

Terrific Tuesday Devotionals from Pastor Donald: 2019

Tuesday, January 1, 2019

Terrific Tuesdays sometimes begin with dropping the ball.

"Though the righteous fall seven times, they will rise again; but the wicked are overthrown by calamity." -Proverbs 24:16

I don't know about you, but I make mistakes; a lot. I fall down; more than I wish to admit. I eat that piece of cake. I don't go on that run. But it's more than that. I am not always the person, pastor, husband, or disciple I want to be, or that my resolutions want me to be. I am always striving to be better, but never fully arriving where I want to be. I have high hopes and expectations. But oftentimes, I don't quite get there. I'm too hard on myself. I struggle to rest in the truth and identity God speaks over me in contrast to the lies that the enemy, the world, or the person I see in the mirror feeds me. I aim for the moon, hoping even to land in the stars if I can't reach that, but sometimes I don't even get out of the stratosphere. Perhaps some of this is true of you too.

But if there's anything I've learned in the past few years of living, it's that there's something beautiful about the art of failure; there's something holy about mistakes. I've never been a fan of failure. I always loathed making mistakes. I didn't like being disappointed in myself or being seen as less in the eyes of others as I tried to do my best in all that I put my mind, hands, and heart to. But to sum up what Confucius and Ralph Waldo Emerson once said, "Resolve not to never fail, but to rise when you do." And as Winston Churchill said, "Success is not final. Failure is not fatal. It's the courage to continue that counts."

Whether you keep your resolutions past January 12th or not, which is, sadly, when they say most discontinue what they resolved to do, I pray you would pick yourself up when you fail or make a mistake, knowing that you are not defined by your failures, but are made better and sanctified through them, as you strive onward toward all God has in store, no matter how many times you have to pick your fallen self up to get there. And sometimes, oftentimes, it is God who ends up picking us up and keeps us going.

You will fail and make mistakes in 2019. When you do, I hope you can find a bit of beauty and preciousness within those moments that make up some of the wonderful pages in your life story.

#terrificuesday #devoswithdonald #happynewyear #goodbye2018hello2019

Tuesday, January 8, 2019

Terrific Tuesdays begin with curious thoughts.

⁴ Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach... ⁶ He said to them, "Cast the net to the right side of the boat, and you will find some." So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in because there were so many fish. ⁷ That disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on some clothes, for he was naked, and jumped into the sea. ⁸ But the other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, only about a hundred yards off. ⁹ When they had gone ashore, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish on it, and bread. ¹⁰ Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish that you have just caught." ¹¹ So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, a hundred fifty-three of them; and though there were so many, the net was not torn. ¹² Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." -John 21:4a, 6-12 (read 1-14 for the full story)

There were lots of interesting things that struck me when I read this passage. Here were just a few of them:

- The sun was beginning to rise in the story (v. 4). Were the disciples fishing all night? Were they night shift workers? Is that when fish normally bit?
- Why was Peter naked as they were fishing (v. 7)? Was it that hot and uncomfortable at the Sea of Tiberias? Were multiple disciples unclothed while fishing? Was this a typical thing in the first century?
- Peter leaves the other six (thankfully, now with clothes) to fend for themselves with the large catch of fish as he swims the length of a football field to see Jesus (vv. 7-8). Are any of the other disciples going, "Hey, Peter! Don't just leave us hanging here! I guess he makes up for it though when he hauls the whole net of 153 fish ashore by himself in v. 11. That's a strong Peter!
- I wonder if the overwhelming amount of fish is representative of the overwhelming amount of people that would come to know Christ through the disciples. And I wonder if the fact that Jesus was the reason for this miraculous catch after a night of no luck, is a reminder that we have no success apart from Jesus as we tread upon the waters of our lives.

Perhaps many of you have a resolution to read the Bible more. If you do, asking any and all questions of the text you're reading is a good and healthy way to glean further insight and provide added depth for your personal study. It's part of a process people like to call exegesis. I hope you found this fun and insightful, and that you can see reading Scripture as a joy and delight in 2019.

Now go out and make this Tuesday terrific! Remember to wear clothes, eat breakfast with Jesus, and be open to the miraculous.

#terrificuesday #devoswithdonald

Tuesday, January 15, 2019

Terrific Tuesdays begin with an invitation.

On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. -John 2:1-2

I wonder how many people had been invited to this wedding, or how Jesus and the disciples knew the bride and groom. We know the setting was a Galilean village in Cana, but Jesus grew up in Nazareth. So, what prompted him and his disciples being added to the guest list?

Oftentimes we focus on the miracle of this passage, the water turning into wine. We talk about the significance of the miracle and how it relates to what was coming in Jesus' ministry, and what Jesus would ultimately do. But what about the significance of the invitation? What if Jesus was never invited to the wedding? What if the wine ran out and there was no Jesus to do something about it? What if no miracle took place, and all the guests had to suffice with water for the rest of the evening?

The beautiful thing about the story is not just that Jesus did a miracle, but that Jesus was invited and didn't send regrets. He accepted the wedding invitation and came. Perhaps he's not the one officiating, but he is nonetheless there, ready to create a miracle if needed and called upon.

