

Words to the Whole Church

Cycle #3 – Session #6

Words to the Whole Church

Text: Romans 12

Gathering

Opening Worship

Light a candle. Where God is there is light and life. We light this candle to remind ourselves of God's presence. We also remember that when we live as the people we are called to be, we also shine with God's light.

Song: Gift of Love—#526 Chalice Hymnal

Litany

For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven,
and do not return until they have watered the earth,
making it bring forth and sprout,
giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater,

**So shall my word be that goes out from my mouth;
it shall not return to me empty,
but shall accomplish that which I purpose,
and succeed in the one thing for which I sent it.**

For you shall go out in joy, and be led back in peace;
the mountains and the hills before shall burst into song
and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.

**Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress;
instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle;
and it shall be to the LORD for a memorial
for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.**

Welcome One Another. Share with one another something or someone for which you are thankful.

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Scripture

Romans 12 (NRSV)

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual^{*} worship.

²Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.

³For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgement, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. ⁴For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, ⁵so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. ⁶We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ⁷ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; ⁸the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.

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

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

Romans 12 (The Message)

Place Your Life Before God

¹⁻² So here's what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him. Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you.

³I'm speaking to you out of deep gratitude for all that God has given me, and especially as I have responsibilities in relation to you. Living then, as every one of you does, in pure grace, it's important that you not misinterpret yourselves as people who are bringing this goodness to God. No, God brings it all to you. The only accurate way to understand ourselves is by what God is and by what he does for us, not by what we are and what we do for him.

⁴⁻⁶In this way we are like the various parts of a human body. Each part gets its meaning from the body as a whole, not the other way around. The body we're talking about is Christ's body of chosen people. Each of us finds our meaning and function as a part of his body. But as a chopped-off finger or cut-off toe we wouldn't amount to much, would we? So since we find ourselves fashioned into all these excellently formed and marvelously functioning parts in Christ's body, let's just go ahead and be what we were made to be, without enviously or pridefully comparing ourselves with each other, or trying to be something we aren't.

⁶⁻⁸If you preach, just preach God's Message, nothing else; if you help, just help, don't take over; if you teach, stick to your teaching; if you give encouraging guidance, be careful that you don't get bossy; if you're put in charge, don't manipulate; if you're called to give aid to people in distress, keep your eyes open and be quick to respond; if you work with the disadvantaged, don't let yourself get irritated with them or depressed by them. Keep a smile on your face.

⁹⁻¹⁰Love from the center of who you are; don't fake it. Run for dear life from evil; hold on for dear life to good. Be good friends who love deeply; practice playing second fiddle.

¹¹⁻¹³Don't burn out; keep yourselves fueled and aflame. Be alert servants of the Master, cheerfully expectant. Don't quit in hard times; pray all the harder. Help needy Christians; be inventive in hospitality.

¹⁴⁻¹⁶Bless your enemies; no cursing under your breath. Laugh with your happy friends when they're happy; share tears when they're down. Get along with each other; don't be stuck-up. Make friends with nobodies; don't be the great somebody.

¹⁷⁻¹⁹Don't hit back; discover beauty in everyone. If you've got it in you, get along with everybody. Don't insist on getting even; that's not for you to do. "I'll do the judging," says God. "I'll take care of it."

²⁰⁻²¹Our Scriptures tell us that if you see your enemy hungry, go buy that person lunch, or if he's thirsty, get him a drink. Your generosity will surprise him with goodness. Don't let evil get the best of you; get the best of evil by doing good.

Dwelling in Scripture

1st reading – Allow people time to reflect on what they have heard.
Note the word or phrase which drew your attention this time.

2nd reading -- Invite people to talk about what they have heard and
where it might intersect with their lives.

Behind the Text

The letter to the Romans is another one of those books in which it is possible to wade, but where one may also spend a lifetime learning to swim. Mostly we're going wading as we primarily focus on one chapter, exploring the meaning of New Life in Christ and what marks a true Christian. There are numerous translations which you might use, but I have found Eugene Peterson's translation into contemporary English to be very helpful. *So here's what I want you to do, God helping you* seems clearer and easier to understand than *Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy.*

When the compilers were putting the New Testament together, they put Paul's letters in the order of their length, so Romans being the longest is placed first. That doesn't mean it was written first. It was more than likely written from Corinth, in 56 C.E., during Paul's third missionary journey where Acts says he stayed for a considerable period of time.

