

Good News Daily

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Sunday, December 7

Luke 1:57-68 *And he asked for a writing tablet, and wrote "His name is John." And they all marveled.* (v.63 RSV)

Today newscasters will recall the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941. The event that drew Americans into World War II was communicated to the country over the airwaves of radio by a stunned and sober FDR.

Surprise is not only a fact of war. It is a fact of life! And for Christians, surprise is often what we leave in our wake. Those who observe our choices and responses are often amazed. In opposition to our culture, we are not to allow pleasure, profit, and convenience to dictate our actions. The guidance (and the power) of the Holy Spirit enable us not to simply do what others think we will (or should).

Zechariah knew what the Lord wanted him to do. He surprised his family and friends by going against their expectations. In order to honor God with his obedience he faced misunderstanding and criticism. We also run the risk of being falsely labeled when our choices catch others by surprise. But the label God gives us as "good and faithful servants" is the label that matters most.

Amos 6:1-14; Psalms 148, 149, 150; 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

Monday, December 8

Revelation 1:1-8 *Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come...* (v.4)

If ever there is a time of year when we could use a little more "grace and peace" in our lives, it's now. The demands and the stress of the season are overwhelming. There are almost three weeks before Christmas and the needles on our emotional fuel gauge point to "E." A silent night sure would be kind of nice. Even holy! Right?

A hundred years after the very first Christmas, the aged apostle wrote to the seven churches in Asia Minor. What he had to say to them applies to us as well. It's an early gift with which we can celebrate Advent and not just tolerate it.

Grace and peace are being offered to us right now by the very One who is God and who came as man and who is coming again as our Sovereign King. All we need to do to receive this special offer is receive it. In prayer, let's confess our needy state, our frenzied dizziness, the turmoil of list-making tendencies and ask the Christ of Christmas to grace us with an awareness of his unconditional love.

Amos 7:1-9; Psalm 25; Matthew 22:23-33

Tuesday, December 9

Psalms 26 *O LORD, I love the habitation of thy house, and the place where thy glory dwells.* (v.8)

Yesterday we referred to the "grace and peace" that the Living Christ longs to give us. One of the conduits through which we receive that blessing is the place where we regularly gather for worship.

How I love to retreat from the frantic holiday rush to the hush of the sanctuary. There, in peace and quiet I'm surrounded by the grace-full beauty of banners and candles and wreaths and trees. Through the windows of my church, diffused light illuminates the pulpit where God's word is proclaimed. Also lit by the morning sun is the table where my hungry heart is nourished and the baptismal font where my identity as a child of God is silently declared.

In the house of God, I find grace and peace and symbols of a holiday to which our culture is sadly blinded. The sanctuary truly is a respite from the cacophony and chaos in which I am forced to maneuver to survive each week in the world. I am sanctuaried from a life spinning out of control. And best of all, I don't have to wait for Sunday mornings to enter the doors of my church. Why not stop by your place of worship between Sundays this week to bask in the glory of God's presence which is tangibly represented there?

Amos 7:10-17; Psalm 28; Revelation 1:9-16; Matthew 22:34-46

Wednesday, December 10

Psalm 38 *Lord, all my longing is known to thee, my sighing is not hidden from thee.* (v.9)

There's a line in the vintage children's Christmas song "Santa Claus Is Coming to Town" that observes, "He sees you when you're sleeping. He knows when you're awake. He knows if you've been bad or good..." Well, the same could be said of our Heavenly Father. (And yes, Virginia, Santa Claus is but a pale impersonation of the Living God).

God's knowledge of us, unlike that rumored of Santa, is not limited to what He observes in our behavior. Our Creator is capable of looking into our hearts to see our hopes and hurts and longings and dreams.

He is aware of those who face this Christmas season alone and lonely. He cares for families separated by miles or divided by misunderstandings. Painful memories that surface each year about this time (because of abusive pasts or empty chairs at family tables) are not hidden from the all-knowing healer of broken hearts. It is comforting to know that the One who knows everything about us desires to forgive us and give us a daily sense of His presence.

Amos 8:1-14; Revelation 1:17—2:7; Matthew 23:1-12

Thursday, December 11

Matthew 23:13-26 *"You blind men! For which is greater, the gift or the altar that makes the gift sacred?"* (v.19)

Did you know there is a vast difference between giving gifts and exchanging gifts? At Christmastime, however, the distinction between the two is blurred. When we give a gift we share a symbol of our heart-felt affection and gratitude for another. Gifts are given without any expectation of receiving in return. On the other hand, when we exchange gifts, we do exactly that. We give in order to get. There is a sense of obligation (and generally a dollar and cents guideline is provided).

