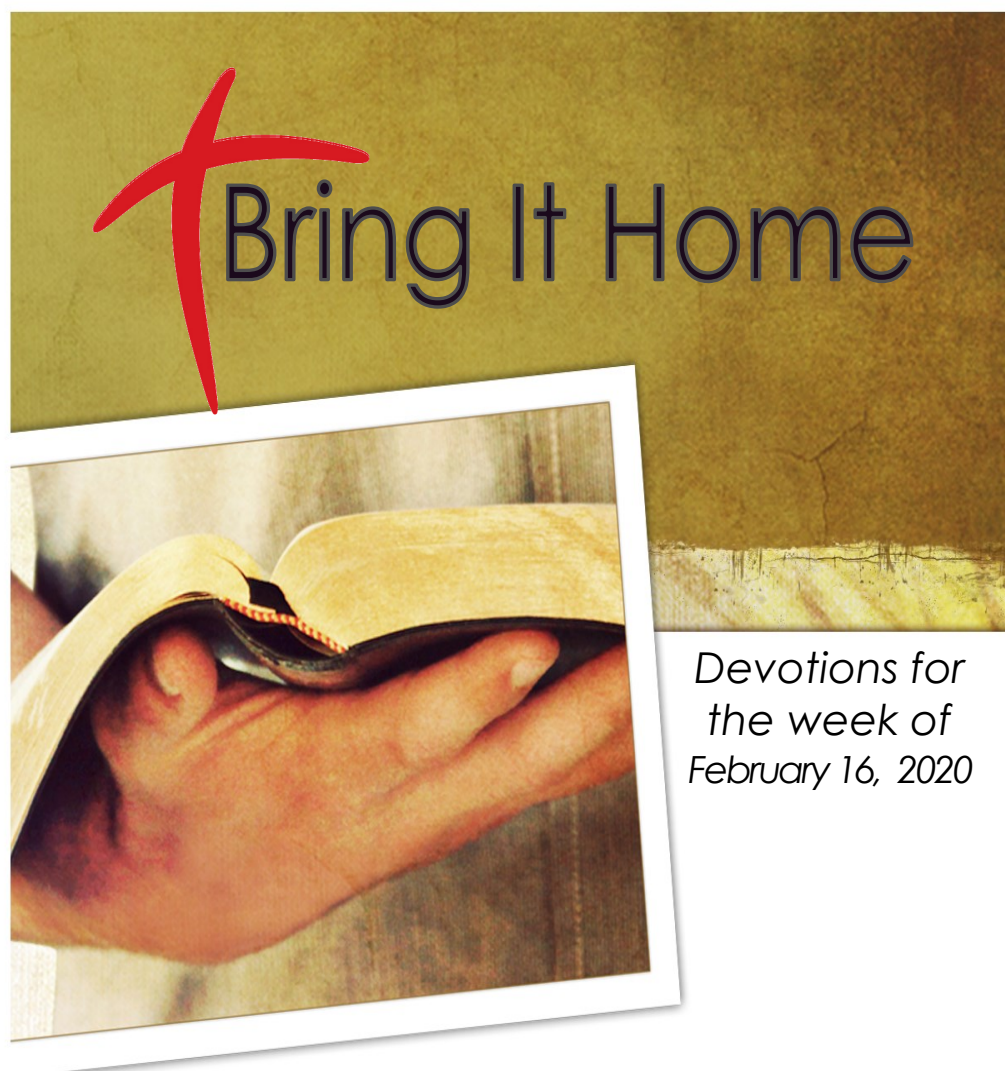
At the heart of the Beatitudes Jesus tells us that the pure in heart will be merciful, they will be peace-makers – Matthew 5:7-9. And they will see God in action in their life experiences. They will not be fault-finders (Matthew 7:1-5), but they will respect others. God will reward our acts of kindness. The Apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthian churches, and this applies to you and me in our relationships: “there shall be no jealousy or strife or division among you!” Jesus says something astonishing, at least so I find it as I prepare these devotions. Jesus says that the whole Bible that they knew – we now call it the Old Testament – can be distilled into one sentence: Treat those around you as you want them to treat you. (Matthew 7:12) We know it as the Golden Rule. In another place he cites a passage from Leviticus: “You shall love those around you as you love yourself.” (Leviticus 19:18) Think with me today about the shape of our life. Our Father has called us to the Christian faith. He has joined us with Jesus in the Sacrament of our Baptism. This has commissioned you and me to live like Jesus. It takes a pure heart, a heart that leans on Jesus. Pray the Holy Spirit to “create in me a clean heart.” (Psalm 51:10) Let’s go and live this, shall we? From my friend’s email: “In a world where you can be anything, be kind.”

Saturday – Choices to Make

Every day we have to make choices, don’t we? Sometimes those choices are about how we feel – excited about the new day, or not. From my friend, this bit of wisdom: “Don’t let yesterday take up too much of today.” (Will Rogers) And another: “May your choices reflect your hopes, not your fears.” (Nelson Mandela) What does that mean? Well, how many times do you find yourself making ethical choices? Is this the right thing to do? I feel strongly like doing the other! How can I say “No” to what I know I should not do? If I do the right thing, maybe speak up for what I believe in, I will get laughed at or opposed. Can I find the hope that if I do right, it will eventually count? Decisions like this have to be made every day, don’t they? About our life together in the family. About how to do something at work. An assignment at school. Speaking up for the sanctity of life. What if my words will not be accepted, even though right? Don’t they need to be said so that they may make a difference later? Words are powerful, and they are heard. If the words are not said, nothing good can come. In the morning we will gather again with our brothers and sisters in faith, all friends of Jesus. What a blessed company! Our Lord will be with us. We will hear his words of life. We will take the sacrament and hear Jesus’ “Do this in remembrance of me!” We are Immanuel. You know what that means, don’t you?