There were several reasons for his letter to the Romans. First, he has been hoping to visit them for some time and this letter is addressed to them as a means of laying out Paul's theology, his view of what is happening or needs to be happening in the church, and to prepare the way for his visit. Second, there are still things for him to do before he comes to Rome. He is going to Jerusalem with a relief offering from the Christians in Macedonia and Achaia to the poor "among the saints at Jerusalem." (Romans 15:25-26). He is somewhat uncertain as to whether this offering from Gentiles will be accepted by the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem. So he requests that the Romans pray for the unbelievers in Judea and his ministry there. Third, he seems to indicate that once that is done, he will be free to travel on to Rome and he is looking forward to "being refreshed" in their company.

If you read through Acts as well as the letters he writes, in all of Paul's travels there is a sense of uncertainty. At times he may be seen as restless. At other times there is a description of uneasiness between Paul and the Jewish community in Jerusalem as well as other places. He seems to have regularly experienced imprisonment and threats of violence. These threats frequently resulted in his rapid departure from whichever place he happened to be preaching and teaching. After being in Athens he went on to Corinth (*Acts 18*) where he met Priscilla and Aquilla. These were two of the Jews who had to leave Rome because the Emperor Claudius had banished Jews from the city of Rome. This was some time in the late 40s C.E. They were not allowed to return until after a new Emperor came to power after Claudius's death in 54 C.E. They were also tentmakers. Paul stayed in their home perhaps for quite some time. Their trades, as well as faith were a common bond. Priscilla and Aquilla were teachers of this new faith

and Priscilla is the only woman Paul ever listed before her husband. I have imagined it was during the time he was staying at their house that not only did they develop a deep and abiding friendship, their home provided a place for Paul to write this letter to the Romans.

If Paul had set out to put his theology down in a systematic form, his writing would probably have been simpler. Because it is a letter it seems to go here and there, not necessarily in any orderly fashion. I sometimes picture Paul sitting at a small writing table, feeling the urgency of dealing with many weighty matters that concern him and this young church and then, every so often, his mind goes in a different direction. In those spots he seems to break into song or reflects on something of joy or news that they would want to hear. And then he gets his mind back to the work at hand and returns to the serious matters.

Clearly one of the weighty issues on his mind is the relationship between the Jewish and Gentile Christians. He knows himself to be Jewish to the core. He is grounded in the Torah and comes with an understanding of the faithfulness of God to the covenant with the Jewish people. At the same time he calls himself the *Apostle to the Gentiles*. Whether he wanted the job or not, his place between the two worlds makes him a connector, a bridge builder. He seeks to build understanding between the two parts of this new Body of Christ.

One of the most important concepts and perhaps one of the most difficult to understand is “God’s righteousness.” Probably the first hurdle for us is the whole idea of righteousness. What does it mean to be righteous? Romans 1:16-17 lays out his understanding and at the same time doesn’t make it a lot easier for most of us to grasp. ¹⁶ *For I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.* ¹⁷ *For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, ‘The one who is righteous will live by faith.’*

It may help some to continue reading through the end of the chapter as he explores what is ungodly and wicked. In that category we would bump into those who suppress God’s truth as well as those who have dishonored God or broken their covenant with God. At this point he seems to be pointing directly at the Jewish people who were chosen to be the people of God. God has been faithful to them, but they have been unfaithful to God. This dishonoring has taken the shape of worshipping idols, degrading their bodies, being overwhelmed by sexual passions. In this same category are such things as covetousness, malice, envy, murder, strife, deceit, craftiness. He even includes in the list, gossip, slander, hating God, being insolent or haughty, or boastful. He finishes the list off by pointing to people who invent evil, are rebellious toward their parents, and even those who are foolish, faithless, heartless, or ruthless. In reading the list, it may bring to mind that these are people who have disregarded the commandments given to Moses and therefore have broken their covenant with God.

