

Terrific Tuesday Devotionals from Pastor Donald *July, 2018 - December, 2018*

Tuesday, July 31, 2018

Terrific Tuesdays start with a testimony:

³⁸ When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, "What are you looking for?" They said to him, "Rabbi" (which translated means Teacher), "where are you staying?" ³⁹ He said to them, "Come and see." They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day. It was about four o'clock in the afternoon.

"What are you looking for?" What an interesting first question Jesus poses to the first people who choose to follow him. When we follow someone, there's something we're looking for. What are you looking for in whoever or whatever you're following?

The disciples don't answer Jesus' question directly, but ask another question: "Where are you staying?" When we follow someone, we want to know where they are staying. It could end up being a make or break for us once we find out.

Jesus also averts answering their question directly. Instead, he invites them to "come and see." They come, we don't know what they see, but we know they decide to stay.

May we go and see when Jesus invites us and may we be willing to remain with Jesus each day, wherever we find he's staying. And may we find in him what we're looking for by the end of each day, even if we didn't know what we were looking for when we initially started following him.

The disciples didn't find Jesus until around 4pm. Find where Jesus is as early as you can and then remain where he's at for as long as you can. Your day will be better because of it.

I hope you can find what you're looking for in Jesus. I bet you he's probably what you need even if you don't know what you're looking for.

Also, if you're looking for some inspiration, then follow these devos from Donald every Tuesday. They aren't Jesus, but they can help point to Jesus, as John the Baptist was called to, and as we are all called to in our lives.

When we find something good, we follow it. Maybe this can be something you remain with each Tuesday. Now, don't spend too much time on Facebook. Go out and make this Tuesday terrific.

#terrificuesday #devosfromdonald #testifytothelight

Tuesday, August 7, 2018

Terrific Tuesdays start with a good thought to tune us in:

If you were an instrument, what would you be? A flute? A piccolo? A trumpet? A bassoon? Something else? What would you be, and why? If I was an instrument, I'd be a violin. For many reasons, but one is because I can so easily go out of tune. And sometimes I need to get myself back to where I was before I keep playing my part in the symphony around me. Hopefully this devotional can put you on a good track and help you to stay in tune as you create some beautiful music today.

“I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture.” – John 10:9

As a musician does with a piece of music, many of us will make entrances and exits into and out of many things throughout our week, playing our part through various chords and rhythms, highs and lows, harmonies and dissonances. We enter in and out of our beds, our phones, our cars, our radios, our homes, our televisions, our workplaces, our churches, our computers. These are gates to other worlds, and they are part of the music we're playing as we try to find the best notes on our instruments and make some decent noise. What are you entering into and out of today?

Many of us are also looking for pasture as we go about our weeks. A refreshing cool place to go and rest whenever we need it. A safe place where we don't have to look behind our back and wonder if we'll be okay. A place where we can relax and be at peace. Many of us find sanctuary in the things we do or the things we have. But such pastures are not as green as they could be, and before long we find ourselves struggling to stay inspired and keep playing in tune with the drier, less colorful, less comfortable grass around us.

But no matter how many times we come into or go out of anything, we can always find rest for our souls through Christ. However many entrances and exits you may be making this week, may you ultimately find your way through the gate that is Christ, and may you find lush green pasture for your soul every time you make your way back to the Good Shepherd.

Now, go out and make this Tuesday terrific!

#terrificuesday #devosfromdonald #testifytothelight

Tuesday, August 14, 2018

Terrific Tuesdays begin with something that makes us think.

If there's any message to tune into, it's the long final discourse Jesus has with his disciples in John 14-16 before he heads toward the cross. And it is in this long discourse he says some form or fashion of the following in five different places, four of which I'll mention: I have said these things to you *so that* _____.

- 1) "I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete." -John 15:11
- 2) "I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another." -John 15:17
- 3) "I have said these things to you to keep you from stumbling." -John 16:1
- 4) "I have said these things to you so that when their hour comes you may remember what I told you about them." -John 16:4

What do you need most this morning?

- 1) Joy for the day ahead?
- 2) Love for others?
- 3) Protection from stumbling?
- 4) Reminders of what God has said or proclaimed?

Pray to God for whichever of these you need most today.

Now, go to the gospel of John and read the verses that come before the "so that" passage you've chosen.

- 1) If you chose the first (joy), read John 15:1-11.
- 2) If you chose the second (love), read John 15:12-17
- 3) If you chose the third (protection), read John 15:18-16:1
- 4) If you chose the fourth (remembering), read John 16:2-4

So, what did Jesus say? And out of all that Jesus said in the verses you read, what do you think is most important? What is it that will help you 1) have the most joy in Christ, 2) love others best, 3) keep you from falling, 4) remember what's most important in the face of whatever you're dealing with?