I don't know about you, but my wedding had lots of interesting mishaps. My best man fainted, I nearly fainted, 911 had to be called, a hymn had to be stopped half-way through, and my wife-to-be had to keep her composure. But I'm reminded of a circle of men holding hands and praying before the wedding in the library of a church which served as our preparation room. I'm reminded of individual prayers and prayers prayed as a couple the year before. Even if there was poor planning and not enough foresight on my or others end (like not eating breakfast, not getting enough sleep, or locking my knees), Jesus had been invited to the wedding and was able to intervene, providing his abundance where we were lacking.

Jesus is ready and able to do a miracle, but first we need to add him to our guest list and invite him into the most important aspects of our lives. When the wine in your life runs out, who will be there to fix it? Perhaps there was poor planning on the bride and groom's end in our story, but thanks be to God they thought ahead and planned enough to know that Jesus needed to be on their guest list.

Now go out and make this Tuesday terrific! And don't forget to invite Jesus into your day!

#terrificuesday #devoswithdonald #noregrets

Tuesday, January 22, 2019

Terrific Tuesdays begin in awe and wonder.

The heavens are telling the glory of God; they are a marvelous display of God's craftsmanship.

² Day and night they keep on telling about God.

³⁻⁴ Without a sound or word, silent in the skies, their message reaches out to all the world."

– Psalm 19:1-4a (The Living Bible)



God has made some beautiful things, hasn't God? I woke up Friday and Sunday morning to snow covered fields and housetops. On Sunday evening, my wife and I drove to a new place and marveled at the snow interspersed between the barren trees, as well as the quickly moving clouds and cotton candy sky. As we walked amidst a cold and windy downtown, we marveled at the formation of ice upon and around the ground, as we carefully made our way down sidewalks, trying not to let the wind catch us by surprise. Perhaps those of you hit by snow this weekend not only marveled at what came from the sky, but what was in the sky one night when the total lunar eclipse happened.

But as much as we view the wonderful world around us in awe and wonder, whether it's snow covered-landscapes or rare occurrences in the cosmos, there's something even more wonderful and awe-inducing: You! How awestruck and in wonder are you of God's greatest creation and most beautiful work of craftsmanship? More than a snow-covered scene, more than a total lunar eclipse, God declares and believes you to be more beautiful than anything we see in creation.

May your day not only start in awe and wonder with the beauty of nature that surrounds you, but may it start in awe and wonder at the unique creation God has made you to be. You are a precious and beloved child of God who is beautifully and wonderfully made. Don't ever forget that! Day and night, nature keeps telling about God. May you, as the beautiful creation you are, always keep telling about God, as you hold on tightly and confidently to what God declares over and believes about you.

Now go out and make this Tuesday terrific!

#terrificuesday #devoswithdonald

Tuesday, January 29, 2019

Terrific Tuesdays begin with taking refuge in the right things.

In you, O LORD, I take refuge; let me never be put to shame. -Psalm 71:1

When the storms come and the waters rise, what do you take refuge in?
What do you take refuge in when the sky is calm and the waters low?
Is it the LORD? Or is it someone or something lesser?

In your righteousness deliver me and rescue me; incline your ear to me and save me. -Psalm 71:2

What is it you are needing saving from? Physical pain, emotional hurt, a difficult situation?
Do you believe God is listening and will respond to your plea?
If God were to deliver and rescue you, what would it look like?
Imagine God reaching down and coming to your rescue.

*Be to me a rock of refuge, a strong fortress, to save me, for you are my rock and my fortress. -
Psalm 71:3*

What does it mean for God to be your rock of refuge and strong fortress?
Do you feel surrounded and protected by God on all sides and at all times?
Do you fear that something might infiltrate that fortress?

Reflect on the following words from the hymn, "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God":

*A mighty fortress is our God, a bulwark never failing;
Our helper He, amid the flood of mortal ills prevailing.
For still our ancient foe doth seek to work us woe;
His craft and power are great, and, armed with cruel hate,
On earth is not his equal...
And though this world, with devils filled, should threaten to undo us.
We will not fear, for God hath willed His truth to triumph through us...*

We serve a God who is committed to us, a God who never fails us or forgets us, even when we fail or forget God. May we be reminded of the One who calls us to find shelter in the right things.

Now, go out and make this Tuesday terrific! When the fire alarm sounds, and even when nothing is sounding, may you duck and cover under our great God of refuge.

#terrificuesday #devoswithdonald

Tuesday, February 5, 2019

Terrific Tuesdays sometimes begin with a call to prayer in the midst of not so terrific realities.

“Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute.”
-Proverbs 31:8

While countless fans cheered for their favorite team in Atlanta on Sunday, countless others were on the move, out to identify human trafficking in any place they could. In preparation for Super Bowl LIII, flight passengers, taxi drivers, hotel staff, stadium volunteers, and many more were trained to identify the signs. The result? A large number of arrests and many lives saved.

