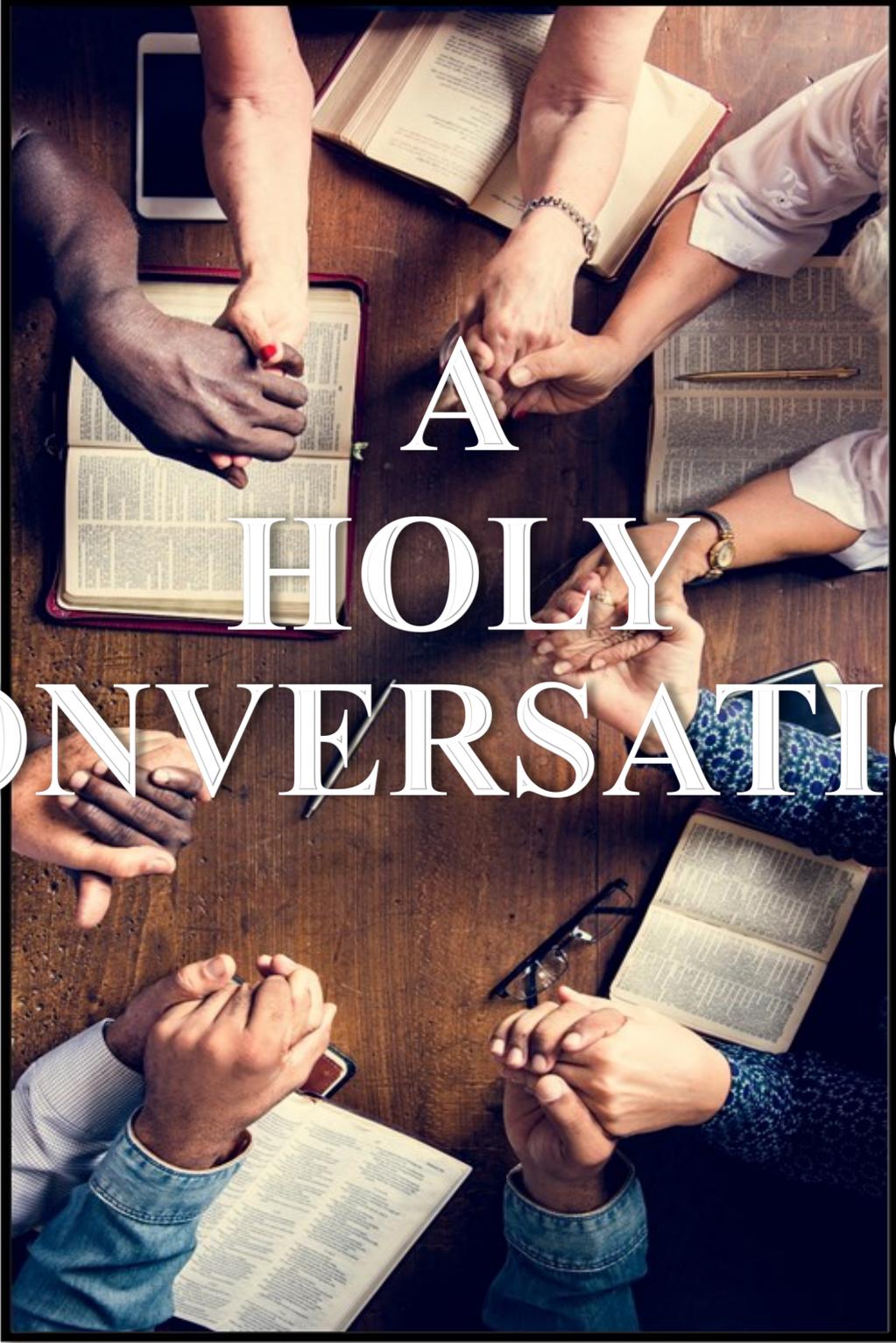


AN INVITATION TO:



A  
HOLY  
CONVERSATION

**“Attaining to the whole measure of the  
fullness of Christ.”** *(Ephesians 4: 13b)*

Booklet One

# **A Holy Conversation**

## **Around the Nature and Mission of the Church**

### *Introduction*

It is time for a “Holy Conversation” about the nature and mission of “The Church.” The Apostle Peter, in both of his letters, speaks to our need of “Holy Conversation” with one another. John Wesley also picks up the phrase, meaning Christians coming together in dialogue led by the Spirit into “all holiness of conversation.”

Our recent experiences, as a result, of the pandemic have been a reminder that the church is not a building, but a people, a particular people, who act in a particular way. The tragic death of George Floyd, the rioting, and the loss of innocent lives call for examination of how the church, the people of God, should act to show forth the One they call Lord. The crisis within the United Methodist Denomination must also be explored within the context of what it means to be a church, followers of Jesus Christ that speaks both the good news of God’s Love and the bad news that our ways are not His Ways, to the culture of the world at large.