I have thoughts of my own for each, things that stand out to me in each segment, but what is it for you? I invite you to reflect more deeply on the things that stood out to you most or the things you think Christ wanted the disciples and us to focus on most in what he said. And then I invite you to pray again based on whatever those things were.

For example, if you chose the first and abiding in Christ's love (15:9) stood out to you most in the verses you read, ask God to help you abide in Christ's love so that your joy may be complete.

Now, go out and make this Tuesday terrific!

#terrificuesday #devosfromdonald

Tuesday, August 21, 2018

Terrific Tuesdays begin with a treasure hunt.

“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.” – Matthew 13:44

Many of us were exposed to the idea of buried treasure growing up. Some of us had treasure hunts of our own where we had a literal map. And we were following it until we reached the X which marked the spot. Some of us would go on treasure hunts not knowing what we were looking for, but hoping we would find something, perhaps similar to someone going along a beach with a metal detector, looking for something of value.

We may have gone here and there, zigzagging all around, but X ultimately marked the spot. This was our desired destination point. And when we reached that spot, we'd dig until we unveiled what the treasure was.

What if I made a treasure map, and at the end of it, you found that the X was Christ (by the way, the Greek letter chi, which people often use for Christ, looks like a capital X!)? Would you be happy? Surprised? Disappointed?

This parable and the one following are some of my favorite parables, because they remind me that the kingdom of heaven is worth more than anything. In fact, the kingdom of heaven is worth everything, as is Christ who is a part of and reigns over that kingdom. More than any material item, more than any person or relationship, more than anything or anyone, Christ and the kingdom of heaven are worth more.

What are you looking for? What is the treasure you are seeking? Many in our world seek treasures that are temporary or that don't satisfy. Do we see the kingdom of heaven being as valuable as buried treasure? And do we see Christ as more valuable than anything else we could find? If not, why not? Do we have too much stuff we care about that's distracting us from the best treasure? Are we too self-focused to care?

If you found a winning lotto ticket, would you really believe that Christ and the kingdom of heaven is more valuable than that? That Christ can offer you more joy, more fulfillment, more provision from himself through this kingdom than millions of bucks?

But the challenge, even after we've found the X which marks the spot, is not to keep this to ourselves like the person in the parable, but to tell everyone we know so that as many people as possible can discover the unbelievable treasure we've found. What treasure hunt might you go on today or might you send others on today? And what might you or they find at the end of it? I hope it's something valuable and worthwhile. I hope you seek and find Christ and his kingdom.

Now, go out and make this Tuesday terrific!

#terrificuesday #devosfromdonald

Tuesday, August 28, 2018

Terrific Tuesdays begin with a terawatt to get us jolting.

“In the morning, while it was still very dark, Jesus got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed.” – Mark 1:35

We’ve often heard people say, “Be careful what you wish for.” I have a composition notebook I’ve started using to write insights from Scripture down in. I’ll use a blue pen for writing out texts that stand out to me, a light green pen for my comments and insights on those texts, and a red pen for prayers related to the texts, whether for my own life, others, or the churches I serve. I started the gospel of Mark yesterday, and one of the passages I first had a red marking for was on the passage above. I wrote the prayer, “May I be one who seeks you as such, O God.”

And then, the next night (last night) I can’t sleep as well and find myself awake at what most would consider an ungodly hour of the morning. So, some would not only say, “Be careful what you wish for,” but, “Be careful what you pray for.” In a sense, I got what I prayed for, much more quickly than most of my prayers might get answered.

When I was going to college, they’d sometimes have the chapel speaker available for a Q & A afterwards. I remember Pastor Jeff Vines being available for conversation and questions one time and speaking a story from his life that spoke to this truth. At one point in his life he prayed, “God, make me an effective communicator in my speech, writing, and life.” I remember being really inspired by what Pastor Jeff said, so much that I decided to pray that prayer for myself later on in the semester. After all, as one pursuing pastoral ministry, I wanted to be an effective communicator in all areas of my life. But as he continued to share that day, he told us how his prayer was a dangerous one, because it was a call for God to break him down. It turns out this prayer I would also pray for myself would, likewise, be a call to break me down.

There was a good portion of my junior year when I went through what many saints of old have deemed “the dark night of the soul,” when God seemed very distant and silent. There may have been many mornings where I was seeking God early and long, but nothing seemed to come from it. There may have been many pursuits of and advances toward God, but none of them seemed to pan out to much of anything.

Whether God feels very close or whether God feels very silent at this point in your life, I want to encourage you to keep seeking. Keep praying, keep reading Scripture, keep writing. Fast occasionally if you must. Find those spots to seek God in your home or in nature that can be a deserted place for you, a sanctuary of sorts away from the hustle and bustle of life.