Unfortunately, Christmas (which commemorates the giving of the ultimate gift as the ultimate expression of love) has become an occasion for exchanging gifts with family and friends and business associates. We list those for whom we have to buy. So and so and what's their name. I even know of people who keep wrapped gifts in a hall closet just in case they are surprised with a gift from someone they didn't plan to give one to.

Gifts do not make Christmas. It's the sacredness of what occurred in Bethlehem that sets Christmas apart. What happened some two thousand years ago frees us to emulate God by giving tokens of our love to those we love because we have been loved.

Amos 9:1-10; Psalm 37:1-18; Revelation 2:8-17

Friday, December 12

Haggai 1:1-15 *And they came and worked on the house of the LORD of hosts, their God, on the twenty-fourth day of the month.* (v.14b)

Fascinating, isn't it? The 24th day of the month had significance for the people of God in Haggai's day. For American Christians, Christmas Eve is the day we celebrate at church, while Christmas Day is the time normally set aside to gather in our homes as families. We know how to separate it out.

We are pretty good at drawing lines of distinction the rest of the year too. Sunday morning is church time and rest of the week typically is our time on our turf. But is it really? The Lord spoke some pretty intimidating words through Haggai the prophet about the sin we commit by not giving the Lord (and His house) the attention and time we invest in our personal concerns at work and at home.

What is it around your church that is in need of attention? Of what are you embarrassed when visitors show up? Can you do something about that? How can you invest your spiritual gift or experience in your local church's ministry? Don't be satisfied to simply give an end of the year financial gift (above your tithe) to the Lord's work. Why not pledge a percentage of time you'll invest each week during the coming year?

Psalm 31; Revelation 2:18-29; Matthew 23:27-39

Saturday, December 13

Revelation 3:1-6 *"I know your works; you have the name of being alive, and you are dead."* (v.1b)

When a new pastor arrives at his or her parish in the summer, he or she has no idea who all the members of the congregation are until December. There is something about carols and candles that bring inactive congregants out of the woodwork. Most of these Christmas (and Easter) saints would say they are followers of the Bethlehem Baby. But doesn't their commitment to the Body of Christ (or their lack of it) challenge their claim?

Regular worship is often an indicator of genuine faith. But not always. The truth is...not all who claim to be Christians are spiritually alive. And that includes some who attend church every single Sunday. Gulp! Baptism alone doesn't qualify us for heaven. Neither does tithing, teaching Sunday School, or taking communion. Claiming the name "Christian" and walking your talk are two different things.

The key is a personal relationship with the risen Christ whose Spirit empowers obedience, faith, and good works. This Christmas, why not give your life to Christ? It's the gift at the top of his wish list.

Haggai 2:1-19; Psalms 30, 32; Matthew 24:1-14

by Greg Asimakoupoulos

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Sunday, December 14

John 5:30-47 *"Yet you refuse to come to me to have life."* (v.40 NRSV)

People today seem to grab at the newest fad and believe that it will change their lives. High-tech gadgets, diets, get rich schemes, vitamins, and new self-help theories are examples of things in which we put our trust.

Jesus' words from John 5 should get our attention. I can hear the frustration in his words as he points out that although people like John the Baptist have testified about who Jesus is and although miracles and healings he has done show that God is with him, some people are not moved. Even Moses and his trusted Scriptures point to him, yet they refuse to come to him.

We are like that too. We know we are missing something important in our lives but where do we look for answers? During this Advent time, while we prepare for his coming to us, I pray that we will also come to him.

Amos 9:11-15; Psalms 63, 98; 2 Thessalonians 2:1-3, 13-17

Monday, September 15

Revelation 3:7-13 *"Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth."* (v.10 NIV)

The Second Coming of Christ is one of the major Advent themes. It is one that makes many Christians uncomfortable. We would rather focus on the babe in Bethlehem than the distress of the chaotic last days Jesus describes in Matthew 24.

The truth of Advent is we have to be ready for both. We prepare for the tribulation of the last days when false prophets perform great miracles and try to turn our heads from the truth. We must "endure" and do it "patiently." We need to persevere.