In response to these three experiences, we are calling for a “Holy Conversation” over the nine weeks from August 9 to October 4. The conversation will not be over on October 4, but this is an intentional time for our conversing with the Lord and each other, about the nature and function of the church.

In this booklet, you will find a scripture for each day, Monday through Saturday. Each day will also pose two questions for your reflection and a brief commentary.

As you listen to God and reflect upon the scripture, record your insights that could guide us in our being a church together. There will be a link on the Mt. Auburn website, where you can post your insights, so that we can converse together.

Life groups will also be joining in this conversation. A lesson plan has been developed to encourage discussion around the theme and scriptural texts of each week within the life group format.

Sunday Morning Worship, during these Sundays of August 9 to October 4, will also call forth your response of what you are hearing from the Lord. Again, you will have the opportunity to share through the Mt. Auburn website, your missional insights from the Lord with the church leadership team.

The challenge for us will be to grasp a picture of the whole measure of the church which is expressed in the “Fullness of Christ.” It is Jesus Christ, who has called the church into being and has given us our missional calling through His own example of ministry among us to which He calls for us to continue.

As we begin, keep three truths in mind.

The church's commission is from Jesus Christ, and that commission has not changed.

1. In any discussion of what the church is and how it is called to function must be based in the Biblical witness of the Early Church. In this study, Paul's letter to the Church at Ephesus is our pivotal text, but the pattern illustrated there is identifiable in the pattern of Jesus' ministry as He formed the church at the very beginning.
2. Keep in mind, this is an integrated picture in several ways, meaning the church is a whole, and the whole will be significantly affected by its weakest functioning element.
  - a. There is an integrated flow of connections. We cannot understand what a disciple is apart from our understanding of what the nature and function of the church is. Nor can we understand what the church is without an understanding of who Jesus is. This takes us to the root question for both a disciple and the church – "Is Jesus being seen in us?"
  - b. This root question, "Is Jesus being seen in us?" moves us to the issue of identity and reaffirming of who we are in Christ.
  - c. The corollary is that the source of strength for the disciple as well as the church is Jesus Himself, to whom the Holy Spirit bears witness

## **“An Invitation into a Holy Conversation”**

**Aug. 9 – Week One**

**Key Verse – Ephesians 4:13**

**Preaching Texts – Rev. 2: 1-7; Eph. 4: 11-13**

**Focus Word – Fullness**

**Daily Reading - Monday, August 3, 2020**

**“Fix Your Eyes on Jesus”**

**Read – Hebrews 12: 1-3**

*Why are we to fix our eyes on Jesus?*

*What helps you to fix your eyes on Jesus?*

The author of Hebrews reminds us that we are in a race. The author is encouraging us in the race so that we do not grow weary or lose heart and we can run with perseverance. When you run a race, it is critical to fix your eyes on the goal, on the finish line. The goal tells you where you need to be and how far it is to get there.

Here, Hebrews reminds us, as Christians, that our goal is Jesus Christ Himself. John Wesley reminds us that Christians are called to reflect the image of Jesus Christ in their living in the world. The question is simply “Can Jesus Christ be seen in us?” Hebrews reminds us that Jesus is the author and finisher of faith. I believe, He is also the model of how we are to live in relationship with both God and our neighbor.

## **Daily Reading - Tuesday, August 4, 2020**

### **“Returning to Our First Love”**

#### **Read – Rev. 2: 1-7**

*How does a Church lose sight of its first love?*

*What has helped you keep your love for Christ alive?*

Jesus is speaking to the church of Ephesus in this passage from Revelation. He has a lot of good things to say about the church; they are working hard, making a difference. But Jesus has one criticism. They have forsaken their first love. Their first love is their love for and focus on Jesus the Savior, the wonder of His grace in their lives. Sometimes, we take precious things in our lives for granted. We get focused on other things, even good things, but we lose sight of the best.

Faith can be like that. The remedy -regain focus, be intentional about giving thanks for the grace we have in Jesus Christ. Be regular in the word and worship.

## **Daily Reading - Wednesday, August 5, 2020**

### **“Attaining to the Whole Measure of the Fullness of Christ”**

#### **Read – Ephesians 4: 11-13**

*What is the climatic point in this passage?*

*What is the assumed relationship between the disciple and the church?*

## Wednesday's Commentary

Here in the last part of verse 13, Paul is directing us to what the mature church, the body of Christ, is to attain to, our goal. He says: 1. Reach unity in the faith. 2. Knowledge of the Son of God. 3. Attain the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

We need to understand that faith is anchored in Christ Jesus.

