

NOVEMBER 30, 2022, MIDWEEK DEVOTIONAL

CENTERING PRAYER

I may not know where I am, or what to do, or which way to turn, but I am never lost if I am in God.

SCRIPTURE FOCUS:

“Be strong and of good courage, do not fear nor be afraid of them; for the LORD your God, He is the One who goes with you. He will not leave you nor forsake you.” (Deuteronomy 31:6)

BLESSED THOUGHTS: “NO MORE BLURRED HOLIDAYS:

What’s it like being a parish Pastor? It’s often just a big blur. I learned this on my Internship (1968-1969). My Pastor Supervisor gave me a lot of special assignments. Before I knew it I had a list of special programs for the Christmas holidays. But how do you feel “Christmassy” in October? My solution was to buy a whole bunch of Christmas albums from my Columbia Record Club and listen to them until I got in the Christmas spirit and could start writing all those special programs and activities. By the time Christmas Day was over I settled down to the usual stuff, like funerals and hospital visits, but as soon as January dawned, I had to order Holy Week and Easter albums to get me in the mood for Lent and Palm Sunday programs.

Even later on in life, the major holidays were—well—more a blur than anything else. In my time serving two congregations in Manitoba, what with all the extra activities and collections for prisoners, domestic violence shelters, psychiatric hospital patients, and mittens for Inner City school children, I never even got to read my Christmas Cards until Boxing Day. In my spare time prior to Christmas Eve I worked late into the night making presents for my kids. It was fun, but exhausting. Finally, when I was a social worker, my Supervisor told me there would be a Unit Christmas Party on a certain afternoon. I told her that actually I hated Christmas and preferred to cover the emergency phone line instead. So much for the Holiday Spirit!

Anyway, I made myself a promise that, upon retirement, there would be no more blurred holidays. I’d enjoy getting real trees from charities, I would help my adult kids put them up, I would actually decorate indoors and out, and I would for the most part focus on helping family members, to make up in part for all those years where they saw even less of me around the holidays.

Now, in less than four weeks from the time this devotional appears in the LUM lunch bags, it will again be Christmas, may God help me hang up all those outside lights before it gets twenty below zero (new rule, take down Halloween decorations and put up Christmas lights the same day), and not having to put in all that extra work helping congregational members experience an inspirational holiday, and with no van load of presents to deliver to three or four worthy charities, I promise to load up my grandkids and drive around looking at outdoor Christmas lights.

That’s the plan, anyway. But honestly, life is what happens to you after you’ve made other plans. Interruptions are often where God intersects the human heart, and—well—I do hope that each of us takes the time to breathe and be kind and be neighborly, not just through December, but every day for the rest of our lives.

There is one verse I want to bless you with as we enter the busy days. A rich young ruler came to Jesus and asked what he needed to do to receive eternal life? Together they rehearsed the major commandments, and the young man was happy. "I had done all these since I was a boy." Jesus challenged him, "Well, then take the next step. Sell everything you have, give it to the poor, and come follow me." Luke ends this story this way in Chapter 18: 24 And Jesus looked at him and said, "How hard it is for those who are wealthy to enter the kingdom of God!

You see, Jesus looked at him. ***That young man's face wasn't a blur.*** Jesus looked deeply at him until he saw even his soul. Soon, he would die on the Cross for that very same man. Likewise, none of us is a blur to our Savior. Why should we allow frantic activity to blur the wonderful face of the Messiah—ever? I was never rich in possessions, but I sure was a billionaire when it came to having things on my "to-do list." Activities can blur out God just the same as wealth can. Thing is, the Kingdom of God is everything. Let's ask the Son of God to never let that Vision become too blurred.

A PRAYER FOR CLEAR VISION:

Turn your eyes upon Jesus
Look full in his wonderful face
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim
In the light of his glory and grace
[song by Helen Lemmel]

—written by Pastor Barry Bence forty-five days before you read this devotional!