Before Jesus started his next day of work, he prayed and sought God. I hope you will too, no matter what time God wakes you up each day.

Now, go out and make this Tuesday terrific!

#terrificuesday #devosfromdonald

Tuesday, September 4, 2018

Terrific Tuesdays begin with a toggle view.

“And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation.” -Genesis 2:2-3

Our society does not rest well. And our culture tells us to find our worth in the doing and in the productivity. If we're honest, it always seems that what we do is never enough. There's always more to do and more that could have been done. And so, we always find ourselves lacking, feeling lesser, plagued by guilt when we look at our level of productivity and what we've accomplished or failed to accomplish.

This is true even in ministry. There's always more work in the Kingdom to be done. I could work, serve, and pray 24/7 in the ripe harvest fields before me, and there would still be more that could be done. But God knows I don't need that. And God doesn't want 24/7 nonstop work from me. God wants me to rest. Not for the express purpose of getting up and doing more work the next day, but so I can know my worth and value is not in what I do.

God does not need to rest, yet God chooses to rest, and gives us a model for what that looks like for us, who do need rest. And that's the beauty of Sabbath. What a good God we serve, that God would command us to rest!

A fellow colleague of mine reached out recently to ask if I wanted to be part of a sleep support group. I'm wondering if I should join. Usually we say, “Yes” to all sorts of things that take our time, energy, and attention. But maybe sometimes we need something like this that helps to do the opposite.

On this post-Labor Day Tuesday, after you've had your fill of hamburgers, hot dogs, and probably less rest than you were hoping to get, I encourage you to think about where you find your value and worth in. Your value is not in what you do, but in who you are. And who you are is a beloved child of God, who God commands to rest and calls “very good.”

#terrificuesday #devosfromdonald

Tuesday, September 11, 2018

Terrific Tuesdays, if we can even call them that, sometimes begin in terror.

“Your people will rebuild the ancient ruins and will raise up the age-old foundations; you will be called Repairer of Broken Walls, Restorer of Streets with Dwellings.” – Isaiah 58:12

Seventeen years ago, on a not so terrific Tuesday morning, walls came down in New York City. Witnesses looked with shock and horror upon billowing clouds of thick smoke filling the air as hundreds of first responders rushed to the scene and thousands of others ran for their lives. Mothers and fathers who had kissed their children goodbye before going to work found themselves jumping from windows in desperation. 9-1-1 operators responding to unending emergency calls from frantic individuals struggled to stay calm. News broadcasters and journalists capturing the unfolding scenes through unsteady cameras and trembling hands struggled to make sense of the scene. Parents in living rooms with their children and teachers in classrooms with their students across America would struggle to explain these images that had flashed across the screen. For those in the planes, countless in the buildings, and many others on the ground below would not live to take another breath. And the weight of that reality was sinking in.

After an event like 9/11, there were many places where repairing and restoring was desperately needed, and such repairing was not merely needed physically. News sources tell us that nearly 3000 individuals died, with 6000 others injured. That day, 1300 children became orphans and 412 emergency response workers would not make it safely off the scene after responding to the call. For 230 days after the attacks, workers dug through debris at Ground Zero, searching for civilians and body parts in the midst of the rubble. For many more days than that, an estimated 422,000 New Yorkers suffered from the rubble of their own emotions with PTSD. America would never be the same after the tragedy of 9/11.

After the horror of an event like this, trust became more of an issue; living in fear became a greater reality. Walls of security had been breached, walls of safety had been torn down, and many were left feeling exposed, vulnerable, and afraid. Hope was depleted and tears were cried in abundance on that day. Seventeen years later, some of our walls are still down and many of our guards are still up. Seventeen years later, some hopes are still crushed and countless tears still shed.

Regardless of how much this event still affects you, and regardless of how any future tragedy might affect you, I leave you with the following questions: How will you continue the work of repairing broken walls? This day and every day, how can you be a restorer of streets? No matter how terrible or terror-filled a Tuesday may start out, how can you move forward and help make something terrific out of it in the days ahead?

#terrificuesday? #devosfromdonald #september11

Tuesday, September 18, 2018

Terrific Tuesdays begin with a healthy distraction.

“Martha welcomed Jesus into her home. She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord’s feet and listened to what he was saying. But Martha was distracted by her many tasks.” -Luke 10:38b-40a

I can relate to Martha...a lot. How often do we welcome Jesus into our day, but then get distracted along the way? We pray, “God, I invite you into this day of mine,” and then find ourselves consumed by less important things that take our attention off Jesus and clutter our minds, so much that we don’t listen to Jesus, or pause long enough to hear what Jesus might be saying after we’ve welcomed him in.