Jesus is the reason for our faith and the focus of that faith.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ proclaims who He is and what He has done for us as our Savior.

The better we know Jesus, the better we can reflect Him in our own lives. In Jesus, we see the Father the clearest and understand in our heart His love and desire for us that fills us with Hope.

Make note of the double emphasis here – “the whole measure” and “the Fullness of Christ.” There is a direct correlation between the whole measure of the church to the fullness of Christ. The biblical witness points us to the fullness of who Jesus is in the course of His ministry among us. As we look to who Jesus is, we can more fully see what the church is called to be and how it is to function in the world.

Verse 11 tells us that Christ gave apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers, but Jesus did more than give these persons and gifts. He was each of these Himself, in His ministry among us, as He was shaping the disciples into becoming the Church.

## **Daily Reading - Thursday, August 6, 2020**

### **“Made Alive in Christ Jesus”**

#### **Read – Ephesians 2:1-10**

*What does sin do to us?*

*Why is there a different option for us? (verse 4)*

We are made alive with Christ! That is why Easter is such a big celebration. The Resurrection of Jesus means that in Christ Jesus we are made alive as well. That is news to celebrate. That is news to share with others. Understand clearly, this is not something we have merited, something we have earned, it is an act of God’s grace which saves us. Because of grace that we can accept into our lives, we have a future and that future is be raised up with Christ, to be seated in heaven.

Ephesians 2:8-10 is the text that John Wesley preached on more than any other. It is by Grace that we are saved. That grace is received through faith. The faith response in Christ Jesus is the channel by which God’s grace changes us, bringing forgiveness, a new focus to our life, and eternal life to us.

Do not miss verse 10. Verse ten reminds us that God is at work in us calling us to His mission that He has planned for us to do, to make a difference in the world in partnership with His Son, Christ Jesus. This isn’t something to boast about, because at heart it is God’s grace that is at work in us, but there is a purpose for us in His calling.

## **Daily Readings - Friday, August 7, 2020**

### **“Conformed to His Likeness”**

#### **Read – 2 Corinthians 3: 12-18**

*How does turning to Jesus take away the veil for you?*

*In verse 18, why does Paul want us to have unveiled faces?*

Paul uses an analogy here in his letter to the Corinthians to challenge the Corinthians in their witness before the world. He goes back to the Exodus story of Moses who veiled his face when coming down from the Mountain of God so the people would not see the glory of God shining on His face.

Paul reverses the charge here for Christians. Believers live in the presence of Jesus, and the glory of the presence of the Lord should be reflected in our lives. The power of the presence of Christ in our lives is that we are being changed, transformed into His image. That is the power of the Holy Spirit at work in us. That transformation is not going to take place over night, but it will be ever increasing as we spend more time in the presence of the Lord, and let Him shine through us.

Letting Him shine through us is a necessary part of the growing in faith interaction that we have with Christ through the Holy Spirit. To veil our face is to block the glory from ourselves as well as a failure in its witness to the world. Jesus put it, “Let your light be seen by men.”

## **Daily Readings - Saturday, August 8, 2020**

### **“Who Jesus Is”**

#### **Read – Hebrews 1:1-3**

*When did Jesus become more than a name to you?*

*Of all the qualities of Jesus mentioned in verses 2-3, which one are you appreciating more and more as your walk of faith continues?*

*What did Jesus do for us?*

This is a rich passage of scripture, like the Gospel of John, which wants us to understand that without doubt Jesus is the Son of God, who has been with the Father from the beginning of creation and a full partner in that creation.

Jesus, the Son of God, became incarnate in the world to do for us, what we could not do for ourselves. He provided purification for us, He cleansed us from sin by His own sacrifice. That is the Good News of the victory already won for us by He who is seated at the right hand of Majesty. Jesus has provided us the way back into fellowship with the Father again. Here is an eternal fellowship that the Father has intended for us since the beginning of creation.

This fullness of Christ makes us fall on our knees in thankfulness for the depth of His Love and the majesty of His Glory as our Lord and Savior.

## **Reflections on Week One of “An Invitation into a Holy Conversation.”**

We end the week where we started with:

“Oh, turn your eyes upon Jesus,  
Look full into His Wonderful face,  
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim,  
In the light of His glory and grace.”

“His Word shall not fail you, He promised,  
believe Him and all will be well.  
Then go to a world that is dying,  
His perfect salvation to tell.”

“Oh, turn your eyes upon Jesus,  
Look full in His Wonderful face.”