Righteousness is not really about the petty or trivial sins that are sometime regarded as most important. Righteousness lies very close to justice and faithfulness to the covenant. This lies at the very heart of the Jewish faith and understanding of God. There has been an understanding that God would be faithful to the covenant and

restore the Jewish people to power and freedom. As Paul understands this, he sees that God has been faithful to the chosen people, and that somehow in the coming of Jesus, the covenant has been fulfilled. Now in Christ, God opens the way for the Gentiles to also become “the chosen people.” While the new Christians are not held to the old laws of the torah, they are nonetheless to be a “*righteous people*” who serve a righteous God.

The community Paul addresses in Romans appears to be primarily Gentile. At the time the Jewish Christians who had been scattered may have been returning, but while they were away, the resident Roman Christians had taken on the roles of leadership and they may not have been all that pleased to have the Jewish Christians coming back with an expectation that their property as well as their place of importance would be returned. So it’s not surprising there is a certain tension going on between the two groups. Paul seems to be reminding them all, that whether their roots are Gentile or Jewish, they are now God’s chosen people and need to function as the body of Christ.

It is against this background that we read Romans 12. While there may be much within Paul’s letters that does not speak to the contemporary church, this one chapter has through the centuries continued to be of great importance. How often have there been divisions in the body? How often have groups tried to act as if they are the only ones who truly are Christian? Even in the whole area of transformation there appears to be a danger of different groups developing who have a tendency to say, “Do it this way,” instead of recognizing that the process of transformation is really a gift from God and that there are many ways by which to make the journey. Just as each person is a unique being, so is each church.

As you begin chapter 12 remember from the beginning of the Jewish faith, behavior and belief are inextricably woven together. That is equally true in Paul’s understanding of the church which is emerging. Jews and Gentiles will find themselves becoming the people of God as they become Christians. What they believe will become visible in their behavior. For Paul how the community behaves and what the community believes about God are two sides of the same coin. So when he moves from the theological reflections which have gone on in the first eleven chapters to focusing on the behavior of this community and how people are to relate to each other, he isn’t changing the subject, he’s simply directing attention to behavior which he sees as essential to the belief.

Observation

Someone said there are three steps in preaching any sermon. 1) Tell people what you are going to tell them. 2) Tell them! 3) Tell them what you’ve told them. I think the advice must have originated with Paul who did both of these things. In the first two verses of this passage are step one. The first word, *therefore*, which appears in most translations or as Peterson put it, “*So here*” serves as a transition, but it also serves to remind those who are about to read this portion of the letter, that everything which has gone before and everything that will follow will connect. He isn’t changing the topic, he’s just turned the page.

What comes next also offers a variety of translations and the one which speaks to you may depend on a number of factors which will affect your hearing. The NIV says, “*I urge you...*” The NRSV uses, “*I appeal*” and the Message says, “*Here’s what I want you to do*”... When I read the three I recognize that “urge” is a strong word which one might use to push an agenda, even perhaps moving toward begging and might be saying, “*Please do this.*” I hear the second alternative as less whiny, more as an equal speaking to equals but still depending on the group hearing to respond, if they will. The third seems to be the clearest to me, “*So here’s what I want you to do*” There is no assurance they will, but at least they will hear the desires of Paul’s heart.

Consider

Among the tasks which face the church in each generation is hearing scripture in fresh ways so that it can speak to particular people in that particular time. Since the meaning of language changes as well as the enormous cultural differences between first century Christians and the present, listening to the scriptures for what God is saying to us now is always a challenge. As you listen to these possibilities what do you hear? How would you react if someone addressed you in this way? How would you say it?

Observation

The second verse of the passage probably deserves more attention than it usually gets. It isn’t an appendage to the first, but deserves to stand beside it and point to a danger that faces the church in every generation. For the first four centuries, until the time of Alexander the Great, Christianity was seen as dangerous. There were various periods of persecution and opposition to this new religion. Then it became not only acceptable to be Christian, but eventually preferable. It was carried throughout Europe, some times with a “*convert or die*” approach. It did, however, affect European culture profoundly and traveled to the new world. The danger of being “*The Religion*” lay in its being taken over by the culture so that people begin to equate cultural norms as being the norm for their faith. That danger is certainly present in our own time and place.

If the church, any church, whether Disciples or other, is serious about transformation one element which will have to be taken seriously is the question of what is important in our faith and what in our culture is at odds with the teachings of Jesus and the understanding of God.