As a devotional this morning, I invite you to pray and reflect on the following. It is a prayer to end human trafficking written by the Sisters of Charity of Saint Elizabeth in Convent Station, NJ:

*God of freedom, beauty and truth
we believe that your deepest desire,
your most powerful energy,
is that all creation might know abundant life.*

*We raise our voices in anguished prayer
for our sisters and brothers,
women and girls, men and boys,
who are modern day slaves;
They are your beloved daughters and sons,
exploited sexually or forced to work
because of human violence and greed.*

*Fill us with your holy anger and your sacred passion
that those who are trafficked might know healing and justice;
that traffickers will come to repentance and conversion;
that all of us might live in such a way
that others are not made to pay the price
for our comfort and convenience.*

*Hasten the coming of the day when all people
and our precious Earth itself
will be treated, not as a commodity,
but as radiant images of your freedom, beauty and truth.
Amen. May it be so.*

Now go out and make this Tuesday more terrific by praying for and speaking out for those who cannot speak for themselves. May we not be found silent in the face of injustice.

#terrificuesday #devoswithdonald

To educate yourself more and to see how you might be able to respond, you can go to:
<https://www.a21.org/index.php>, <http://www.inplainsightfilm.com/#sthash.psc8UvG6.dpbs>,
<http://www.canfreedom.org/>, or <http://itsapenalty.org/>.

Tuesday, February 12, 2019

Terrific Tuesdays begin in trust.

“Blessed are those who trust in the LORD, whose trust is the LORD. They shall be like a tree planted by water, sending out its roots by the stream. It shall not fear when heat comes, and its leaves shall stay green; in the year of drought it is not anxious, and it does not cease to bear fruit.” -Jeremiah 17:7-8

When I was a child, one of the sports I played was baseball, and I would usually play either second base or left field. I didn't realize it then, but turns out I was a child consumed by anxiety. Every time a ball was coming my way, my thought was usually never, “Oh look, an opportunity for me to shine!” It was usually more like, “Oh shoot, it's coming right at me! I hope I don't make a mistake!” Anxiety often consumed me when I was up to bat as well. I was often very worried about the ball hitting me or anxious about making the decision of whether or not to swing. And this anxiety was often wrapped up in fear.

Playing baseball wasn't the only area of my life where anxiety and fear were present, nor was it by any means the biggest. But what areas of your life do you experience anxiety or fear in?

I once heard a wise person say that anxiety reveals a great lack of trust. I believe this can be true of fear as well. If we are anxious or fearful, we don't have the kind of trust we ought to. On one level, while playing baseball, I didn't trust myself. I didn't trust my abilities to respond well in a given situation when the ball came in my territory. On another level, I didn't trust how my failures or mess-ups might be perceived in the eyes of others. What or who are you struggling to trust?

This is why we are blessed if we trust in the LORD. Lately, I've been exploring some of the deep-rooted anxiety in my life through counseling, and I'm learning a lot about myself that I believe will help me in my life, marriage, and ministry. How might rooting out things like fear and anxiety make a difference in your life?

The prophet Jeremiah tells us not to be afraid when heat comes. He tells us not to worry, to not be anxious when we feel like we're in a year of drought. There will yet be green grass and fruit to spare. Trust his words. But more importantly, trust God, through whom this message is being communicated. Because one of the greatest things we can establish in a committed relationship with God is trust, and the greatest blessing we can give to ourselves is rooting out things like anxiety and fear, as we stretch our roots deep alongside the stream of life that God wants us to drink from. That's easier to say than do, but I'm confident our trustworthy God can help to see us through.

Now go out and trust that this Tuesday will be terrific!

#terrificuesday #devoswithdonald

Tuesday, February 19, 2019

Terrific Tuesdays begin with drawing imaginary lines and dots.

“What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.”
-James 4:14b

Look at one of the walls in the room you're sitting in. I want you, in your mind, to draw an imaginary dot. Then, in your mind, I want you to draw a horizontal line from that dot which goes all the way around the room. You can put a dot on the far left of the horizontal line above if you wish to have a visual.

Now, look at that small dot in comparison to the rest of the line. That dot represents the span of your life in comparison to eternity.

Think of how comical our worrying in the midst of this little dot must seem to God! In the grand scheme of things, our life is so small in length, and yet we fret and concern ourselves with countless things. If I'm honest, the extent of my worry and anxiety in life are, at times, a bit embarrassing, and I'm ashamed that the peace of God, this fruit of the Holy Spirit, is not manifest in me to the extent I want it to be.

I now want you to imagine the small dot representing your life's problems, or the things you worry about most. I want you to put this dot in comparison with the long line, which I suggest allowing to represent either eternity or how big and capable God is to handle all these anxiety-inducing things. Take a moment to realize how small your problems seem when put next to God. Think about how fleeting your life is in comparison to eternity.

Prayer: God, mindful of how small my problems are in comparison to how big and capable you are, fill me with that peace of God, that fruit of your Holy Spirit, as I strive to make the most of the small dot of life you have graced me with. Help me to be faithful to live my small, yet important, life span well. Amen.

Now go out and make this Tuesday terrific!

#terrifictuesday #devoswithdonald

Tuesday, February 26, 2019

Terrific Tuesdays begin with new revelations.