Perhaps that is why we are together as the Body of Christ, so we can help each other keep straight in our journeys of faith. At least we have been warned about what to expect and we know that God will protect us if we keep the faith.

Zechariah 1:7-17; Psalms 41, 52; Matthew 24:15-31

Tuesday, December 16

Matthew 24:32-44 *"So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him."* (v.44)

As we continue to read these passages about the future end times in Matthew, Zechariah, and Revelation, a common theme jumps out at me. Be ready! There will be signs—like signs of spring—but we don't know the day or hour. That is okay. It is probably better that we don't.

These passages are unsettling and a bit scary because they are warning us about a Judgment Day that is catastrophic. On the other hand, we are also told what to do. We must press on and not be like the lukewarm Laodiceans in Revelations, who think they have all they need in the bank and are missing the wakeup call at their door.

We must see the possibilities for our future through God's eyes. Then, when Judgment Day comes, we can only hope He finds us out there in His fields with our boots on.

Zechariah 2:1-13; Psalm 45; Revelation 3:14-22

Wednesday, December 17

Zechariah 3:1-10 "This is what the LORD Almighty says: 'If you walk in my ways and keep my requirements, then you will govern my house and have charge of my courts, and I will give you a place among these standing here.'" (v.7)

Who is in charge? Today's readings leave no doubt. It is God who is restoring the Jews to their homeland. It is God on the throne in heaven and it is God who decides who will be trusted to work in His earthly kingdom.

Even the psalmist (119:60) says, "I will hasten and not delay to obey your commands." God is big—He can handle anything. This is comforting to me when I begin to worry about my little problems.

For example, my church is not as alive as I would like it to be. God can handle that. I don't have to run around trying to fix my fellow parishioners. I do need to be open to the possibility that God might want me to act in some way and be willing to follow through—but God is in charge.

Psalm 119:49-72; Revelation 4:1-8; Matthew 24:45-51

Thursday, December 18

Psalm 50 He who sacrifices thank offerings honor me, and he prepares the way so that I may show him the salvation of God. (v.23)

What are we supposed to do as we patiently wait, ready for the Second Coming of Christ? The readings today give us an idea. We are to worship the Lord God. John's vision in Revelation shows us a glimpse of all of heaven bowing before the throne of God.

In today's world we have been exposed to so many special effects and extravaganzas that we are numb to the majesty and glory of God. For example, to me, "Old Faithful" was a disappointing fountain, and the glorious fall color in the mountains was so perfect I thought of a Disney movie set.

We need to reconnect with the reverential awe we had as children and really worship our Creator. As those in heaven, we need to fall down before the throne of God and say, "You are worthy to receive glory and honor and power. For you created everything, and it is for your pleasure that they exist and were created." Then we will be on the right path as we wait.

Zechariah 4:1-14; Revelation 4:9—5:5; Matthew 25:1-13

Friday, December 19

Revelation 5:6-14 Then I heard... them singing: "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever." (v.)

The Scriptures tell us to worship and then how we should worship. Psalm 40:16 says, "May those who love your salvation repeatedly shout, 'The Lord is great!'" and Psalm 54:6 says, "I will praise your name, O Lord, for it is good."

Praise, praise and more praise should be our worship mode. I have been in more than a few churches lately where the worship was stifled and dry. It is "a good and joyful thing" that we should lift our hearts and glorify God—"Holy, Holy, Holy Lord God of Hosts."

We praise Him because He is our God and maybe because He likes it. We like to be praised and should uplift each other in this way. It follows that God likes it too! When I have trouble sleeping, instead of counting sheep, I now go through the alphabet and think of a praise word for each letter. My Advent (New Year) resolution is to praise my Lord regularly.

Zechariah 7:8—8:8; Psalms 40, 54; Matthew 25:14-30

Saturday, December 20

Psalm 55 But as for me, I trust in you. (v.23b)

If I needed motivation to persevere in my Christian journey, today's readings would provide it. I want to be with the sheep, not the goats. I want to be protected from the workings of the seven seals described in Revelation. These readings make me want to renew my efforts to be a seeker of truth and to trust God to guide and protect me.

I want to be open to all the gifts and jobs God might have for me. I don't want to be afraid to be used by Him. The "end times" will come someday. There is nothing we can do about that except strive to be His people here on earth. If we focus on that, the end will take care of itself.

