

faithful
hopeful
loving



October Stewardship

Emphasis Month

Weekly devotionals

faithful For the Week prior to October 4th

1The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; ² to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; ³ to provide for those who mourn in Zion— to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit. They will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, to display his glory. ⁴ They shall build up the ancient ruins, they shall raise up the former devastations; they shall repair the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations. ⁸ For I the LORD love justice, I hate robbery and wrongdoing; I will faithfully give them their recompense, and I will make an everlasting covenant with them. ⁹ Their descendants shall be known among the nations, and their offspring among the peoples; all who see them shall acknowledge that they are a people whom the LORD has blessed. ¹⁰ I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my whole being shall exult in my God; for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. ¹¹ For as the earth brings forth its shoots, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up, so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all the nations. -Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11

Much like the ancient audience for whom the words of Isaiah 61 were originally spoken, faith communities are in a new place.

Like those who faced rebuilding Jerusalem, many of us feel that our beloved churches have suffered the brunt of attack, and we wonder if it's even possible to rebuild them so they will be around for more than another generation.

The words of Isaiah 61 call us to a different path, one of action and faith. The prophet's message was not a call to grasp at security or embrace complacency. These were words of challenge, risk, and service. Is not this message still relevant for us today?

To respond to this call to ministry we will have to take off our mourning clothes and take the risk of being generous, in order to bring about this realization of God's will.

Reflect: What is something you are looking forward to now? What helps you in the waiting when the promised future seems far off? How does God's faithfulness support you in your waiting? Is someone waiting for you to be faithful?

Pray: Everlasting God, you have been faithful to us beyond measure. We can hardly wrap our minds around the eternal nature of your love for us. May we live in gratitude for what you have done for us, and may we live always to your glory. Amen.

hopeful

For the Week prior to October 11th

⁹ Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; ¹⁰ love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. ¹¹ Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. ¹² Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. ¹³ Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.

¹⁴ Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. ¹⁵ Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. ¹⁶ Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. ¹⁷ Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. ¹⁸ If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. ¹⁹ Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." ²⁰ No, "if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads." ²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

-Romans 12:9-21

Romans 12 does not offer a unicorn-esque view of transformation as stewardship. Before we can care for people and their existential reality, we must examine the world and who we are in this world. The product of such examination ought to be a desire to enhance and improve our personal state so that how we live in this world and how we perceive this world changes.

Transformation as stewardship is not complacency with the world's current offering. We march for justice. We protest with our feet and with our prayers. We hope with our actions against anything that is inhumane and non-life giving or life affirming.

What hope for the world is there if the church community genuinely cares for the needs of others, but lacks its own hope?

Reflect: Do you consider yourself to be a hopeful person? Why or why not? How does your answer shape your ability to be generous?

Pray: Generous God, we know that we have hope always through your son, Jesus Christ. Help us to hear you saying that over all the other voices of this world that try to drown you out. When times are hard, guide our feet so that we run to you— with both hands stretched out--instead of running away from you. Help us hold our head high with hope and give us a reminder today that hope is a spiritual lifeline that is unbreakable. It's in Jesus precious name that we pray. Amen.

Loving

For the Week prior to October 18th

¹Shout out, do not hold back! Lift up your voice like a trumpet! Announce to my people their rebellion, to the house of Jacob their sins. ²Yet day after day they seek me and delight to know my ways, as if they were a nation that practiced righteousness and did not forsake the ordinance of their God; they ask of me righteous judgments, they delight to draw near to God. ³“Why do we fast, but you do not see? Why humble ourselves, but you do not notice?” Look, you serve your own interest on your fast day, and oppress all your workers. ⁴Look, you fast only to quarrel and to fight and to strike with a wicked fist. Such fasting as you do today will not make your voice heard on high. ⁵Is such the fast that I choose, a day to humble oneself? Is it to bow down the head like a bulrush, and to lie in sackcloth and ashes? Will you call this a fast, a day acceptable to the LORD? ⁶Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? ⁷Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin? ⁸Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up quickly; your vindicator shall go before you, the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard. ⁹Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer; you shall cry for help, and he will say, Here I am. -Isaiah 58:1-9a

These words of Isaiah 58 echo down to us across the centuries. Although the culture, language, and millenium of our time are radically different, the message is no less pertinent.

We live in a world where the problems seem overwhelming: world hunger, homelessness, epidemics-- and these are just a few of the headlines on the front page. We are distressed by all the problems facing us.

Being faithful stewards of all we have been given is a loving response. Generosity is necessary for our gaps in society to be filled. Sharing our time, talents, and money empowers all of us to build paths of life. Imagining with the Holy about a future time when humanity will reflect the hospitality of God can inspire us to action, reflecting the divine image that is within each of us.

Reflect: How have you worked towards justice? How has your church worked towards justice?

Pray: Justice-loving Lord, you have given all peoples one common origin. It is your will that all should be gathered together as one family in you. Fill the hearts of all believers with the fire of your love and with the desire to ensure justice for all. By sharing the good things you give us, may we secure— through loving justice—release of the bond of injustice for all our siblings throughout the world. Help our light to break forth like the dawn, so that healing can spring up quickly. May there be an end to division, strife and war. May there be a dawning of a truly human society built on love and peace. We ask this in the name of Jesus, our Lord. Amen.



For the Week prior to October 25th

¹If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. ² And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. ³ If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast,^[a] but do not have love, I gain nothing. ⁴ Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant⁵ or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; ⁶ it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. ⁷ It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. ⁸ Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. ⁹ For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; ¹⁰ but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. ¹¹ When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. ¹² For now we see in a mirror, dimly,^[b] but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. ¹³ And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.

-1 Corinthians 13

Oak trees take a long time to grow and are some of the strongest and most durable trees in existence. God's righteous healing may seem to take time to those who hurting. However God is working to do something different. God is being a steward: actively creating a world in which all are able to rejoice in God and be clothed in garments of salvation and righteousness. **Do I believe in God's faithfulness?**

The power of hope comes from the belief that the pains, the struggles, the frustrations, the annoyances, and the fears of our lives and this world are not the *only* things in this world. Hope comes from those moments of pain that create endurance, then character, and then hope. Hope is the rejection of the status quo, rejection of the way things are, and the belief that something better is not only possible, it is coming. **Where do I see hope?**

To be good stewards of God's love, we are to actively work to show God's love in the world. Some show God's love by working for social justice. Others visit and listen to those who are alone. Others show God's love by making sure the business and work of a faith community reflects the love of God. **How am I showing God's love?**

Pray: God of new life, thank you for the gifts of faith, hope, and love. Thank you for reorienting us toward you. We pray that we will respond to all that you have done for us with gratitude and praise. With joy we pray in the name of your son, Jesus Christ. Amen.