After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. -Revelation 7:9

Last night, as I informed myself of all the latest happenings at the 2019 Special Session to General Conference, I was reminded of a book I read in seminary called “The New Shape of World Christianity” written by Mark Noll. So I pulled the book off my shelf and thumbed through it, hoping it could offer some new and needed revelation. This book was NOT written to speak directly into the situation of the UMC, but it was written to say that world Christianity has a new face, and this inevitably affects things, including how history plays out and how Christian beliefs and practices are expressed.

Mindful that the United Methodist Church is a global denomination, I invite reflection on the following insights from Noll’s book. I offer no commentary myself, only reflection. And I hope it can offer new and needed revelation for you:

“The most important thing to realize about the current situation of Christianity throughout the world is that things are not as they were...A few short decades ago, Christian believers were concentrated in the global north and west, but now a rapidly swelling majority lives in the global south and east” (19).

“The typical late 20th Christian was no longer a European man but a Latin American or African woman. The magnitude of recent change means that all believers, including those in the former Christian heartlands of Europe and North America, are faced with the prospect of reorientation. But the scale and pace of recent developments means that more than just history needs to be reoriented; the awareness of where North American and European believers now fit within that history requires reassessment as well” (21, 23).

“Translation, by strengthening the Christian presence in many new locations has, however, also weakened some bonds of cohesion in worldwide Christianity and pointed in the direction of religious chaos” (25).

Syncretism [the excessive intermingling of a culture’s non-Christian elements with the Christian message] has become a difficult charge to apply with precision. It is often a question of the beholder’s eye as well as what the beholder sees” (25).

“If syncretism is a danger when Christian concepts...are translated into a new culture, the translation process also says something powerful in and to the new culture. Translation implies that receiving cultures, with their languages, histories and assumptions, are worthy of God’s attention; they are valuable entities that the entrance of God’s word can change into something even better” (26).

“The new shape of world Christianity offers a mosaic of many, many varieties of local belief and practice...But the multiplicity goes far beyond what any one influence can explain, except the adaptability of the Christian faith itself” (27).

“Throughout the world, the end of Western imperial rule has opened new possibilities, created new inequalities, overcome some tribal rivalries, inflamed others and—in general—accelerated the markers of social change” (31).

“As much as the new shape of Christianity in the world affects general world history, much more does it influence matters of Christian belief and practice. For many in the West, such matters may have seemed mostly settled. Now, when the gospel is being appropriated by multiplying new populations—when it is being seen through new eyes—believers wherever they live have the opportunity to reconsider the priorities of doctrine” (33).

“The contrast between the West and the non-West is never between culture-free Christianity and culturally embedded Christianity, but between varieties of culturally embedded Christianity” (44).

Whatever happens today, let's commit to making this Tuesday terrific.

#terrifictuesday #devoswithdonald #GC2019

Tuesday, March 5, 2019

Terrific Tuesdays begin with a cup of private pi-e-tea.

“Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven.” -Matthew 6:1

Today, we get to practice our “pie-eating” with Mardi Gras/Fat Tuesday. I’m having pancakes for breakfast to celebrate! But tomorrow, many start to practice a bit of intentional “pi-ety.”

As we enter into the 40-day season of Lent with Ash Wednesday tomorrow, what might you consider giving up and fasting from in preparation for Easter? What are those things you can't seem to live without that might be worth severing ties from for a time?: Is it Coffee? Hot showers? Facebook? Dessert? Wearing a watch? Listening to music in the car? Watching TV? Caring too much about what other people think of you?

Or what might you consider taking up? Journaling? Writing encouraging letters? Intentional silence? Affirming others? Having a habitual quiet time? Serving others in some capacity?

Whatever it is, commit to it and give yourself grace when you stumble. And also, as our passage suggests, try not to broadcast it to the world, unless there’s a select few you want told for the sake of accountability. For there is great value in practicing “piety” in secret, unlike the Pharisees who Jesus was warning in our passage.

What is our reward for practicing piety? It’s not brownie points for heaven. It’s not merit in the eyes of God. It’s knowing God more and drawing closer to God in our personal relationship with the Creator of the universe, who formed us out of dust and can make beauty out of the ashes of our lives. That is our personal reward for practicing piety, or at least part of it, and I hope you’ll come to experience that reward in the days ahead.

Now go out and make this Fat Tuesday terrific!

#terrificuesday #devoswithdonald #mardigras

Tuesday, March 12, 2019

Terrific Tuesdays begin with unveiling mysteries.

“God reveals deep and hidden things; God knows what is in the darkness, and light dwells with God.” -Daniel 2:22

This verse has been a prayer of mine lately as I’ve been going to counseling each week: God, reveal those deep and hidden things that I don’t even know about, the things you wish to shine light on and bring me out of.

What are those areas in your life that are dark, difficult, or deep and hidden that you need God to shine light upon? Turns out the mystery in Daniel 2 (the dream that King Nebuchadnezzar had, which he refused to tell anyone about, yet demanded the wise men to both tell the dream and interpret it to him) was revealed to Daniel and his companions when they sought mercy from the God of heaven. If Daniel did not seek the mercy of God to determine this mystery, he, his companions, and all the wise men of Babylon would have been killed. But thankfully, on this dark and uncertain mystery, light was shone.