Zechariah 8:9-17; Revelation 6:1-17; Matthew 25:31-46

by Elizabeth Schorr

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Sunday, December 21

John 3:16-21 *Light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light....* (v.19a ESV)

As I was growing up, in these late December days the Christmas tree in our house would already have presents tucked under the branches. We heard the stories about Santa but it was obvious to me and my brothers that the presents were already here! Guessing at their contents was allowed but opening any of them had to wait for Christmas Eve. (It was easier for my younger brother. His birthday was two days earlier. He got to open gifts at his party. That helped relieve all sibling anticipation about the packages under the tree.)

Opening those gifts always came with a strange anxiety. I had to hide disappointment that some of my packages held nothing but clothes or other sensible things. And these usually stayed useful longer than the toys I wanted. I now suspect my parents watched my Christmas attitude with sighs like those Our Father must have had when He sent us His Gift and watched the reactions.

Genesis 3:8-15; Psalms 24, 29; Revelation 12:1-10

Monday, December 22

Luke 1:1-25 *Those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us...* (v.2)

In his book *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, Richard Bauckham cites a minor and unnoticed detail that lends credence to New Testament records about Jesus. Bauckham did a frequency count of the names of people mentioned in the Gospels and the letters to various early believers and communities. He then compared this list of names to a list of names on Apostolic era grave markers. The frequency for popular names on both lists was the same. By contrast, “gospels” that appeared in later centuries with authorship attributed to other Disciples of Jesus included few names beyond Jesus himself, or only close followers like Peter and John, or Mary, Jesus’ mother.

Bauckham concludes that the casual inclusion of verifiable common names in the New Testament is, itself, one of the assurances we have that the accounts are trustworthy. These records come from legitimate eyewitnesses who were there at the beginning, on the spot. They’re trustworthy.

Zephaniah 3:14-20; Psalms 61, 62; Titus 1:1-16

Tuesday, December 23

Luke 1:26-38 *And he came to her and said, “Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!”* (v.28)

When she woke up from her night’s sleep to the day Gabriel would visit her, did Mary think of herself as favored by God? Did she feel any special closeness to her Lord at all that morning? Gabriel spoke to her as if it was an established fact. He had no doubts about it. But he waited politely, respectfully, until the surprised young girl had made up her mind about it and decided to say, “Okay!”

1400 years later, a young French girl caught in the midst of international conflict also concluded, “I was born to do this.” Neither Mary nor Joan knew exactly what kinds of blessing or opposition lay ahead. As each day unfolded, no matter what swords might pierce their hearts, they decided that it would be enough to know the Lord was with them.

Even without all the details spelled out in advance, it is enough to know that. That’s what it means to be favored.

1 Samuel 2:1b-10; Psalms 66, 67; Titus 2:1-10

Wednesday, December 24

Psalm 46 *God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.* (v.1)

I was familiar with the Bible Christmas story from childhood. It was not until I grew up that I noticed certain details about Joseph, Mary's "silent" husband. Not one word of his is recorded for us. He surely had questions about the claims concerning a child to be born under unusual circumstances. But he was kept from asking ones like Zechariah the priest had blurted out, because Joseph's angelic encounter happened while he was sleeping, dreaming. While given no chance to ask questions, Joseph was still given several explanations for the events he would see. And, most remarkable to my grownup mind, when Joseph woke up from his dream he *proceeded to act* on the instructions he'd been given while asleep! That decision completely disrupted any expectations he ever had about a quiet tradesman's life. God's very plan to salvage and redeem His Creation, to say nothing of the beloved creatures formed in His image, depended on Joseph's decision to accept instructions from his dream with no way to test them first. And he didn't complain. Remarkable.

Isaiah 59:15b-21; Psalm 45; Galatians 3:23—4:7; Matthew 1:18-25

Thursday, December 25

Psalm 85 *Yes, the LORD will give what is good...* (v.12a)

Last Sunday, I wrote about my youthful anxiety over the tantalizing Christmas presents under our family Christmas tree. I always hoped the gifts with my name would delight me. But there were always some that were merely practical and "good for me" even if I hadn't asked for them.

On this pivotal day of the year, we grapple with that same life issue. There are things we want and there are things we need. We've heard that if we just ask, seek, and knock, we will find. But even before we do, whether we have realized it or not, we have a Father who loves us and knows what we are going to need, and what we need already even though we haven't asked for it. He provides us with those gifts, too, because He loves us. He takes the initiative because He is good. Good gifts are all He has and all that He is holding out to us. That's what makes today a merry Christmas!