Consider

Using the translation from the Message Bible where do you see yourself taking *your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and placing it before God as an offering?* Do you offer God your best or only the leftovers? Do you see any places where because of your faith, you are at odds with your culture? What, if anything, do you do to either move the culture in a different direction or if you don’t see yourself able to do that, how do you maintain what is most important to you in the midst of the culture?

Observation

In these very tightly packed opening verses Paul seems to have touched almost everything connected to living as Christians. Two things worth looking at further are *“be transformed by the renewing of your minds”* and *“so that you may discern the will of God – that which is good and acceptable and perfect.”*

Perfect is one of those words that has gotten a lot of people into difficulty. A better translation might be *“whole.”* The problem with perfect is that it never is. Some people are paralyzed by their inability to ever do anything perfectly enough they don't constantly find something wrong with it. Sometimes other people demand that someone live up to their definition of perfect whether or not the definition is perfect or even doable. That simple word has spoiled the joy of many things for many people.

Consider

These are two challenges which face every generation and every Christian. Transformation is closely linked to the *“renewing of your mind”* which seems closely connected with the commandment, *“Love God with all your mind.”* What does this mean for you? What might it mean for your congregation? How do you gain fresh insights, information, understanding? And along with that, what do you understand to be involved in discerning God's will?

How perfect is perfect? A story I heard in India many years ago says that at the time of creation while God is enjoying all that has been created, Adam comes to God and complains that he hasn't been allowed to create anything. So God allows Adam the chance to create a tree. Adam does it carefully and creates a beautiful tree. The shape of the trunk, the color of the leaves, even the fruit which he shapes like a bell in bright yellow and red and hangs all over the tree is beautiful. When he is finished he goes to God and says, *“Look at what I have done. It is the most beautiful tree in the garden.”* God considers Adams handiwork and then asks, *“What kind of tree is it? How will it spread? Does it have seeds?”* Adam becomes very quiet and after a long pause says, *“I have forgotten the seeds.”* God laughs and says, *“Since it looks like a bell, we'll simply make it a little more like a bell* and attach the cashew to the bottom of the fruit so that anyone who sees it would be reminded that if a bell is going to ring it has to have a clapper and if a tree is going to spread, it has to have a seed. It also serves to remind us only God is perfect, and God working with humans can always make anything we do, better.

Observation

There is one verse in this passage which I suspect has caused a lot of mischief Paul never intended. In part this may be because of the way in which it is translated and partly it may be because of the way many have interpreted what he has said. Paul said, *“don't think of yourself more highly than you ought to think.”* I suspect Peterson's translation is more helpful or at least I find it so, *“Living then, as every one of you does, in pure grace, it's important that you not misinterpret yourselves as people who are bringing this goodness to God. No, God brings it all to you. The only accurate way to understand ourselves is by what God is and by what he does for us, not by what we are*

and what we do for him. There is always some danger that we humans can become overly proud of what we accomplish, but on the other end of that it seems to me there are many people I have met over the years who deny the gifts and abilities God has given to them because if they say, “*I am good at...*” or *I do.... well*” this is thinking of themselves more highly than they ought. It seems to me that isn’t what Paul was getting at. In a lecture I heard recently by Joan Chittester she said, “True humility begins with an accurate assessment of who we are, our capabilities.” If we do this we are free to use our gifts and allow ourselves to continue to grow.

Consider

When you hear these words from Paul what do they say to you? Do you know people who seem to deny the gifts they have been given and hide behind not wanting to brag? What might be a healthy way to balance the gifts we are given and pride? Does reading the next few verses more carefully offer help to you or to others?

Observation

The description of the Church as the body of Christ is a familiar one and therefore we may slide over it or not take it all that seriously. It is worth considering. The same is true of the gifts. As I read that list I see some of the gifts which are needed by the contemporary church aren’t listed. More over, I suspect the gifts Paul has listed here are his gifts or the ones he noticed as most necessary. It is always easier to see our own gifts than it is to see the gifts of others. At the same time it is a trap we can easily fall into if we think the more obvious, up front kinds of gifts are the most important. Perhaps the most important thing he says in this passage is, *we all have different gifts.* In a similar passage in I Cor. 12, he stresses that all the gifts are needed and that all the gifts aren’t as visible as some. But whatever the gifts are they are to be used for the good of the whole.