I have many tasks before me each day, as I know you do too. Oftentimes, it is more than I think I can accomplish. But in my frantic attempts to get as much done as possible, too often I let the less important things that aren’t Jesus become the focus. I even let those less important things become my identity and sense of worth at times. And sometimes, because I am worried and distracted by many things, it takes Jesus calling my name not once, but twice, and perhaps even more, just to get my attention (Luke 10:41). When we welcome Jesus in, may we not find him needing to reign us back in shortly thereafter.

But the beauty of Christ is that even when we’ve welcomed Jesus in and failed to give him the appropriate attention he deserves, he still welcomes us in, perhaps a bit laughingly saying, “_____, _____, you are worried and distracted by many things. Come away from your distractions and be distracted by me. I am the one you want to listen to and focus on.”

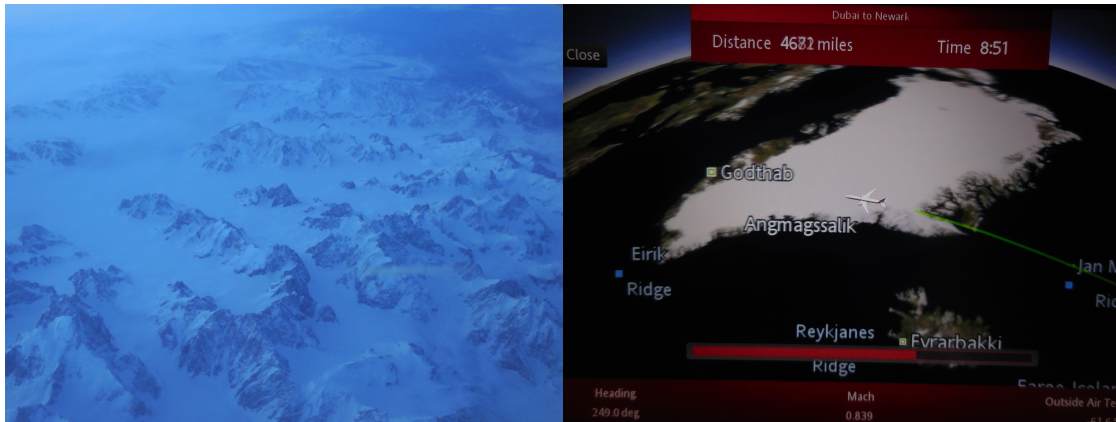
Whatever you may be worried about and distracted by this morning, I invite you to surrender it to Jesus. And no matter how many tasks you have before you today, I invite you, like Mary, to take time to sit at Jesus’s feet and listen to what our welcoming Savior might have to say.

#terrificuesday #devosfromdonald

P.S. I will be on vacation, hopefully sitting at Jesus' feet and not distracted by many tasks, the next two Tuesdays. I pray those Tuesdays may continue to be terrific for you, even without a devo from Donald. But I look forward to sharing more inspiration and goodness in the Tuesdays following.

Tuesday, October 9, 2018

Terrific Tuesdays begin with an aerial view.



“Zaccheus was trying to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was short in stature. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see him, because he was going to pass by that way.” -Luke 19:3-4

There are many things in life that often try to keep us from seeing Jesus. The crowd and Zaccheus’ height were two things that were preventing him from seeing Jesus. What is it that most often prevents you from seeing Jesus? Is it an external force or thing? Is it a personal trait or reality that you live with? Is it a mindset you can’t seem to get out of, an unhealthy relationship you’re in, a bad habit you struggle to break? What is it?

As I was flying high in the middle of the night on my return flight from Kenya last week, I was starting to understand what Zaccheus was doing as he was climbing up that sycamore tree. He was trying to gain perspective; trying to position himself in a new way so he could see Jesus.

There are oftentimes things in my life that try to keep me from seeing Jesus. My pride and selfishness can cloud my vision. Little and big challenges faced during the week that I let get under my skin can keep me from climbing higher. The realities of who I am and the things I want to change but can’t may be things that prevent me from extending my stature.

But there’s nothing like climbing higher in the sky to draw closer to God in those thin spaces. I had a nice travel pillow and a blanket the airline provided on that flight, but I struggled to sleep. Yet when I looked out my window, I was glad I couldn’t sleep, for this is what I discovered in that thin space: Majestic mountains covered in snow as we flew over Greenland.

Zaccheus knew Jesus was going to pass by his way. Do we know or realize that Jesus is passing our way? And when we do, what will we be willing to do to see him? I pray you may find ways to climb higher this week as you strive to see Jesus wherever he’s passing by. And when you see where he’s at, I pray you will run to him, knowing that Jesus wants to come to your house today.