Prayer: Giver of wisdom, who shines light on and reveals all mysteries, grant that I may have your wisdom and power from on high so that I may discern and know that which is dark and hidden. In the name of your Son who gives light to all. Amen.

I find it interesting to connect this passage with Colossians 1:27 which talks about the mystery of Christ in us. What would it mean to approach this idea of Christ being a mystery with the Daniel 2:22 understanding that God can reveal deep and hidden things?

Prayer: God, give us wisdom and power to discern even this mystery, your Son. For just like the revealing of mysteries in the story of Daniel saved countless lives from being killed, so too can the unveiling of this mystery save countless lives. Over and above the deep and hidden mysteries of our world and ourselves, may we strive to know this mystery of Christ in us above all else.

Now go out and make this Tuesday terrific!

#terrificuesday #devoswithdonald

Tuesday, March 19, 2019

Terrific Tuesdays begin with looking in the right direction.

*“The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?
The LORD is the stronghold of my life, of whom shall I be afraid?” -Psalm 27:1*

The words of Lauren Daigle’s song, “Look Up Child,” came to mind for me this morning:
*Where are You now, when darkness seems to win?
Where are You now, when the world is crumbling?
Oh I, I hear You say, I hear You say,
Look up child. Look up child.*



After the horror of what happened on Friday at two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand, people from our communities rallied together in unity and support at the Jam-e-Masjid Islamic Center in Boonton, NJ. Holy words were spoken, prayers were given, speeches made, and a unity walk commenced. A throng of nearly 500 people participated in this gathering and walk organized by the Morris County Islamic Centers.

While many look down in sorrow, fear, and discouragement, I want to encourage you to look up. Look at this testimony of peace and unity of all backgrounds, cultures, and faiths. And look up to our God in the face of such horrific tragedies.

Psalm 27:1 contains two truths and two questions in response to those truths:
Truth #1: “The LORD is my light and my salvation” (27:1a).
Question #1 in response to this reality: Why fear?

Truth #2: “The LORD is the stronghold of my life” (27:1b).
Question #2 in response to this reality: Why fear?

When we realize who God is (our Light and our Stronghold) and really let that sink in, it casts out fear. The question many are asking after Friday’s mass shooting is, “Whom shall we fear?” Perhaps you have assured yourself of who God is. Perhaps, as the psalmist says at the end of this psalm, you are confident you “will see the goodness of the LORD” (27:13). But perhaps you are still waiting for the Light to dissipate the darkness, for your Salvation to save you, for your Stronghold to protect you. Perhaps you’re telling yourself, “Whom shall I fear?” but are getting more nervous as whatever “army” or thing rising up against you (27:4) that represents your difficulties draws closer and looms larger. You’re tempted to worry, fear, and look down or run in the other direction. And yet, the end of the psalm prompts you to “wait for the LORD,” to “be strong and take heart and wait for the LORD” (27:14).

I invite you to pray the following, filling the blank with whatever is most pertinent to your situation and life right now:

- God, though _____, my heart will not fear (27:3a).
- Though _____ even then will I be confident (27:3b).

Prayer: God, my Light and Stronghold, I wait upon you. Cast out fear while I wait, and in my waiting, would you keep me safe in your dwelling place. God, no matter what comes my way, help me to say, think, and believe with absolute confidence, “Whom shall I fear?” For I know you are with me. Amen.

No matter what the day brings, go out and make this Tuesday terrific!

#terrifictuesday #devoswithdonald #christchurch #newzealand

Tuesday, March 26, 2019

Terrific Tuesdays begin with being like the blue bird.

“[The LORD] drew me up from the desolate pit, out of the miry bog, and set my feet upon a rock, making my steps secure. He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God...”
-Psalm 40:2-3a

I don't know about you, but I have good days and bad days. Days where everything seems to be going right, and days where I can't seem to get out of the bad funk I'm in. Days when I'm able to maintain a good and positive internal state, and days when a negative mentality or critique of self plagues my day and productivity. Days when the little angel on my right shoulder wins, and days when the little devil on my left shoulder gets too much mic time.

I have a friend who told me that spring is the one time of year when he finds himself most depressed. As everything is budding and showing signs of new life, he is reminded of particular things he does not have that he wishes he did.

This friend of mine knows himself and what he needs well. Thus, when he feels this depression coming on, which seems to be an annual occurrence, he reaches out to a couple individuals who talk with him. This year, he said his depression was lifted within hours after doing that. But oftentimes, the things that weigh us down are not so easily lifted, and we often don't know what it is that can lift us out of our funk. Oftentimes the depression we feel or the negative train we let run its course isn't just a one day endeavor we have to overcome.



As I was washing my breakfast dishes yesterday morning, I looked out the window to find a blue jay hopping around...and another...and then another...and even another. “Give Me Jesus” by Jeremy Camp had just finished playing in the background, and then I kind of just hung in the silence over the kitchen sink, staring at the bluebirds as they went about their morning adventure.

