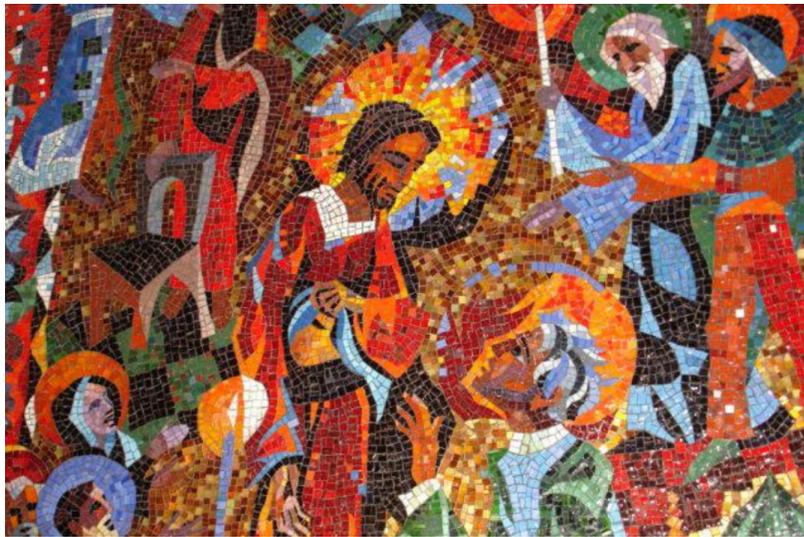


2020 SUMMER DEVOTIONAL

First Presbyterian Church, Greensboro, NC
fpcgreensboro.org

Week six



Receive the
Holy Spirit

WEEK SIX
—
DAY ONE

Scripture & reflection

John 20:
19-23

It had been a weekend of rampant terror and unspeakable joy. Jesus was dead and buried. Early Sunday morning, when Mary Magdalene visited the tomb, his body was missing but her hope soared when she met him in the garden. Other disciples looked for Jesus without success. As the day ended, they gathered together behind closed doors for fear of the Jews.

As the shadows of the evening lengthened, their faith searched for meaning. Their lives had been traumatized by the loss of Jesus. It was at this darkest moment that Jesus came and stood among them. Some wrestled with their shame and guilt for abandoning him when he was arrested, but Jesus greeted them with “Peace be with you,” not with “where were you?”

Jesus breathed the Holy Spirit deeply into his community of faith. They were filled with the peace that only Jesus can give. Their lives were radically transformed. The gift of the Spirit empowered them to continue the ministry of Jesus. Jesus commissioned them and sent them to be an unceasing witness of God’s grace and forgiveness in the world. This faith community went forth to turn the world upside down.

One Sunday morning several years ago, a woman named Sara Miles passed by St. Gregory of Nyssa Episcopal Church in San Francisco. She had been raised as an atheist and had no reason to enter the church, but her curiosity drove her to enter the building. She had served as a reporter in war-torn countries and had, as we say, been around the world a time or two. She was a secular intellectual and a left-wing journalist with a habit of skepticism. As she entered the sanctuary, communion was in progress and someone held bread out to her and said, “take this bread.” As she tasted the bread, she experienced a radical conversion. This experience turned her world upside down. She received a special calling to feed the poor and she began doing that through her church. Every week she serves over 500 people by distributing food to anyone in need. God’s Spirit came upon Sara in a dramatic way and her life was transformed.

Paul Tillich once said, “We cannot transform our lives, unless we allow them to be transformed by that stroke of grace.” May the Spirit of God breathe a transforming grace into us all. Amen.

– Rev. Doug McLeroy



<http://www.flickr.com/photos/maryannsolar/5119341372/>

“Christ Shows Himself to Thomas,” Resurrection Chapel, Washington Cathedral

John 20:19

“Jesus came and stood among the disciples and said, ‘Peace be with you.’ ”

Take in the image of the mosaic, slowly moving your eyes over the image. Invite the Holy Spirit to be present with you in this exercise of visual devotion.

What do you notice when you look at the mosaic? What first stands out to you?

How do the colors and shapes in the mosaic make you feel? Does your eye gravitate towards a particular shape or color?

Read today’s scripture verse. Do you experience any resonances between the scripture and the image?

Pause. Breathe. Take in the image once more. Close your devotion time with a prayer, offering to God the prayers of thanksgiving and intercession that are on your heart this day.

WEEK SIX
—
DAY TWO

Visio divina

WEEK SIX
—
DAY THREE

Spiritual practice

Confession & forgiveness

We know that our faith deepens and broadens when we engage embodied practices that form us as faithful disciples of Jesus Christ. We invite you this week into the practice of confession and forgiveness.

The word “peace” pervades this week’s scripture text. In the days following Jesus’s resurrection, it seems that he wants his disciples to know deeply what it means to experience God’s peace, for he knows that he will not be with them much longer. We hear this word “peace” each week in our worship services at FPC, as we share words and signs of peace with one another following the Confession. As we think and pray together this week about peace and what leads us to peace in our own lives, we’re invited into the individual practice of confession and forgiveness. In confession, we lay bare the parts of ourselves that are not in accordance with God’s will for our lives. As you engage in the spiritual practice of confession and forgiveness, ask yourself the following questions, trusting in God’s mercy and peace.

When have I felt the presence of sin in my own life this week?

When did I speak when I ought to have listened, or remain silent when I ought to have spoken up?

When did I act in a way that denied another person their full dignity as one made in God’s image?

When did I fail to treat God’s creation with care and love?

Prayer

Offer these confessions to God in prayer. After you pray, speak these words from 2 Corinthians 5 aloud to yourself, receiving the gift of God’s forgiveness. “If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation; everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!” By the mercies of God, we are all forgiven and made new. Thanks be to God!