#terrificuesday #devosfromdonald

Tuesday, October 16, 2018

Terrific Tuesdays start with a turn toward a different direction.

“Repent therefore, and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord...” -Acts 3:19-20a

“When God raised up his servant, he sent him first to you, to bless you by turning each of you from your wicked ways.” -Acts 3:26

Usually we don't think of repentance as a blessing. And we often shy away from confession, which accompanies our turning from lesser things and turning toward God. We think of repentance primarily as the thing that has to be done to get us right with God.

And usually, repentance has had negative stereotypes attached to it. When we think of repentance, we might think of a Christian on a street corner holding up a Bible saying, “Repent or else...” Or else what? Usually that “or else” has involved some sort of eternal punishment. And because repentance has often been associated with our eternal destination, we've lost some of its richer meaning that this text tries to bring out.

That's not what John the Baptist said when he first came. Instead of saying “Repent or else” or “Repent or go to hell,” John the Baptist said, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.” And as the church is expanding in its first years in the book of Acts, one's eternal destination was not the basis for proclaiming repentance. It was repent and turn to God, “so that your sins may be wiped out.” Repent, “so that times of refreshing may come.” We repent not in fear of what God will do to us, but in gratitude for what God has done for us. And what God promises to do when we accept the blessing of repentance is freedom from and forgiveness for all the sins of our lives that once stained us. It means being refreshed, like drinking a cool glass of water on a hot summer day. And because of this great blessing that God is bestowing on us, we can't help but want to turn from lesser things and turn toward God.

So I urge you, repent, not because you fear where you're going, but repent so that you may experience the gracious and refreshing realities of God's abundant love that God is all too ready to pour out.

Now, go out and make this Tuesday terrific!

#terrificuesday #devosfromdonald

Tuesday, October 23, 2018

Terrific Tuesdays start with a walk to Emmaus.

“Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them.” Luke 24:13-15

Where are you walking to today? What is your destination and how are you feeling as you head in that direction? In our passage, two disciples of Jesus with heavy hearts and dashed hopes are talking with one another as they walk along the road from Jerusalem to Emmaus. They had chosen to follow Jesus, whom they thought would be the one to redeem Israel. But it is three days after his crucifixion and, for all they know, Jesus is still dead and nothing has been redeemed. Even though some women who went to the tomb claimed Jesus was raised from the dead, they did not believe them. From their perspective, Jesus was still gone and out of reach. And yet, there Jesus was, walking alongside them.

What is weighing on your heart this morning as you walk along the path before you? What are some of your disappointments and dashed hopes? If you are a follower of Jesus, are there things you have been discouraged by as you have followed Jesus? Is there an expectation you had that was not met? Are you questioning whether this Jesus is still worth following? Offer up these concerns and hopes as though Jesus were walking alongside you. What would you tell him? And how would he respond to you as you express all these things to him?

“Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight.” - Luke 24:31

I recently came off of a 72-hour spiritual journey called Walk to Emmaus. I have made the trek and have found Jesus at surprising points along the way. I have been honest about disappointments and hopes I've had in my pursuit of Christ, and I have hoped to be a better disciple at the end of it all.

What will it take for you to recognize Jesus in your midst, and where will you find him? Will it be in a broken piece of bread? A gift from a friend? An intentional time set apart for Sabbath and renewal? And if Jesus seems to vanish away sooner than you would have liked, what will you do in response, regardless of where and at what point you recognized him along the way?

I hope you can recognize Jesus today, because he wants to walk alongside you wherever you're going. In fact, he might currently be in your company. Actually, I'm convinced he already is.

Now, go out and make this Tuesday terrific!

#terrificuesday #devosfromdonald

Tuesday, October 30, 2018

Terrific Tuesdays start with an unexpected vision.

“One afternoon at about three o’clock he had a vision in which he clearly saw an angel of God coming in and saying to him, ‘Cornelius.’ He stared at him in terror and said, ‘What is it, Lord?’ He answered, ‘Your prayers and your alms have ascended as a memorial before God. Now send men to Joppa for a certain Simon who is called Peter.’” Acts 10:4-6

In Acts 10, we are introduced to a Gentile named Cornelius. Up to this point in the book of Acts, the Gentiles have not been the ones hearing and responding to the gospel. It has been the Jews. And yet, we see that this Gentile has “a vision in which he CLEARLY” sees an angel of God. This is the first instance of God breaking in beyond the children of Israel in the movement of the early church. It is the first instance of the last part of Acts 1:8 being fulfilled, that witnesses for Christ would not only witness in Jerusalem and Judea where Jews were, but to Samaria and beyond, to where non-Jewish individuals were, to people they were once told not to go.