About five minutes later, as I continued to get ready for the day ahead, the song “Be Like the Bluebird” from the musical “Anything Goes” came to mind, so I kindly asked Alexa to play it. It’s a song that Moonface Martin, one of the main characters, would sing when he was feeling blue. Moonface sings this to a very blue Billy Crocker as they sit behind bars in the brig of the ship. Some of the words are as follows:

*When your instinct tells you that disaster is approaching you faster and faster.
Then be like the bluebird and sing, "Tweet, tweet. Tra-la, tra-la, tra-la."
When you know you're headed for the jailer, don't allow the old face to look paler.
But be like the bluebird and sing, "Tweet, tweet. Tra-la, tra-la, tra-la."*

What lesson can you take from the bluebird? Is Moonface’s suggestion to combat sadness one that works for you? Or does reaching out and talking to others, like my friend did, work for you? Is there something entirely different that works for you? Or is it something you still need to discover for yourself?

I’m a fairly young guy and, God-willing, have a lot more life to live. But unlike my friend or Moonface Martin, I haven’t learned what things or actions best help to lift me out of the desolate pit or the miry bog I sometimes find myself in. But as Psalm 40 speaks to, I know the One who is ultimately able to lift me out of whatever funk I find myself in: the LORD. I desire my feet to be set upon a rock by God and my steps to be made secure daily, so I don’t go down any less desired path. I know that my God will be faithful to put a new song in my mouth, helping me to sing like the bluebird even if I feel blue. And I believe our God will be faithful to do it for you as well.

“Tra-la, tra-la, tra-la.”

Now go out and make this Tuesday terrific!

#terrifictuesday #devoswithdonald #belikethebluebird

Tuesday, April 2, 2019

Terrific Tuesdays begin with love, not knowledge.

“Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. ² Anyone who claims to know something does not yet have the necessary knowledge; ³ but anyone who loves God is known by God.” -1 Cor. 8:1c-3

When I read these verses, I want to shout them aloud from the rooftop to every person going to seminary and studying to become a pastor. I want to place them above students’ bed frames and on their doors. But why not speak this verse to EVERYONE going to ANY school? It is a good reminder that students need not forget. But then, looking at the passage again, I find other meaning in it, and I find it to have relevance for all of us, not just students.

It seems that knowing God puffs us up, while loving God builds us up. A little over a month after the 2019 Special Session to General Conference, the United Methodist Church still stands more divided than ever before, with individuals and groups claiming right knowledge over wrong knowledge on both sides of the fence of one of the biggest issues of our day: homosexuality. This is not an April Fools joke, and many have been torn down, not built up, on both sides.

But how would our lives and conversations change if we took v. 2 to heart—that we should not claim to know anything? Would claiming that we don’t have any capital in the argument cause us to hear others better or differently? Would it cause us to share more stories and less opinions? Paul is speaking to an argument that was going on in the Corinthian church about food sacrificed to idols, but I think this passage is very applicable to us today, especially in a world filled with an untold amount of strong and differing opinions.

Verse 3 seems to imply that loving another allows them to enter into our world and know us. It says that anyone who loves God is known by God. Putting theology and who’s right aside in any argument, if someone holds a conservative or liberal viewpoint, but loves God, they are known by God. If someone who identifies as straight or gay loves God, they are known by God. If someone who is not a self-professing Christian even, but loves God, does that then mean they are known by God too? If ANYONE loves God, they are known by God.

Our passage also says “anyone” in the verse before. ANYONE who claims to know something... Yes, I’m talking about you. Yes, you. No, you think I’m only talking about them, but I’m talking about you too. If ANY of us are claiming to know something; if we think we have a leg up in any conversation or regarding any opinion, we do not yet know as we ought to know.

I find it interesting that in the gospel of Matthew, Jesus says, “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven.” Many who claim to KNOW Christ or to have done deeds in the name of Christ will be told, “I never KNEW you; go away from me, you evildoers.” (Matthew 7:21-23). Jesus says to people who call him by name, “I never knew you.” Perhaps we are doing good, but do we have love in our hearts? If we don’t, it’s a recipe for disaster and could even have eternal repercussions.

Is it possible to know God and yet still miss the mark by leaps and bounds? More important than knowing God, we must choose to love God, and build others up by showcasing not our knowledge and opinions, but our love.

Even if you feel like you had a mediocre Monday, go out and make this Tuesday terrific!

#terrifictuesday #devoswithdonald

Tuesday, April 9, 2019

Terrific Tuesdays begin with unexpected deliveries.

And why are we putting ourselves in danger every hour? I die every day!...If with merely human hopes I fought with wild animals at Ephesus, what would I have gained by it? If the dead are not raised, 'Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.' -1 Corinthians 15:30-31a, 32

My wife was away at a conference this past week. Thus, on a couple nights, I endeavored to find something to do. And because being in the community more and in the church office less is a good thing to do as a pastor, I decided to go to a coffee shop to hang out and do some work. Unfortunately, the coffee shop was closed, so I went to another one. But then that one was closed too, so my options were running thin. I took several more strides uphill and landed at a place called Scoop House. Who needs a vanilla chai when you can have vanilla ice cream?! Or mint chocolate chip in my case.