In the fullness of Jesus, we discover our calling as a Church and as Disciples, for this is a dying world that needs to hear of His perfect salvation, which is for them, even as it is for us. Look closely to this Shepherd of our souls, who came to teach us of the Father and show us the depth of the Father’s love. He proclaimed the Good News of salvation completed from the cross so that all might see Him as their Savior and proclaim Him as Lord of their lives by living into their true identity in Him who has, called them from death to life. As people respond to His Lordship, Christ sends them on His mission of redemption even as He sent the first Apostles for the hope and transformation of the world. May Jesus in His fullness be seen in us! The Church is measured by the fullness of Christ.

## **“An Invitation into a Holy Conversation”**

**Aug. 16 – Week Two**

**Key Verse – Ephesians 4:15-16**

**Preaching Texts – Colossians 3:12-17**

**Focus Word – Body**

**Daily Readings - Monday, August 10, 2020**

**“One Body in Christ”**

**Read – I Corinthians 12: 12 – 27**

*How does Paul counter the spiritual pride of the Corinthians in this passage?*

*What are the implications of verse 26 for the Church? For your Life Group?*

The Church at Corinth was Paul’s problem child. They were contentious, arguing with one another, and prideful. What Paul is trying to impress upon the Corinthians was they were no longer to think of themselves in individual terms, but they were the Body of Christ together. Jesus Christ is represented to the world by a community of faith.

What does this community look like? Well, it is a body. The body functions as a whole, each part is working in harmony with all the other parts to a common goal, God’s Glory. The Church is the Body of Christ.

**Daily Readings - Tuesday, August 11, 2020**

**“Held together in Love”**

**Read – Ephesians 4: 14-16**

*What is the function of the Head in the Body?*

*What is the climactic point of this whole passage?*

The Apostle Paul is giving direction to the storm-tossed Corinthian Church in this passage. Essential his word to them is “Grow-Up.” Do you recall the “grow-up” conversation you had with your teenagers? It can be a tough conversation to have.

Paul gives the Corinthians, in this passage, two clear words on how to grow-up. First, Paul says, “Grow-up into Him who is the Head.” Paul is saying that a part of growing-up is recognizing who is in charge. So much heartache happens in the church along with the work-place and any number of other settings because we get confused here. We begin acting as if we are the ones in charge, instead of recognizing, in the church, that it is Jesus Christ that is the Head of the Church. Jesus is the one that gives direction and purpose to the church.

Second, Paul says that all the ligaments, those connectors that hold everything together, are Love. God is Love and has called the Church into being through His Love. The Church is to give expression to God’s Love in every aspect of what it does so that the world may not just hear about Love, but see Love lived.

## **Daily Readings - Wednesday, August 12, 2020**

### **“Christ in You, the Hope of Glory”**

#### **Read – I Colossians 1: 13-27**

*From what have we been rescued? For what?*

*What is the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages?*

Paul wants us to be clear about salvation. He wants us to be clear what we have been saved from and what we are saved for. This is a whole new world, a new kingdom, into which we have been born. A world of Life.

Nor does Paul want us to miss “The Who” of our salvation. “The Who” is Jesus Christ, the very Son of God. Paul makes a point of underscoring the divinity of Jesus, in detail, and then reminding us of all that Jesus has done for us so that we might be reconciled to the Father. It is this same Jesus who is the Head of the Church. A church that is called to be Holy, established in Faith, and grounded in the Hope of the gospel.

Finally, Paul points us to the living out of our salvation, which has been a mystery for so many ages. But, now that mystery is revealed to the saints and applied to not only the Jews, but also to the Gentiles. This secret, to living out of your salvation, is Christ in you, His taking residence in your hearts through faith in Jesus, Who has been given to us by the Grace and the Love of God. Here is our Hope of glory, our Hope of living life in fellowship with God forever.

## **Daily Readings - Thursday, August 13, 2020**

### **“Love in Action”**

#### **Read – Colossians 3: 12-17**

*When you need to feel like a “New Person,” what outfit do you like to wear?*

*What difference do these new clothes of faith make in your relationship with others?*

I remember a short story by O Henry, how clothes make the man. A thief put on the clothes of a policeman to be a lookout, but he was changed by his interaction with people, when he was in his new set of police clothes.

That is the thought of Paul here in Colossians. In Christ, we are chosen, Holy, and Dearly Loved. That is who we are in Christ Jesus, our Lord. As such, we need to wear a new wardrobe of clothing. This new wardrobe affirms our new identity. Four of the garments, Paul, also, includes in his list of the Fruits of the Spirit: Kindness, Gentleness, Patience, and Love. These clothes will change us as we wear them daily.

Then, Paul calls for another Fruit of The Spirit – Peace - to rule in our hearts. Since we live at Peace with God, because of what Jesus has done for us on the cross, then we can live peacefully with each other. The person of peace brings calm into the midst of chaos, because of the Peace of God is ruling in their hearts. Do not forget to be thankful - that completes the ensemble.

