



HOPE STARTS HERE

March 23-28, 2020

As we face this challenging time of social distancing, we want to join in daily devotionals, structured around our church's Core Values, to encourage us in our walk with God. Please consider incorporating these into your "new normal" as a time of Scripture reading, reflection and prayer individually or with your family.

We invite you to open by reading the Bible passage(s) for each day, then read the devotional text. If you are sharing this as a family or over the phone with a friend, take a few moments to reflect on the Scripture and the text. Then close in prayer, including the prompt for each day but adding the praises and prayers that are on your own heart. May God bless his people through this time as we seek his face together!

March 23—Found People Find People

Pastor Geoff Schultz

REMEMBERING HIS PRESENCE

[John 14:25-27](#)

You and I tend to forget. When the chaos swirls around us, and the headlines scream things are out of control, we can be overwhelmed with what we think is happening in the moment.

Yet the Holy Spirit can give us a "sacred memory." He can remind us of Jesus. It is good to remember what we have and how we have been blessed. When we remember His goodness, anxiety lessens. When we remember his presence, the result is peace.

The world will attempt to legislate peace, negotiate peace, appropriate peace. But it over-promises and under-delivers. What it gives can be taken away.

Jesus says he will give us peace. This is a treasure to hold dear, because it reminds us that he is giving us himself. We need not be afraid, because our Savior is near.

Prayer prompt: Lord Jesus, give us your peace.

SEEING WITH COMPASSION

[Mark 6:33-44](#)

The Feeding of the 5,000 began because Jesus had compassion for the people. With the eyes of heaven, they were like sheep without a shepherd. In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, many people are wondering and wandering in light of an uncertain future.

With parents thrust into the realm of homeschooling, men and women working from home, unemployment sky-rocketing, this is an opportunity for the body of Christ to rise up and shepherd the wondering and wandering sheep in our communities.

How do we do it? It begins with *compassion* for those around us. “Jesus saw them and he had compassion.” As you see your neighbors, your local businesses, the folks in your community, do you have compassion for them?

One of the principles of this story in Mark is that having compassion and meeting the needs of others isn’t birthed out of abundance but in simply what we have to offer. When God is present, two fish and five loaves is all you need.

There are four basic questions that form the heart of spiritual direction. They are:

1. God, where are you in this?
2. What are you doing, God?
3. How am I responding to this?
4. How do you want me to respond?

Let’s ask these questions daily with the eyes of faith, with a heart of compassion and with hands and feet to serve those around us.

Prayer prompt: God, give us compassion for those around us and eyes to see the work you are already doing.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO LOVE MY NEIGHBOR?

[Mark 12:28-34](#)

We don't often acknowledge it, but by and large, to be American is to look out for "number one." It's all about *me*, what *I* want, what makes *me* happy.

So in this season of confusion and discomfort, there has been a tendency by many to have a very "American" response to the situation and subsequent restrictions put on our day-to-day lives: "This causes *me* discomfort; this is inconveniencing *me*." I have felt this too; I am one of the most selfish people I know, and I am constantly at war with myself because of it.

But we are not called to identify as American first. Maybe that seems unpatriotic, but we are in good company. The early Jewish and Roman converts went through the same thing, calling into question their culture against their newfound faith. As Christians, we are called to take spiritual stock of our American behaviors and sensibilities, and check them in line with what Jesus says.

The Gospel of Jesus Christ is not, and has never been, a message about looking out for "number one." It is not selfish, but it is a message of God's selfless love for us, and an encouragement to us to show selfless love to one another. We must take off our crowns of aggravation due to inconvenience, and begin to wear a shroud of compassion, putting Mark 12:31 into practice.

Jesus calls us to "love [our] neighbors as [ourselves]," and puts this command in line as one of the greatest commandments, superseded only by the command to love God with everything we are. To love our neighbor is to put ourselves in the shoes of our neighbor.

We need to ask ourselves, "If I were sick, or frail, or at risk of death due to this virus, how would I want others to conduct themselves? How would I want others to show me love?" From there, we need to put the answer we give ourselves into practice.

It's likely your answer may cause you some discomfort, and that's okay. It just means you're becoming more like Jesus, which is why we chose to follow Him in the first place.

Prayer prompt: Jesus, help us to love our neighbors as ourselves. Help us to be like you.

WE ARE NOT IN EXILE

[Jeremiah 29:12-14](#)

These verses in Jeremiah are God's words written to a people in exile.

Good news! We are not in exile.

That's probably not a reality that most of us have grappled with before. But we are all feeling the effect of shutdowns, isolation and major changes taking place in our weekly schedules. Some of these changes include social distancing, self-isolation and quarantine.

It's easy to use this newfound alone time to worry about the future and feel the very real effects of loneliness. In that worry, be reminded of the message in Jeremiah's words: Draw near to God; he has not left you! You are not alone; he hears your prayers.

Let us be encouraged! We serve a God who hears us, who is always available to us when we seek Him in genuine prayer and worship. Praise our God who is always near.

To those of you who are struggling with the lack of social interaction—God sees you. We see you. We are praying for you. We are so ready to be with you again.

Prayer prompt: Holy Spirit, remind us that we are never alone. Show us how we can support one another, even and especially at this time.

THE PARTNERSHIP OF GIVING

[Philippians 4:10-20](#)

Many of you know that Ginger and I spent three years teaching in China, and we stay connected to former students and several of our friends who are still serving there with their families.

So we received a preview of this whole mess beginning in January through their emails and newsletters. Foreign teachers were blocked from returning to their fields of service, and they remain in various locations around the world, living out of suitcases and waiting. They connect with students over video chat and text; one friend is attempting to teach a debate class online.

Our emails with former students reveal a strong contrast. Some are distraught, uncertain of the future and angry about many things. But others have true hope, and peace that passes understanding.

In the middle of this, we realize that we are still part of the work of sharing that hope and peace. We continue to pray, but we can also add to our regular support of those who, like Paul, are facing many unexpected expenses in their service. We have a chance to be an encouragement to them as we make a fragrant offering.

At times like these, the temptation to find security in our money is strong. But are we willing to enter into true partnership with our brothers and sisters? Whether around the world or closer to home through opportunities like the Care to Share fund, will we support one another as there is need, to the glory of the Father?

Prayer prompt: Father, help us to hold loosely to the gifts you have given us, to make sacrifices acceptable and pleasing in your sight.

NEW WAYS TO WORSHIP

[Luke 4:8; John 10:10, 16:33; Isaiah 40:31](#)

For many of us, when we hear the word worship we immediately think of church or singing. Just being in a church filled with people seeking God and singing out to him is enough to bring me peace and comfort regardless of what is happening in my life.

So what happens when that is taken away from us? We have been given opportunities to take advantage of the things we often take for granted. We are figuring out what is actually important in this life. We have been forced to be still and listen for God's voice in the darkest hours. We have found new ways to worship.

As I study God's Word and get to know the desires of his heart, I find that worship can simply be putting others' needs before our own, serving those around us, loving each other, and most importantly, placing God at the center of our lives.

No matter what attacks the enemy throws at us, he cannot take away the life we have been given in Christ. And he cannot take away our ability to worship God! I urge you today to spend time worshipping God in your own unique way.

Prayer prompt: Holy Spirit, enable us to focus on the heart of worship. Give us the joy and peace of the life we have in Christ.

Join us for our live-streamed service at 10 a.m. Sunday!

facebook.com/northolmstedefc

