

Good News Daily

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Sunday, December 6

2 Peter 3:1-10 *Remember the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets, and the commandment of the Lord and Savior spoken through your apostles.* (v.2 NRSV)

My daughter's first day of first grade caused me to remember my first day of first grade. The hallway (turn right at the office), the room (last on the right), and the teacher (Mrs. Rose). What makes this scene, like many others since, so easy to remember? How are certain memories so readily etched in our minds?

Peter encouraged the brothers and sisters in Christ who read his letter to remember the word of God, both the Hebrew Scriptures (the holy prophets) and the writings we now call the New Testament (the commandment spoken through the apostles). Perhaps he envisioned a vivid memory, like that of the first day of school, for his readers. Peter knew that the vivid memory of God's word would prove a strength in the face of danger, anxiety, or trial.

This vivid and encouraging remembrance of God's word can happen for us when we "treasure," "plant," or "keep" Holy Scripture in our hearts and minds. Memorizing and repeating biblical passages of hope, encouragement, and promise becomes the vivid memory of God's word that will strengthen us in the midst of trouble.

Isaiah 5:1-7; Psalms 148, 149, 150; Luke 7:28-35

Monday, December 7

Luke 21:20-28 *"Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."* (v.28)

When we were residents of North Central Florida, my wife and I regularly tested our young children on tornado safety: climb in the bathtub and hunker down under the bath towels. This may seem a bit overboard to some, but tornadoes are a regular occurrence on the Florida weather map. If, however, Jesus returns during my or their lifetime, I'm sure his arrival will dwarf any tornado or hurricane.

Our human reaction to these signs—death and destruction on a biblical proportion—could be "fear and foreboding." But God's word directs us not to hunker down in fear but to stand up, raise our heads, and watch the Lord's arrival.

We can stand without fear and trembling because we are in Christ Jesus. The final installment on our redemption from sin and death will be made on his return. The process of new life which started when we acknowledged Jesus as Lord and Savior draws to completion with his return.

Isaiah 5:8-12, 18-23; Psalm 25; 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

Tuesday, December 8

Psalm 27 *The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?* (v.1)

I often lead a session on Christian stewardship which examines the worries, concerns, and anxieties of participants. Individual worries and concerns often fill a sheet of paper and then the group's worries and concerns usually fill a poster board. Life today seems to breed worry and anxiety for believers and non-believers alike.

Our human condition—fallen, sinful and self-centered—breeds fear and anxiety. Our natural response to uncertainty or loss of control in our lives focuses on fear, anxiety, and worry. The godly response to fear—trust and contentment—is, on the other hand, taught and learned.

The psalmist understood that only the Lord could teach and lead him. The apostle Paul understood that through trial and adversity he had learned (and kept on learning) contentment: "For I have learned to be content with whatever I have. I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have

learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need” (Philippians 4:11b-12).

Trust and contentment are very unnatural—perhaps supernatural—reactions to uncertainty and loss. But these two essential spiritual reactions come only when we learn the way taught by the Lord.

Isaiah 5:13-17, 24-25; Psalms 26, 28; 1 Thessalonians 5:12-28; Luke 21:29-38

Wednesday, December 9

2 Thessalonians 1:1-12 *Therefore we ourselves boast of you among the churches of God for your steadfastness and faith during all your persecutions and the afflictions that you are enduring.* (v.4)

A world map with red highlights covers part of the wall near my desk. It is not an ordinary world map, because the red highlights denote countries where our brothers and sisters in Christ are regularly and routinely harassed, imprisoned, beaten, and killed for their Christian faith. The map proclaims the persecuted Church around the world.

I pray for these brothers and sisters in the hope that their government leaders might come to know Christ through the witness of the persecuted Church. I also pray that our persecuted brothers and sisters may be strengthened and sustained to make a good confession, in whatever form, of their faith.

The persecuted Church throughout the world shines like a beacon of witness and encouragement through its “steadfastness and faith” in the face of persecution and affliction.

I also pray that the example of persecuted brothers and sisters will strengthen and challenge me. Peter says to “always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you” (1 Peter 3:15). I pray that I may be as steadfast and as faithful as my persecuted brothers and sisters.

Isaiah 6:1-13; Psalm 38; John 7:53—8:11

Thursday, December 10

Psalms 37:1-18 *Be still before the LORD, and wait patiently for him.* (v.7)

Although written during the lazy, hazy days of summer, this devotion will be read with only fourteen shopping days until Christmas. Stillness, quiet, and calm are probably not words that will describe this time of preparation for Christmas Day.

It is easy to blame the craziness of the season on the greedy retailers. They become an easy mark when Christmas merchandise and holiday sales begin in late October. Perhaps holiday shopping will one day begin after Labor Day.

Retail merchants cannot, however, sell what we do not demand. Stores will only open at 7 a.m. if consumers will buy. Holiday sales and in-store specials only occur with the dollar’s support.

Perhaps the psalmist’s words are about confessing our sins before God: the sin of letting it all get so crazy—the sin of allowing our lives, especially during this time of preparation, to become so noisy, busy, and unmanageable. To paraphrase Shakespeare, perhaps the fault is not in the star-studded stores, but in ourselves.

Isaiah 7:1-9; 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12; Luke 22:1-13

Friday, December 11

Luke 22:14-30 *“But not so with you; rather the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like the one who serves.”* (v.26)

Living for a time in Virginia afforded me the opportunity to “experience” many places and events of American history. Walking tours brought Jamestown, Williamsburg, and Manassas to life.

It was during a walking tour of Yorktown, the site of the British army’s surrender, that the gospel was brought to life. A brief narrative noted that the British fife and drum played a tune called *The World Turned Upside-Down* as the redcoats stacked arms before the colonial troops. For the mighty British Empire, the world was turned upside down.

Jesus not only taught, but he lived and died “a world turned upside-down.” Jesus’ ministry and atoning death overturned completely our human understanding of leadership (“When I say jump, you should say how high!”) and our human understanding of a relationship with God the Father (“I’ll do it my way!”).

Truly living the gospel means flipping over our human—broken and sinful—understandings of power, authority, leadership, and service. And this great reversal is probably just as difficult for us as surrender was for the British at Yorktown.

Isaiah 7:10-25; Psalm 31; 2 Thessalonians 2:13—3:5

Saturday, December 12

2 Thessalonians 3:6-18 *Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times in all ways.* (v.16a)

“No Jesus, No Peace; Know Jesus, Know Peace” states a recent bumper sticker. Although it seems cliché, this bumper sticker hits the mark regarding the biblical understanding of peace.

From a human perspective, we look for peace on a horizontal perspective. We desire peace, or lack of conflict, between individuals, groups, or nations. This peace is often short-lived; conflict seems to move from place to place in companies, neighborhoods, and countries. Why can’t we all just get along?

The biblical understanding of peace, however, exists on a vertical or spiritual plane. True peace is achieved when we claim Jesus’ cross as the instrument of our reconciliation with God the Father. This peace helps us understand and know contentment even in the face of conflict. The peace of God through Christ also provides us the key to being truly peaceful with one another. As Paul writes, “So he [Jesus] came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father” (Ephesians 2:17-18).

Isaiah 8:1-15; Psalms 30, 32; Luke 22:31-38

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