## **Daily Readings - Friday, August 14, 2020**

### **“A Spiritual House”**

#### **Read – I Peter 2: 4-10**

*What is the task of the people who belong to God?*

*How does it make you feel to be chosen, royalty, and God’s possession?*

Peter gives us a very interesting picture of us not only as disciples, but as a church. Discipleship is inseparable from the fellowship of the church, or from Jesus in this picture.

Jesus is the Living Stone. He is our bedrock. In coming to Jesus, we become living stones, as well. As Living stones, we are fashioned together into a Spiritual House, with Jesus as the Cornerstone. He is the Stone upon which the whole house is built, and without the Cornerstone the whole building collapses. Both the living stones and the whole house are to reflect Jesus.

One of the positions that believers assume in this Spiritual House is a royal priesthood. The function of the priesthood is to make connection between God and the people. In this sense, believers are to connect God with the people of the unbelieving world. They are to let His Light shine in the darkness. In a cruel merciless world, the priesthood points to the mercy of God, a God who would claim us as His own.

## **Daily Readings - Saturday, August 15, 2020**

### **“The Church, the Fullness of Jesus”**

#### **Read – Ephesians 1: 15-23**

*What does Paul pray that you and the Ephesians may have?*

*Why?*

*How would these three gifts change your life, if you accepted them?*

Paul has heard how faith in the Lord Jesus has been growing in Ephesus, and how The Ephesians are living that faith out, in love for others. Paul is clear faith must express itself in love.

It is in this joy that Paul prays that the Ephesians may have three gifts which will deepen them in the fullness of Jesus. His pray is essential that they may be grounded more fully in Jesus, to experience and give expression to all of Who He is. The three gifts are:

1. The Holy Spirit – The Holy Spirit points us always to Jesus so that we may know Him better.
2. The Eyes of your Heart enlightened – This is a call for light so that we might better see the Hope to which we have been called. We have been called to an eternal fellowship with the Father. Can you see it?
3. Jesus’ glorious inheritance in the saints – Here is the power of belief that connects us to the Father, and the power that raised Jesus from the dead.

## **Reflections on Week Two of “An Invitation into a Holy Conversation.”**

Jesus is represented to the world, by His Body, the Church. The image of the Church as a body conveys the connectedness of many parts working together under the direction of the Head, for the same purpose. There are several cementing elements that hold the Body together, which need to be evident within the body’s functioning.

Obviously, Jesus Christ as the Head of the Church is one of those cementing elements that keeps us on mission. Paul, however, takes the presence of Christ further when he refers continually to Christ in you. In this week’s readings, Christ in You, the Hope of Glory underscores the critical nature of Christ’s presence. So, the question is where do you see the presence of Christ in the church? How are you intentionally focusing on Jesus and living Him out in your relationships? As a Church, we are called to be the fullness of Jesus.

Another of the cementing elements is the Holy Spirit. The Spirit makes us one, uniting us in prayer, and turning our attention to Jesus. It is the Spirit that equips the Church with gifts that up-builds the body. It is our cooperation with the Spirit that empowers us to be the Spiritual house, a Holy Nation that Peter envisioned.

Finally, it is Love that holds the church together. But it is a love that is in action. It is the same Love, which Jesus lived out during His Ministry among us. Are you the evidence of Jesus, the Spirit, and Love among us?

# The Five Functions of the Church



*In the Fullness of Jesus*



**Aug. 23 – Week Three - Monday, August 17, 2020**

**“The Good Shepherd”**

**Key Verse – John 10: 14-15**

**Preaching Texts – John 10:11-18**

**Daily Reading – John 10:11-18**

*What is the relationship of the Shepherd to the sheep?*

*How does Jesus identify Himself with the “Good Shepherd?”*

Jesus is clear, there is a relationship between the “Good Shepherd” and the sheep. He names five characteristics of this relationship.

1. The Shepherd lays his life down for the sheep, meaning that the sheep are loved by the Shepherd.
2. The Sheep know the Shepherd. They know His love and caring for them. It is personal.
3. The sheep listen to the voice of the Shepherd. They recognize His voice and are obedient to it.
4. There is one flock, connected to one another. They are the Shepherd’s Flock marked by love.
5. There is one Shepherd, one Voice, and one Master.

**“The Whole Measure of the Fullness of Christ”**

## **Daily Readings - Tuesday, August 18, 2020**

### **“Shepherded and Shepherding”**

#### **Read – John 21: 15-19**

*Why do you think, Jesus repeated the same question and charge to Peter three times?*

*When Peter tried to turn Jesus’ attention to one of the other disciples, what is the crucial issue that Jesus reveals in His response to Peter?*

Peter needed to experience the forgiveness of Jesus; before he could move forward as a disciple. By the Sea, Jesus appears to several disciples as they are fishing. Here, Jesus speaks to Peter right at the point of his need.