Micah 4:1-5, 5:2-4; Psalm 2; 1 John 4:7-16; John 3:31-36

Friday, December 26

Acts 6:1-7 *They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit....* (v.5b)

After I was ordained to the permanent diaconate, I noticed more about the Deacon Stephen, first martyr of the church, whose feast day immediately follows the pivotal annual celebration of Christmas Day. Growing up in a non-liturgical denomination, I had always thought the choice to follow Christmas with a day honoring a martyr was jarring.

But Stephen's final prayer request, facing his executioners, was to ask their Judge to forgive them all. God answered this prayer by taking the mob instigator that day and turning him into the most influential teacher and international evangelist of the Apostolic era. As a comparatively minor final touch, it would be Saul himself who recruited the Greek Gentile who would document the history of the first churches founded throughout the Roman empire and, with that, write an account of Stephen himself, preserving his memory for all time.

St. Stephen's example of participating at a humble, hidden, and indirect level of service in God's kingdom is one that I hope I measure up to on my own journey.

2 Chronicles 24:17-22; Psalms 28, 30; Matthew 23:34-39

Saturday, December 27

Psalms 97 *All worshippers of images are put to shame...* (v.7a)

I have enjoyed mystery and detective stories ever since I learned to read. I have also delighted in puns, the sound-alike words that point listeners in silly directions away from reality. As I grew stronger in my Christian faith, I began to realize *mysteries* and *puns* were image design elements in God's teaching and creation patterns. His ways are clearly seen in the moment but can seem mysterious to us.

John proudly told Jesus he had rebuked some men who were exorcising demons because they weren't members of "The Twelve" disciples. Jesus told him, "You're not getting it." John asked Jesus who would betray him. Jesus told him, "Watch who I give the bread to." None of the disciples around the table that night got what the gesture meant. In a few hours, scattering in the darkness, each one of them looked like betrayers.

Jesus repeatedly told others, "Simply do what I say to do. Follow me." That made it possible even for little children to feel welcome and get close and solve the mystery.

Proverbs 8:22-30; Psalm 98; 1 John 5:1-12; John 13:20-35

by Rick Hoover

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Sunday, December 28

Psalm 96 *Sing to the Lord, praise his name; proclaim his salvation day after day. Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous deeds among all peoples.* (vv.2-3 NIV)

Three days ago, we celebrated the birth of Jesus, our Savior and our Lord. Can there be a better time than this to sing praises to God, to proclaim His salvation, and to declare His glorious deeds? Even though, according to the church calendar, the Christmas season has just begun, in the world Christmas is over. The time to celebrate is past.

What better time joyfully to tell our friends that the season of celebration is just beginning? It is, in a sense, a season which lasts forever because the babe born in Bethlehem is God's gift to us forever. This Son will grow up to proclaim that the kingdom of God is here, will show us how to live, will die for our sins so that we can be reconciled with the Father, and will send us the Holy Spirit so that we can know and do God's will.

May the joy of Christmas continue to shine in us and may we declare God's glory and proclaim His salvation.

1 Samuel 1:1-2, 7b-28; Psalm 93; Colossians 1:9-20; Luke 2:22-40

Monday, December 29

2 John 1-13 *As you have heard from the beginning his command is that you walk in love.* (v.6b)

One of the major challenges facing the Church and each of us is to understand what it means to walk in love. One of the best books I have read about love is *The Road Less Traveled* by M. Scott Peck.

Peck defines love as "the will to extend oneself for the purpose of nurturing one's own or another's spiritual growth." He writes, "Love is not simply giving; it is judicious giving and judicious withholding as well. It is judicious praising and judicious criticizing. It is judicious arguing, struggling, confronting, urging, pushing and pulling in addition to comforting. It is leadership. The word 'judicious' means requiring judgment and judgment requires more than instinct; it requires thoughtful and often painful decision making."

As I look at Jesus and his life and death, this is the kind of love he modeled. May God give us the will to extend ourselves to nurture spiritual growth in ourselves and others. May He grant us each wisdom and discernment so that our judgment may be informed by Him.