I met a student behind the counter who worked there, whom I had several small side conversations with after our initial one. Turns out this guy not only serves up delicious ice cream, but he delivers. That's right, there's a mini freezer-like thing he puts in the company owned car he drives, plugs into the cigarette lighter, and voilà! The ice cream stays cold and he makes ice cream deliveries. Although, instead of saying, "Papa John's, hot and fresh!" like I did when I delivered pizza in the past, he probably says, "Scoops, cold and delicious!"

So, here's the scoop. It turns out pizza places aren't the only ones that deliver. Ice cream places do too. And by the way, in case you didn't know, it turns out that Jesus also delivers.

In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul has just taken a lot of time to say that "if Christ has not been raised," there's a whole lot of negative consequences that follow: our faith is futile, we are still in our sins, those who die in the Lord perish, and there is no point in risking our lives." It seems Paul was risking his life for Christ often, putting himself in danger with every passing hour. He was even fighting off wild animals at one point in Ephesus. Yeah, I'm sure you didn't catch that one the first time you read 1 Corinthians 15! Daredevil, lunatic, sacrificial disciple, call him whatever you want, but Paul experienced some unexpected deliveries. The first was when God delivered him from his figurative and then literal blindness on the road to Damascus. The later deliveries were God's faithfulness to deliver him daily from troubles as he stepped out in faith and obedience wherever the Lord led him.

What do you need deliverance from today? We still have a little way to go in our Lenten journey, but as we go through Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, and Good Friday, will God deliver? I'll let you go to your local church to find out as you let the story of Christ, our Deliverer, unfold.

Now go out and make this Tuesday terrific! Perhaps add pizza or ice cream to your diet to help.

#terrificuesday #devoswithdonald #scoophouse #papajohns

Tuesday, April 16, 2019

Terrific Tuesdays begin with humility.

“With him (Titus), we (Paul and others) are sending the brother who is famous among all the churches for his proclaiming the good news.” -2 Corinthians 8:18

Paul is giving Titus another brother to go with him as the good news is proclaimed throughout the land, but it is interesting to note that this famous preacher among churches goes unnamed. And actually, we never find out who he is. Would we be willing to be admired by others, yet go unnamed as we do God’s work?

By not naming this famous preacher, it seems to put the focus on God more than the person. I wonder if this famous brother would have been in any way upset when he found out his name was not being given. Or I wonder if he himself had requested not to be named as he went about his ministry.

I’m reminded of a song by Francesca Battistelli called “He Knows My Name.” Some of the lyrics are as follows:

*I don’t need my name in lights,
I’m famous in my Father’s eyes.
Make no mistake, He knows my name.*

We don’t know the man’s name, but God does. And is not that what’s most important?

This past Sunday, we shouted loud hosannas to a King who came in an unexpected way, humbly and unassuming. This is a Jesus who was also, as recorded in the first half of the gospel of Mark, constantly telling those who cried out his famous title of Messiah to hush and not tell anyone who he was, even as he was making himself more famous by all the preaching/teaching and healing he was doing.

How might you, like the famous yet unnamed preacher in our passage, and like Jesus, humble yourself, not drawing as much attention to yourself? It is tempting to want to be acknowledged, praised, and lifted up for all the good things we do, but how might we change that and avoid giving into this temptation? How might we, as the song above speaks to, be content in knowing that we don’t need our name in lights, because we’re already famous in God’s eyes?

May you realize this day that you need not live for applause, for you are already so adored as a beloved child of God. And you need not validate your self-worth by what you do or by what others think or know about you, for what God thinks and knows is immeasurably more important.

Now go out and make this Tuesday terrific!

#terrificuesday #devoswithdonald

Tuesday, April 23, 2019

Terrific Tuesdays begin with peace, not fear.

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." - John 20:19

What do you fear most? Is it an unwelcome diagnosis? Is it death? Is it guns? Is it people who perpetuate hate crimes? What do you fear most? A few days after what hardly seemed like a "Good" Friday, the disciples likely feared death. Jesus, whom they had followed faithfully for three years, had been killed brutally and unjustly. And now, the disciples were hiding behind locked doors, likely believing they would be next. They were told by Mary Magdalene that Jesus had been raised from the dead. But apparently, that was not enough to free them from fear.

Two days ago, countless churches shouted with exclamation, "Christ is risen! Alleluia!" But shortly after, upon learning of the bombings in Sri Lanka, many found themselves saying, "My God, my God, why does it still feel like you've forsaken us?" With darkness enveloping as the death toll climbed to 290, the light and glory of the resurrection may have seemed much dimmer, especially for those whose alleluias were met with loud explosions and piercing screams.

Whether the horror and injustice happens at a church in Sri Lanka, a mosque in New Zealand, a synagogue in Pittsburgh, a hotel in Las Vegas, a night club in Orlando, or a school in our neighborhood, fear often follows. And although this may be a natural and understandable initial response, we cannot remain in our fear.