Peter do you truly love me? Peter was very conscious of His failure to carry through with his commitment to Jesus on the night of the arrest. What Jesus calls for Peter to do is reaffirm his personal love for Jesus, and then directs Peter that his love for Jesus needs to be demonstrated in the lives of others.

Jesus, says Peter, if you love me, “Feed my lambs,” “Take Care of my sheep, and Feed my sheep.” Jesus points Peter to the flock of the Good Shepherd. Feeding lambs, feeding sheep is needed in the flock. “Peter, you know my word, share it. The flock needs care Peter, people get hurt, injured, scared, and lost. Peter, be there for my flock.” Oh, by the way, disciple, just replace the name of Peter with your name, same message.

## **Daily Readings - Wednesday, August 19, 2020**

### **“Abiding”**

#### **Read – John 15: 1-17**

*How is love the essential dynamic of the Christian Life?*

*What is the link between obedience and prayer?*

In the Upper Room, Jesus changes up the nature of the relationship He has with disciples. He says, “You are not servants, but my friends.” The relationship is personal. Then Jesus takes us into what this change means. Friends talk. Friends share what is happening and why. Jesus says, I have told you everything that my Father has told me. Now, you disciples know what the purposes of God are, and purpose number one is your salvation.

But the friendship is a two-way street. Disciples have a part to do as well. “Disciples remain in me, abide in the vine. The secret of your fruitfulness as a disciple is staying connected to me.

How does that happen? How do you stay connected with Jesus? Jesus called on the disciples to pray as they went out to the Garden of Gethsemane, so they could withstand what was coming. Staying connected to Jesus who is the Word through the Word is a step that brings us vital nutrients. Staying connected to the Family of God, as they gather for worship and study together, connects us vitally to the Shepherd. Alone, unconnected, we are in trouble. Abide in Jesus!

## **Daily Readings - Thursday, August 20, 2020**

### **“Fruits of Community”**

#### **Read – Galatians 5: 22-26**

*How are you growing the Spiritual Fruit that the Holy Spirit is forming in you?*

*Which fruits are ripening? Which are still buds?*

Let us take a trip to the garden. What in your garden grows without help? In my garden, for some reason, the weeds are always popping up without any help from me. My tomatoes - that is another story. My tomatoes need fertilizer and water and weeding.

The fruits of the Spirit in my life also need tending if they are going to produce good, ripe fruit that will bless me and others. There are some attitudes and behaviors that need to be weeded out if the behavior of patience has any chance of maturing. If the Fruit of Love is going to mature, then I am going to need to water it with the inspiration of Jesus' ministry among us and the passion of worship. If fruit of kindness is going to grow into a juicy, tasty fruit, I am going to have to fertilize it with regular practice in challenging situations.

Note as well these fruits are all relational. Love, Joy, and Peace grow in our relationship to God. The fruits of Patience, Kindness, and Goodness are developed in our relationship to others. And the last three, Faithfulness, Gentleness, and Self-control grow in our own heart.

## **Daily Readings - Friday, August 21, 2020**

### **“My Shepherd”**

#### **Read – Psalm 23**

*What does the Shepherd do for the Sheep? List?*

*Which of these actions of the Shepherd is most meaningful to you?*

This Psalm of David comes out David’s own personal experience of being a Shepherd and being Shepherded by the Lord. The only reason that the sheep do not want is because they have a shepherd. Left to their own devices, the sheep are vulnerable, to the wolves, getting lost, not finding the good grass, nor the quiet waters. The Shepherd makes all the difference in the life of the sheep.

One of the critical things that a Shepherd does is gather the sheep together into one flock. The sheep are safer together. They are together, because of the shepherd they hold in common. They want to be near the Shepherd, who has the rod of protection, the staff of rescue, and the voice that soothes their fears.

The picture of the prepared table is for me a powerful symbol of the Lord’s Supper. The Prepared Table reminds me that I am expected and wanted. The Prepared Table is not just what can be thrown together, at the last minute. The Prepared Table will have each of our particular needs in mind. Jesus, our Shepherd prepares the table to meet our need of salvation.

## **Daily Readings - Saturday, August 22, 2020**

### **“The Seeking Shepherd”**

#### **Read – Luke 15:1-7**

*How do sheep get lost?*

*What is the attitude of the Shepherd when He finds the lost Lamb?*

I have had the experience of the Lost Sheep from both sides of the story. As a boy, I got lost from my parents in Florida. I was in a strange place. I knew no one. I could not find my parents. It was scary. I did not know what to do. So, I did all the wrong things, and started wandering. Then my parents spotted me, walking alongside the road. I was relieved; they were relieved.