And many would have problems with it. When the Jewish believers heard of Peter going to preach the message of “repentance that leads to life” to people like Cornelius who were not circumcised, to people who did not have the sign of the covenant, they criticized Peter (Acts 11:2-3, 18). But once Peter shared the story of how it came about that this happened, they were unable to deny that God had, indeed, encountered this Gentile (Acts 11:4-17).

Who are the Cornelius’ of our day and age? Who is it that we don’t expect God to come to, and yet, are the very ones whom God encounters? If Cornelius wasn’t a Jew or Christian before Peter came to him, what does it mean that simply being a generous, God-fearing, prayerful man was all it took for God to appear to him in a vision (Acts 10:2)? What does it mean that the prayers and money given by Cornelius who did not yet know the message that leads to life, were a sweet memorial to God (Acts 10:3)? And even for people who aren’t God-fearing or pursuers of justice and good like Cornelius was, couldn’t God still encounter them?

This Gentile, who originally was not part of the plan is being grafted into the body of Christ alongside the Jews. I pray that if we, like Peter, are called to witness to someone we don’t expect, that we would answer the call. For yes, God may be appearing and making Christ known even to them. And let us remember that most of us here in America were Cornelius’ that God was gracious enough to encounter, Gentiles whom God was gracious enough to hear the prayers of. Our Jewish brothers and sisters were among the first, and we, by God’s grace, entered into that inheritance with them.

Now, go out and make this Tuesday terrific!

#terrificuesday #devosfromdonald

Tuesday, November 6, 2018

10 Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you be in agreement and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same purpose. 11 For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there are quarrels among you, my brothers and sisters. 12 What I mean is that each of you says, "I belong to Paul," or "I belong to Apollos," or "I belong to Cephas," or "I belong to Christ." 13 Has Christ been divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?

Terrific Tuesdays begin with a vote.

When Paul wrote the letter to the Corinthians, he was writing to a divided church. As we head to the polls today, we realize there are many divisions among us and within our nation. Things are more polarized than ever before and, as Corinth was a fractured church by its divisions, so are we, in many ways, a fractured nation because of our divisions.

When the people of the church in Corinth were saying, "I follow _____," they were communicating who was their favorite and who's doctrine and theology they preferred to abide by and live their lives based on. When people said, "**I follow Paul**," they were probably Gentiles, people who were not Jews, who focused on the promises of God, on grace, before focusing on the response to those promises, the moral commands and ethical challenges. When people said, "**I follow Apollos**," they were following a man who was a Jew from a place called Alexandria, and Alexandria was a huge intellectual center. So, Apollos' followers would have been Christian intellectuals that prided themselves on what they knew. When people said, "**I follow Cephas (or Peter)**," they were most likely Jews who were more legalistic and exalted the law, with less of a grace focus than Paul would have had.

Who was right and who was wrong? Well, we can often get caught up in trying to determine an answer to this question. But more than our divisions and differences on who would be best to vote for, what would it look like to be committed to and strive toward unity? We will go to a poll that forces us to pick a side. But let us remember that even the individuals on the side we dislike or disagree with more, whether the Pauls' or Apollos' or Cephas', are still a part of the team in which unity must be striven for.

They may be different people who come with a different party affiliation, perspective, or stance on certain issues, but, at the end of the day, they are on the same team. What would it look like to have this mentality of unity? Would it help us to have no divisions among us even in the midst of the inevitable differences we have? Is what Paul suggesting even possible? What does he mean by division? Or by being of the same mind and heart?

Whoever you vote for and however you interpret this passage, I also pray you vote for unity, regardless of what color your vote represents. Now, go out and make this Tuesday terrific! And don't forget to vote!

#terrificuesday #devosfromdonald #vote #unity

Tuesday, November 13, 2018

19 But Jews came there from Antioch and Iconium and won over the crowds. Then they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing that he was dead. 20 But when the disciples surrounded him, he got up and went into the city. The next day he went on with Barnabas to Derbe. -Acts 14:19-20

Terrific Tuesdays begin with a testimony.

Paul and Barnabas were going from town to town proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ. In this part of the story, they find themselves in the city of Lystra. But it is here that Paul is stoned and then dragged out of the city. Those who were responsible for this act assumed he was dead when they left him.

Imagine Paul, lying flat on the ground outside the gate of the city. He has bruises all over and red scars on his body, with some of his wounds still bleeding. Then, there are people with different intentions who surround him. We're not told what his friends, other disciples of Christ, do for Paul. Perhaps they laid hands on him and prayed to God for Paul's healing. Perhaps he really was practically dead, but was brought back to life. Perhaps they simply gave him a pep talk to encourage him even in the midst of the difficult situation. But whatever it was, Paul got back up. Have you ever been hurt in a big way? Have you had people do something awful to you, and found yourself lying on the ground not wanting to get up, whether because of an overwhelming amount of physical or emotional pain?