Some years ago I was having a conversation with a good friend. At the time a person who was near and dear to both of us was very ill. She had good doctors, so she was receiving good care. But just kind of in passing I said, “*There are times I wish I had the gift of healing.*” My friend replied with her usual wisdom, “*If you needed that gift, you would have it. You have the gifts you need.*” I have been reminded of the wisdom of her words many times, not just about me, but about the church as a whole. When gifts are needed, they are usually there. It may take some courage to step up and do the task to which we’re called. It may even take courage to discover new gifts and to continue to grow in God’s grace.

Consider

What are your particular gifts? Have you discovered gifts you didn’t know you had at times when they were needed? When you see something which needs to be done how do you respond? Do you look for someone who knows how to do it? Are you willing to risk trying something new? Do you recruit people with a variety of gifts to help you? What happens if you face a need and what you hear is, “If it is going to happen, it’s up to you?” “You look around and you’re the only one there. Then what?”

Observation

The next ten verses of this chapter all focus on behavior. For the most part what Paul invites us to do seems very obvious and yet they are not always as easy to do as they might seem on the surface.

Consider

Noting each of the qualities which Paul lists, which ones draw your attention? Which do you find most difficult? Are there specific people in which you see these various qualities? Which ones would you like to strengthen?

Observation

The passage between verses 17 and 21 sounds very right and yet it is difficult to do. When we are wronged, we want the wrong righted and we want someone to be punished. Children learn early to recognize unfair behavior. In fact some people think it may be part of the original equipment. In a recent television program a researcher was working with a group of preschoolers. Some children were given 10 small pieces of candy and some none. The children were old enough to count to ten and they also recognized that some children hadn't gotten any. One of these 4 year olds announced that it would be fair, if those with ten pieces of candy gave five to others and then everyone would have the same amount. In one sense this passage seems to go against what comes to us most naturally.

One of my favorite stories from India concerns King Ashoka, a contemporary of Isaiah who after a terrible battle which his army had won, but which had left hundreds of men and horses dying, decided he would never again go to war. Because winter was coming he would in fact send food and warm clothing to his enemies so that they would not know want during the cold months ahead. Not only would he do these things he caused an edict to be carved in stone in seven different places throughout North India. The result was a time of great peace and prosperity not only for his own people, but for the kingdoms around him.

Consider

What might be different if we as Christians, as a church, took this passage seriously? Who are the enemies we would feed? How do we overcome evil with good?

Activity (Optional)

Write a note to someone in your congregation offering encouragement for work they are doing or a struggle they are facing in life. If appropriate thank them for something they have done.

Practicing the Presence

- 1) As you continue your study this week, spend some time in reflecting on what lessons from this scripture seem most important to you? If your church is as Paul says, the “body of Christ,” how well is the body functioning?
- 2) This is another of Juan Marcos Rivera’s prayers from his *Letters to Jesus*, which grew out of his experience and invites us to look at our faith journey. You may want to use it during your reflection time this week.

Ay Bendito, Jesus! How life has changed since that day when we were all together at Don Maceo’s house! The fear of God was in the hearts of all the people of the neighborhood. Our faith was simple, without all the complications of the present time. If we clapped our hands it was because we had no other instruments at our disposal.

Those were times of spiritual renewal. That sacred hill was the birthplace of a grateful people. We got up early, shivering with cold, and we warmed ourselves with coffee. We had nothing else for breakfast. We had to make the coffee last until lunchtime.

Before going to school we worked in the tobacco fields or on the farms. We milked the cows and took them out to pasture. We harvested the vegetables for lunch, brought wood for the stove, took the milk cans out to the road, and walked up the hill two kilometers. All this before eight-thirty in the morning! We were truly happy.

The evening liturgy was equally inspiring. On coming down from the school we collected the cattle, brought water from the well, and worked for another two hours on the ranch or in the fields. It was all worth it, just to take part in the closing of the day with Dona Juana Perez, Ramona, and Dona Ursula. Those women, after performing their duties as housewives and mothers came to our place at seven in the morning. They worked all day for twenty-five cents, but they knew that father was not exploiting them. That was all he could pay them. The whistle of the hydro-electric plant blew at five, and they used to sing a doxology, say a prayer, and commend their whole day’s efforts into God’s hands. They were happy, and every Sunday they took their tithes to the church. So did we, and from what everyone would bring we were barely able to collect ten dollars, which paid the pastor’s salary.