Our oldest grand-daughter got separated from the family group at the zoo some years ago. She was the oldest, and everybody was focused on the other young children until suddenly – Where is Annie? Several of us went off in different directions looking. Some minutes later, I spotted her in the crowd going away from where we were. I called her name. She turned and spotted me, and with tears filling her eyes, she came running.

People do not intend to get lost, generally. They just get distracted, they head off in pursuit of something they thought was important at the time and suddenly they discover that they are alone, vulnerable, and scared. They need one who searches for them. How about you?

## **Reflections on Week Three of “An Invitation into a Holy Conversation.”**

The Church is: The Flock of God’s gathered and gathering people, who bear witness to the healing presence of the Shepherd, and then live His love into the World.

One of the things that Jesus knew about we human beings is that we need shepherding. We were created for community; we were created for fellowship with the Shepherd and one another. The Church is called to be that flock of community, who are responding to the call of the Shepherd, to gather together in worship and celebration of the Shepherd’s Love. The Church is also called to be a gathering community, bringing others to the Shepherd’s love and healing, sharing the love and healing which we ourselves have received.

One of the other things that happens to we human beings is that we get hurt. We get thorns and burrs of irritation under the skin. We lose our way and get separated from the Flock for a variety of reasons. We face sickness and disease. But, we are not equipped to heal ourselves, nor are we good at finding our way home to the flock without some intentional seeking and caring help. We need the ministrations of the Shepherd and the care of the flock. The flock is not perfect, but the sheep of the flock gather around a perfect and good Shepherd, who has laid down His life for the sheep out of His Love for them. The Flock is to take its cues from the Shepherd and live into His Love.



**Aug. 30 – Week Four - Monday, August 24, 2020**

**“Full of Grace and Truth”**

**Key Verse – Matthew 4:4**

**Preaching Texts – II Timothy 3: 16-17**

**Daily Reading – John 1: 1-5, 14-18**

*What facts about “The Word” can you find in these verses?*

*How did Jesus come?*

John poignantly says, “The word became flesh and made His dwelling among us.” It raises a question, have you allowed Jesus to dwell with you?” Remember, Jesus is the Living Word of God, who was from the beginning, Who came in the flesh. He ascended back to the Father after the Resurrection, but He still lives and still seeks to dwell in us through the Holy Spirit taking up residence in our hearts. That is where He wants to dwell. But to dwell there, He needs to be received (v.11). He needs to be invited in. How do you invite the Living Word to come and dwell in your Life? By treasuring the Word, we become the Children of God.

## **Daily Readings - Tuesday, August 25, 2020**

### **“Live by the Word of God”**

#### **Read – Matthew 4:4 and Isaiah 55: 10-11**

*How does Jesus handle temptation?*

*What purpose is God’s word accomplishing in you?*

The temptation comes in the form of hunger. How much time do you spend trying to decide what you are going to eat, fixing the food, and then consuming it? Food, we have a real need for it, and find joy in the satisfying of that need. After 40 days in the wilderness, Jesus was hungry.

As Jesus processed the temptation of hunger that came to Him, He asks Himself the critical question. How does a man live? The answer to the question is based in who you think people are. If you think that people are just flesh and blood, then bread is what gives, you, life.

But, Jesus knew that people are not just flesh and blood. He knew that the Father had breathed the very breath of life into us. We are spiritual beings, meant for an eternal fellowship with God. As spiritual beings, we live by words - words that are breathed into us by the Mouth of God. Words are the flesh and blood of a relationship. Relationships cannot exist without words. The Word of God is our real need, the real hunger of our lives. Don’t settle for the bread of the world, feast on the Living Word that gives Life.

## **Daily Readings - Wednesday, August 26, 2020**

### **“Bread from Heaven”**

#### **Read – John 6: 32-59**

*What does the Bread of God do?*

*How do we receive eternal life?*

Jesus is quoting the Prophet Isaiah when He says, “They will all be taught by God” (Isaiah 54:13). Isaiah says the result of being taught by the Lord will be great peace for the people. Isaiah was seeing ahead to Jesus and His teaching about the Kingdom of God.

Jesus as He speaks to the People on the day after His feeding of the multitude in the Gospel of God, says that no one else can speak with authority about the Father, except the One who has come from God, Only He has seen the Father. Jesus is the Teacher, with authority, because He is sharing His personal testimony.