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This week’s *Bring it Home* devotions were written by Pastor Al Schroeder
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*Devotions for
the week of
February 16, 2020*

What Now?

This week reflect on the relationships God has put into your life. Give thanks for the people in your life and the gifts they are. Where there is hurt, disappointment, or frustration, pray over those relationships and seek ways to allow our Lord’s healing to enter in.

Monday – What Is Jesus Teaching About Our Life Together?

The Scriptures for this week that we heard yesterday are hard-hitting, but there is also promise in them. We can do it! The law that condemns us is wrapped in the Good News of the Sermon on the Mount that Jesus preached to his own. Thankfully we are his own! What faults does the law bring to light in our lives? Listen carefully to Jesus' words. He does not want us Christians to fail, but to live lives that are effective and achieve much good. We are meant to live a life that is special, different from the walk of the world around us. Jesus speaks to each of us, and to all of us Christians together. "You are the salt of the earth! ... the light of the world! ... a city set on a hill in clear sight!" This is the role of the Christian Church in this time. Recently I got an interesting email forward from a friend. (I guess not all Internet communication is untrustworthy?) Here is one of the bits: "It's better to walk alone than with a crowd going in the wrong direction." Like it? Jesus begins his instruction about our life together with those glorious "Blesseds." These nine "Blesseds" ring like bells from heaven, or a refreshing rain, and they build up to the final, "Rejoice and be glad!" Think of the familiar, "This is the day that the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it!" Will our Father let the Christian Church die in our lifetime? No! Will our Father leave us unattended? No, we will not walk alone. Jesus calls us his friends, and we have our Christian friends at Immanuel.

Tuesday – Sanctity of Life

Please read Matthew 5:21-26. Here Jesus goes right to our relationships with other people. Yes, he begins with the commandment, "Do not kill!" To kill someone is, of course, the worst breakup of fellowship. Recall Cain and Abel in Genesis 4! We are created for life together in relationships. Jesus peers right in between us. There he sees that I like some people very much, while others are OK with me and I can get along with them. Then there are those I cannot bring myself to like. Why is that? If you are in this like me, pray to let it go! Jesus presses me to examine myself – that is, before God has to examine me and put his judgment on me. What do I resent them for? What did they do to me? A friend sent me an email with something he picked from the Internet – "When you forgive, you heal. When you let go, you grow." How profound! Jesus goes further. He compares my broken relationship with that other person to being a criminal on trial. Ouch! "Get it settled out of court!" Then he drives it further still. "If you are in church with your offering and you just remember, in the presence of the holy, that you have this issue, this unresolved bitterness with some other(s) – leave! Get it resolved! Get reconciliation. Then come back next Sunday all clean!" Hear the prophet – "My God has become my strength." (Isaiah 49:1-7) We are meant to be peace-makers. Peace-makers work on it because they have a pure heart, Jesus says in Matthew 5:8-9. I came to realize years ago that peace is that condition when all relationships are in order. And they are wholesome. We want to

work on that, don't we? Jesus is talking about the sanctity of our life together. With whom do you have a broken relationship? What will you do to mend it? I have one of my own to work with.

Wednesday – Sanctity of Marriage

Please read Matthew 5:27-32. Here Jesus has us look at marriage. He begins with our native sexual drive. This wonderful gift of our Maker is meant to be enjoyed within a marriage relationship, a committed relationship of a man and a woman. How pleasant it can be in that relationship! How we let this gift be ruined in our culture today! It is insane. My sexuality is given by my genes, an accident or happening of nature, it is believed. My gender is to be discovered and decided upon – only by myself! It's what I choose. How unreal! How we violate this sacred gift! Lust is the sexual desire that we all experience. Jesus reminds us with a gross parable how dangerous lust can be, self-destructive, and destructive of wholesome relationships. Check his words. Don't do this in real life – but let's learn to control our behavior! Not everyone must get married. Think of Jesus, his brother James, the Apostle Paul and others who lived the single life, dedicated to serving that for which they were gifted and for their mission and purpose in their time. This calls for discipline with regard to the sexual drive all of us have in our nature. For this we can recall the prophet's words, "My God has become my strength." (Isaiah 49:1-7) Jesus wants us to keep marriage clean and wholesome. No distractions! We are to grow together and maintain the relationship. We are to be very good for each other. Today we hunger for romance, and many written or broadcast bits of advice aim to help us keep the romance alive. But married love is much more than romance, even though in a good marriage it just grows better. But look at the state of marriage and family today. Perhaps you are struggling with your marriage. Jesus promises help, grace, forgiveness, and hope. Perhaps you have experienced a broken relationship, as I have. We grieve over the loss! Our Lord has promised in this Sermon on the Mount, "Blessed are the poor in spirit (that is, the sorrowing, the penitent, the despairing, reaching for hope), for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." That is, we are the Lord's! The grace of God in our Lord Jesus and his sacrifice is there for us, with the forgiveness of all our sins. We are set free to do our best with each other. Ponder this! Take courage!

Thursday – Integrity Is Vital for Our Social Relationships

Please read Matthew 5:33-37. You know why we sometimes have to take oaths, don't you? Swear with your hand on the Bible (let God strike me down if I don't really mean it!). We have learned that we can't take a person's word to be true. We can't always make a deal on a handshake (like they used to?). Yes, there will be times when we have to take an oath. The law punishes you for perjury, if it comes out that you broke your word. That's life! Jesus reminds us that we must do better than the world expects. Here Jesus has us examine our character. Each