2 Samuel 23:13-17b; Psalm 18:1-20; John 2:1-11

Tuesday, December 30

3 John 1-15 *Anyone who does what is good is from God.* (v.11b)

It is easy to say we are Christians, but God does not judge us by our words but by our actions. In this letter, the good work for which John commends Gaius is a specific: the offering of hospitality and assistance to missionaries. Gaius not only gave the missionaries a place to stay but also provided for their journey.

We don't know why the church led by Diotrephes would not assist those sent by Paul and indeed forbade its members to do so. Could it have been that they felt they had to take care of their own needs first? Do we and our churches provide hospitality to those who are committed to taking the Good News to the lost at home and abroad? Do we support them in their work, or do we look at our budgets, at our own needs, and close our doors and our pocketbooks?

John's judgment is harsh. If we do not do good by assisting those who go out in God's name we are not, in truth, Christians.

1 Kings 17:17-24; Psalms 20, 21; John 4:46-54

Wednesday, December 31

James 4:13-17, 5:7-11 *If anyone, then, knows the good they ought to do and doesn't do it, it is sin for them.* (v.17)

It's New Year's Eve, a time when many of us make New Year's resolutions phrased in terms of "I will" or "I won't." We look ahead and make plans for the coming year.

James warns us of the danger of making our plans without an awareness of our dependence on God for we "do not know about tomorrow." If we simply read the verse quoted above, we might think it refers to good works we know we should do but don't do. In this context, however, it is clear that the good we ought to do is recognizing that we are not in charge. The greatest good we can do is to trust in God, recognize our dependence on Him, and seek His will and direction.

Relying on ourselves and boasting of what we will do in our own strength is sin. As we make our New Year's resolutions and plan for the year ahead, may we seek God's will and the strength to accomplish it—always aware that our days are in His hands.

1 Kings 3:5-14; Psalms 46, 48; John 5:1-15

Thursday, January 1

Revelation 19:11-16 *"On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS."* (v.16)

Today our lessons focus on who Jesus is. Jesus is described as Savior, as God with us, as redeemer, as judge, as warrior, and finally, as "King of Kings and Lord of Lords." God has given Jesus all authority in heaven and on earth.

In the service of Baptism, people are asked a series of questions: "Do you turn to Jesus Christ and accept him as your Savior?" "Do you put your whole trust in his grace and love?" "Do you promise to follow and obey him as your Lord?" We are expected to respond, "I do."

For me it is easy to continue to live in the recognition that Jesus is my Savior. But it is a continuous struggle to follow and obey Jesus as my Lord, for that means giving up control. It is possible only because I do trust in his grace and love. I know that his plan for my life is better than anything I could come up with, and I know that his grace will empower me to fulfill his plan. May each of us begin each day by praying, "Lord, what would you have me do?"

Isaiah 62:1-5, 10-12; Psalm 103; Matthew 1:18-25

Friday, January 2

Ephesians 4:1-16 *From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.* (v.16)

Each of us is called and gifted by God to perform a certain function in the body of Christ. If we do not use our gifts, if we do not do the work God has called us to do, the body will not be strengthened and grow as God intends.

Understanding how important each one of us is to the functioning of the body of Christ is often difficult. In *Fearfully and Wonderfully Made*, Dr. Paul Brand and Philip Yancey helped me to understand the image of the Church as the body of Christ by explaining how the human body functions. Did you know that a cancerous lipoma is caused by a single fat cell which refuses to give up its reserves—the gift it has been given for the body's use—and then multiplies out of control?

If I don't want to be a cancer cell in Christ's body, I must use my gift. The health of the Church depends on each of us using our gifts. Are you using your gifts to build up the body of Christ?

1 Kings 19:1-8; Psalms 66, 67; John 6:1-14

Saturday, January 3

Ephesians 4:17-32 *Put off your old self...be made new...put on the new self.* (vv.22-24)

Thank God, it's not all up to me! Reading these verses reminds me that as I seek to become the person God created me to be I don't have to do it all myself. I am not called to make myself into a new

person, I am simply called to cooperate with God as He makes me new. Did you know that Christianity is the only religion which does not call us to perfect ourselves?

God makes us new by giving us His Holy Spirit who leads us into all truth and empowers us to do God's will. Our part is to cooperate. We must be willing intentionally to put aside anything in our lives which is not pleasing to God, and we must actively and intentionally put on new attitudes. God won't change us against our will; but, as we prayerfully place ourselves in His hands He will, day by day, mold us into the image of His Son.

1 Kings 19:9-18; Psalm 68; John 6:15-27

by Diane Brown

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