Moses led the Children of Israel out of Egypt and slavery through 40 years in the wilderness. The one food that sustained Israel in that 40-year sojourn was Mana, sent from Heaven. There is still a wilderness that the believer must travel through today, where wholesome food is hard to find. Jesus is the Bread of Heaven, sent by the Father for the sustenance of those who are on the way to God’s Eternal Promised Land, where we can live in full fellowship with the Father. Today, believe in the Son as the Living Bread, Who brings life for you.

## **Daily Readings - Thursday, August 27, 2020**

### **“God Breathed”**

#### **Read – II Timothy 3: 16-17**

*What does Paul say about the origin and purpose of scripture?*

*What good works do you need to be about?*

All Scripture is God breathed. What Paul is saying to Timothy is that there is vitality to the Word of God that gives life to us, as did God’s first breathe into the nostrils of Adam in creation.

Today, there is a nearly endless stream of words that we encounter every day. Much of it is empty, at best, deceptive and misleading, at worst, which are aimed to entertain and distract us from what really matters. Vital, living words are what we really need to shape our lives. Words, which matter, have the substance of truth. These vital words direct us to how life is to be lived, so that we can make an eternal difference. These are the God Breathed Words that Paul recommends to young Timothy.

The purpose, Paul had in mind for Timothy, was so Timothy might be thoroughly equipped. I have come to tasks less than thoroughly equipped. Haven’t you? That is an exercise in frustration, trying to make do with the wrong tool. But Paul says, God has provided you with the right equipment, just breathe it in, Timothy.

## **Daily Readings - Friday, August 28, 2020**

### **“The Way, the Truth, and the Life”**

#### **Read – John 14: 1-11**

*Write out Jesus’ “I AM” statement in 14: 6-7 in your own words.*

*In troubled times, what promises of God give you hope and courage?*

In the Upper Room, Jesus was very much The Teacher. He knew that He was running out of time. The students were not showing great aptitude at understanding the lessons that He had been trying to impress upon them for the last 3 years. So, Jesus really narrows it down. These are the lessons you really must learn.

But then, in his dialogue with Philip, Jesus shifts gears and reminds them again. “The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father, living in Me, who is doing His work.” Philip, the Teacher here is the Father. Jesus and the Father are on the same page.

You disciples have seen marvelous things, the Father is at work through me, and because I am going to the Father, the Father is going to be at work through you too. Philip, I am the Way to the Father, I am the Truth of the Father, and I am the Life that the Father wants to give you, Philip, if you believe. Philip, believe you have seen the Father in Me!

## **Daily Readings - Saturday, August 29, 2020**

### **“A Lamp unto your Feet”**

#### **Read – Psalm 119: 105**

*What is the purpose of a lamp?*

*How do you keep your lamp from going out?*

The 119<sup>th</sup> Psalm is the longest chapter in the entire Bible. All 176 verses are about the scriptures as the Word of God that guide us in the living of our lives. The 105<sup>th</sup> verse is a part of the Pledge to the Bible that has been used by children in Sunday School for a long time.

The light of a lamp is how the darkness is broken. There is never any contest between darkness and the light. The light always wins. The darkness is a threat to our path. Without the light, we cannot see the path clearly. To get off the path in the dark means that we can be tripped up and fall on the uneven ground or miss a trap for our feet that might cause injury.

How are we to live in a dark world? We are in danger without a reliable source of light. God’s Word is that reliable source of light. God is the creator of the heavens and the earth. He knows how everything was put together. His Word is like the owner’s manual for your car. Here are the detail instructions as to how life works and what the overall plan for life is really all about. To walk through life without reference to God’s manual for living is foolishness in the extreme.

## **Reflections on Week Four of “An Invitation into a Holy Conversation.”**

The Church is: An Equipping Community which lives by God’s Word, who know Jesus as the Way, the Truth, and the Life, and share the fullness of Jesus with the world.

The church is more than a learning community. It is an equipping community. It is a community that uses every opportunity to reach out and teach the Way of Faith to every person in the community and world, because this is equipping knowledge that the whole world needs.

The focus of the church’s teaching is Jesus Christ. Jesus is the Way into fellowship with the Father. Jesus is the Truth about God and His Love for each of us. Jesus is the Life that we are called to live into.

The Scriptures bear witness to Jesus as Lord and Savior. The Old Testament points forward to Him, as it announces the character and promises of God inviting people into relationship with the Father. The Gospels of the New Testament bear witness to the Life of Jesus lived in our midst as the “I AM” of God who made a Way for us to be forgiven and reconciled to the Father on the cross with the shedding of His Blood. In defeating death, and rising from the grave, Jesus is the Life which is eternal that He offers us. The rest of the New Testament points us back to Jesus and invites us to live in Him, as Savior and Lord, through the power of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the scriptures are both authoritative and essential for the living of the Christian life.

**Notes:**

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