What amazes me most about this story is not only that Paul gets up after all this, but he goes back to the very place he was stoned. He wasn't there for much longer—only a day—but he had some unfinished business to do. And I wonder what that unfinished business was. What did people think when they saw this person they just stoned and assumed was dead? When he was there a second time, did Paul call the people to confession? Did he express forgiveness to those who hurt him? Did he preach the gospel and see people come to Christ? What would you say if you had the opportunity to go back to those who have hurt or oppressed you most? Would you be willing to do so?

I don't think God always call us to go back to the place we have been most wounded. In some cases, it may not be the right thing to do. But whatever bad thing happened to you, do you think you can find the strength to stand? God, may I be someone who does not remain on the ground after taking a severe beating. Help me, in your strength, to get back up and to surround myself with needed support. And when I am standing, should you call me to do so, give me the courage and boldness to face with confidence my enemies.

Even if you find yourself starting your day like Paul—on the ground, hurt, and not yet up—I encourage you to surround yourself with what you need, and to stand. Standing up may be harder in some situations than others, but I pray that in God's strength, and with the aid of others, you might find yourself not left for dead, but alive in Christ. Now, go out and make this Tuesday terrific!

#terrificuesday #devosfromdonald

Tuesday, November 20, 2018

Terrific Tuesdays begin with a song of praise.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gUH_NzfRmbs

“Give thanks to the LORD, our God and King. His love endures forever.
For He is good, He is above all things. His love endures forever.
Sing praise. Sing praise.” – Chris Tomlin, *Forever*

What do you want to give God praise for today?

May you come to see what it means that God is good. May you come to see what it means that God is above all things. May you come to see what it means that God’s love endures forever. And may you sing praise as a result of these realizations.

“Give thanks to the LORD, for He is good. His love endures forever.” -Psalm 136:1 (NIV)

#terrifictuesday #devosfromdonald

Tuesday, November 27, 2018

Terrific Tuesdays begin with a step in the right direction.

“But I do not count my life of any value to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the good news of God’s grace.” -Acts 20:24

What would it look like to live in a world where people did not live for self? What would it look like if our primary desire was to do that which Jesus called us to do? Perhaps we have not been given the specific charge of Paul; but all of us, regardless of who we are or what we do for a living, are called to “testify to the good news of God’s grace” in the context God has placed us.

As a long distance runner, I rather like the analogy of “finishing my course.” No one wants to stop half way through a race and not finish; we all want to complete what we started. But sometimes completion is hard and it entails things we didn’t expect. Sometimes there are big hills and people on our path that give us a run for our money. Sometimes conditions are not favorable, and we find ourselves drenched in pouring rain or trying to pick up our feet through a great deal of mud.

This verse was spoken one chapter before Paul would start making his way to Jerusalem. Before he starts this trek, he is told by a prophet that he will be bound in Jerusalem (21:11). But Paul is not concerned, for he says he is ready to be bound and even to die in Jerusalem for the sake of Christ (21:13). And the prophet's vision is precisely what happens, for Paul ends up being imprisoned and faces a great deal of persecution as he goes about testifying to God’s grace.

When the going gets tough and unexpected turns lie on our course, how will we respond? Will we stop half way through the race or keep running? As we run our course, may God grant us deliverance from any self-centered motives and free us for a selfless life lived for the sake of testifying to God’s grace. And may we be willing to keep running and finish our course well, no matter what comes our way on the path marked out for us.

#terrificuesday #devosfromdonald

Tuesday, December 4, 2018

Terrific Tuesdays begin with a reminder of God's presence.

⁷ *Where can I go from your Spirit?
Where can I flee from your presence?*
⁸ *If I go up to the heavens, you are there;
if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.*
⁹ *If I rise on the wings of the dawn,
if I settle on the far side of the sea,
¹⁰ even there your hand will guide me,
your right hand will hold me fast.*
¹¹ *If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me
and the light become night around me,"
¹² even the darkness will not be dark to you;
the night will shine like the day,
for darkness is as light to you.*
-Psalm 139: 7-12

This psalm, Psalm 139, is one I have often been turning back to lately. And different parts speak to me at different times. This is the part I wanted to share with you this morning, but I encourage you to read the passage in full on your own.

Perhaps you feel like you're on cloud nine. God's Spirit is there. Perhaps you feel down in the dumps and are really struggling with life in general. God's Spirit is there too. Even if you go as far away from your problems as possible, God's Spirit can be found whispering in the quiet stillness: "I'm here, I haven't left."