Those were the days of the revival. Then we had no idea of anything taking place beyond our neighborhood. That is why we enjoyed what we had so much. The pools and falls of the creek, the electric lights around the dam and the hydroelectric plant, became focal points during our childhood. The teachers and the pastor were our mentors and guides, preparing us for the life that followed.

I have no doubt that those days were days of preparation for the future tasks. Our bodies acquired resistance to disease and were trained for the struggle. Our spirits were tempered to resist the many crises to come.

Today everything seems different. The bureaucracy continues a power struggle that consumes us all. Brotherly love is no longer present in our relationships. We discriminate and distinguish between our brethren. We reject

or ignore those who represent a different point of view, and we actively oppose them. Each one of us has a different project, and no one is willing to share.

Development has gone to our heads. All that electronic equipment, all those strident instruments, all that loud scandalous volume, separates us from our origins, from our former dignified poverty, from the time when we placed all our hope in God. We now have so much confidence in our economic and political power that we have relegated God to a second place. People now go to church looking for an experience with you that they no longer find in the street, in their jobs, and in their everyday struggles.

I really feel sad and concerned, Jesus, that the church service now only entertains and calms people, while Lazarus continues at the foot of the table, with his sores still being licked by the dogs. The night is very dark, but we begin to discern the glimmering light of morning, and there will be peace.

In the meantime, we'll see each other around, Lord, on the road.

pp. 51-52

3) The scripture focus for the next session is 1 Peter 1:13-2:10

Suggested Reading Pattern

- 1st Read and listen to the text. Notice phrases that seem familiar or stand out for you. You may want to read it out loud or you may want to read it with someone else.
- 2nd Choose a word or phrase to carry with you and reflect on it as it comes to your mind through the day. (If you read at night – let the word or phrase rest overnight and pick it up in the morning. Remember the pattern of creation – “evening and morning.” You may receive fresh insights when you waken.)
- 3rd During the week read, “Behind the Text” and the “Observations/Consider” portions. Even a few minutes spent each day or several times a week, will enrich your experience of the study and the experience of your small group.

Closing Worship

Words to carry with you -

A revolution is going on in the world today that is cutting across lines of class, color and nationality. It is the revolution of those all over the world who are in on the secret of gifts. At the heart of it is the gospel, but the church cannot assert this in the traditional words of faith because of a noisy piety that failed to become embodied in authentic life styles. In this revolution, one gift is neither superior nor inferior to another. The recognition that dawns that the exercising of gifts is wrapped up with our needs which mesh with corresponding needs in the world. Because our gifts carry us out into the world and makes us participants in life, the uncovering of them is one of the most important tasks confronting any one of us. When we talk about being true to ourselves – being the persons we

are intended to be – we are talking about gifts... We ask to know the will of God without guessing that this will is written into our very beings. We perceive that will when we discern our gifts. Our obedience and surrender to God are in large part our obedience and surrender to our gifts.

Eighth Day of Creation
by Elizabeth O'Connor

Prayer

As you have done in each session, notice the person on your right and on your left. Hold them in prayer during this week. If there are special joys or concerns share them with one another.

Response (Unison)

**Creating Spirit, loving God, Who dwells in each of us
And fills the world with your presence,
Open our eyes that we may see one another
As the unrepeatable miracles you have made us to be.
We are grateful that you place within each of us
gifts to be used for the good of all.
Let us see, share, and celebrate your wonderful work
in those who are gathered in this place.
Let us see, share, and celebrate your wonderful work in all
of our sisters and brothers throughout the world.
Through your son, Jesus, whose gift of love
continues to transform us and the world in which we live.
Amen.**

Blessing

Grace was given to each of us according to the measure of Christ's gift.

Ephesians 4:7

Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them.

Romans 12:6

Give and it will be given to us, for the measure you give will be the measure you get back. (Luke 6:38)

**We have heard the Word of our God!
Go in peace, giving thanks for the gifts
entrusted to each of us and looking forward to
opportunities not only to do things, but to be
the people God has called each of us to be.
Amen.**

Song: Lo, I Am with You! -- #430 Chalice Hymnal