With the beginning of the Advent season this past Sunday, many of us are filled with expectation; expectations for God to do something great, expectations to find God in unexpected ways in the midst of the ups and downs that characterize our lives.

Knowing the psalmist could not escape God's Spirit, God's presence, may you become all the more mindful of God's presence around you as you step into each and every day. May the expectation that God will be there for you to guide you and hold you fast, be the expectation that keeps you going this Advent.

As we approach what many deem the bleak midwinter night, as the days get colder and darker leading up to Christmas, may you find God's Spirit shining forth even there. For in the place of darkness and difficulty, that is precisely where God, our Light, wants to shine.

#terrifictuesday #devosfromdonald

Tuesday, December 11, 2018

Terrific Tuesdays begin with a cup of delight.

Delight yourself in the LORD and he will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him and he will do this. -Psalm 37:4-5

Psalm 37 has been one of my favorites for quite some time. During my freshman year of college, it was the psalm that spoke to me most and was one I would turn back to and reflect on often.

Five years later, during seminary, I would meet an incredible brother in Christ named Zoltan, who was an international student from Hungary. He was living right next door to me and gave me the following mug as a parting gift. Little did he know that the verse engraved along the mug was one of my favorites. It remains one of my most cherished gifts to this day.

What are your desires this Advent season? What is it you are waiting for the LORD to do? And what would it mean to delight yourself in the LORD as you wait? What would it mean to trust God and commit your way to the LORD, even before your answer arrives? And then, how would it feel for God to do the very thing you are desiring to have done?

There are people who wake up every day and end up doing the very things they do not want to do. There are also people who wait with expectancy for long periods of time and are not met with the answers they were hoping for. But as we turn toward one of the most expectant times of the year, what is it you would like to do, and what is it you need God to do for you?

Whatever your answer to that question, I pray that when you go to take a sip of whatever is in the cup you are drinking from, that you would find a reason to smile at the end of it.



#terrificuesday #devosfromdonald

Tuesday, December 18, 2018

Terrific Tuesdays begin in contentment.

You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor. -Exodus 20:17

As we approach Christmas, we are mindful of the lure of coveting, and the danger of breaking this commandment. While the first three commandments God gave to Moses were focused on our relationship with God, the last six were focused on our relationship with others. And I don't think it's a coincidence that this commandment gets a bigger slice of pie than the other five in its category.

Merriam Webster defines covet as "to wish for earnestly" or "to desire (what belongs to another) inordinately," inordinately meaning not within proper or reasonable limits.

We covet what we do not have and we want that which we think we need. Perhaps it's not our neighbor's wife, slave, or animal, but what would it be for us today? What is it or who is it we covet? The commandment implies that we can covet people as well as material objects, but in all cases, it's coveting something that belongs to someone else.

Perhaps you grew up in a broken home and covet someone who seemed to have a more put together and healthy family. Perhaps you're struggling in your marriage, and you covet how you perceive other marriages are going in comparison to yours. Perhaps you're not in the place you want to be financially, and you covet what others have or can buy versus what you don't have or can't buy. Perhaps you struggle with self-image or self-confidence, not liking the way God made you, and so you covet others who you think or perceive are more beautiful, talented, intelligent, or successful.

Whatever it is we covet, at the root of our covetousness is often a lack of contentment. Thus, instead of coveting this Christmas season, what would it look like for us to treasure? To not wrongfully desire what we don't have, but to rightfully appreciate what we do have; to find joy and contentment in what belongs to us and is a part of us?

Instead of coveting another's family, relationship, financial status, or perceived trait, what would it look like to treasure who you are, who you have, and what you have? What would it look like to do that this Christmas and in the new year?

Once again, covet means to desire something wrongfully or in a way that exceeds reasonable limits. But one thing I'm grateful for and treasure is Christ's love which exceeded reasonable limits and seemed wrongfully placed, even though it didn't and wasn't. I'm grateful that Christ eagerly desired us, so much that Christ was born into this world as one of us. And it was because we belong to Christ, that Christ would do anything it took to show us how much he treasured us, even dying on a cross. May you not only treasure who you are and what you have, but treasure and find contentment in knowing how much Christ treasures you.

#terrificuesday #devosfromdonald

Monday, December 24, 2018

Terrific Tuesdays sometimes don't start with a devotional from Donald.

They start with people you love, spending time with them and with God, especially when it's both Jesus' and your wife's birthday on the same Tuesday. Happy Monday everyone and have a very merry Christmas tomorrow! I hope it's one of the most terrific Tuesdays of your year!\

And if you're around and not committed elsewhere, join us for our Christmas Eve Candlelight Service at either Boonton UMC at 7pm or Montville UMC at 9pm TONIGHT!

#terrificuesday #christmastuesday #devofromdonald