After Jesus spoke peace in the midst of the disciples' fears, he would call them to go and be sent, equipping them with the power of the Holy Spirit. Wherever God wants to take us as individuals and wherever God wants to take us as a universal church, the fear of others, the fear of death, the fear of anything other than God will cripple us and keep us from going where Christ wants us to go. We are not called to be paralyzed by our fears, but are called to be free from them. And we are called to view every fear faced in light of the resurrection. My prayer for you is Zach William's prayer (slightly adapted) in his song "Fear Is a Liar": *"May God's fire fall and cast out all your fears. May God's fire fall until God's love is all you feel."*

When disaster strikes and the darkness around us seems so thick we can hardly see any trace of light or hope of resurrection, our society will tell us to fear. But what will you tell yourself and others? Will you be found behind locked doors or outside wherever Christ sends you? May you experience resurrection life and power in the 50 days of Easter leading up to Pentecost, for no matter what may be going on in your life or the world around you, Christ is risen, indeed.

Now go out and make this Tuesday terrific!

#terrificuesday #devoswithdonald #srilanka #peace

Tuesday, April 30, 2019

Terrific Tuesdays begin with love.

"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another." - John 13:34

This Thursday, people all around the country will be gathering for the National Day of Prayer. This year's theme is "Love One Another," yet I'm mindful that we don't often live this commandment out well. I'm reminded of the movie "Pocahontas" in which people with seemingly irreconcilable differences were at war with one another. Each side was calling the other savages and assuming only the worst of them. But when the English stopped pointing their guns and the Native Americans stopped pointing their arrows, when fear was laid aside and eyes were opened, they were able to pause long enough to see the potential for love between people of difference, people who may not speak the same language or have the same skin color, but people who had something to offer the other.

This past week, the judicial council of the United Methodist Church met as a follow-up to the decisions made at the 2019 General Conference. While the church's top legislative court okayed parts of the traditional plan, which would tighten and expand certain restrictions and language in our Book of Discipline concerning human sexuality, there were seven of the plan's petitions that proved to be unconstitutional and will be null and void. While most things held constitutional will take effect in January of 2020, the disaffiliation petition, which gives churches the option to withdraw from the UMC as a whole, goes into effect immediately. All this legislation I am not completely clear on and need to look into more, but more information can be found at the following link: <https://www.umnews.org/en/news/court-oks-part-of-traditional-plan-exit-plan>

There have been a lot of figurative weapons raised and pointed on both sides of this division. And I'm afraid this weapon raising and pointing may still continue long after what has been determined. I'm afraid that, unlike the story of Pocahontas, differences may not be able to be reconciled, and two groups that differ will part ways. But do we believe the side we disagree with, the side that differs from us, has something to offer us?

When we engage with one another in the midst of differences, we have two options to take in our conversations: we can debate or we can dialogue. In the days ahead, whatever the future holds, I encourage you to practice loving dialogue with one another. Debate closes down conversation and doesn't get very far. Dialogue opens up the door so that all may be heard, respected, and most of all, loved. I feel like what I've said is not sufficient, but I invite you to pray and I invite you to love, for that is what Jesus commands us and models for us.

Now go out and make this Tuesday terrific!

#terrificuesday #devoswithdonald #nationaldayofprayer #loveoneanother

Tuesday, May 14, 2019



Terrific Tuesdays begin with squeezing a stress ball.

Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!" Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. -Matthew 14:29b-31a

Our church is currently going through a sermon series called "Just Keep Breathing," and this Sunday I was going to use a stress ball for the children's sermon. Only problem was, in the midst of a small bout with food poisoning I was experiencing the night before and morning of, I couldn't find it. Talk about stressful! But as I prepared to hit the hay and was doing my nightly stretching yesterday, I found a small object lying on the floor in the guest bedroom. It was the stress ball! And now all the stress from Sunday could finally be relieved, right?

When you find yourself stressed out, what do you find yourself reaching for and holding onto? For some, it's a stress ball, for others it's a person. For many, it could even be a sin, or something entirely different. As Peter was walking on the water toward Jesus, he noticed some things that unsettled him. The wind was strong and the distance to Jesus probably longer than he anticipated. We don't know where Peter's arms went as he started sinking, but I imagine as he shouted, "Lord, save me!" his arms went outward, reaching toward the one who could save him, toward the one who could alleviate his stress and keep him from sinking.

What is it that represents the wind in your life? What are the things that cause you to fear as you're making your way toward Jesus? What is it that is tempting to blow you over or sink you? Is it a financial difficulty? Is it a physical or mental health issue? Is it what's going on in our world? And whatever it is, do you recognize Jesus as being the one who can save you?

My stress ball reminds me of a song I learned when I was in Sunday School. It was a song that repeated, "He's got the whole world in His hands" over and over. It also said, "He's got you and me brother/sister in His hands." Do you believe you're in God's hands? And perhaps more important than what you're holding onto is what's holding onto you. For Jesus, like he was with Peter, is holding onto you. And Jesus will never let go, no matter how stressful things get, no matter how far you are from him. Jesus will be reaching out and holding onto you.

Now go out and make this Tuesday terrific!

#terrifictuesday #devoswithdonald

Tuesday, May 21, 2019

Terrific Tuesdays begin with putting on clothes.

As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience...Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. – Colossians 3:13 & 15

The past few days, I've been down in Wildwood, NJ with clergy and laity from over 500 churches across the Greater New Jersey Annual Conference. People have been commissioned and ordained, praise and worship has filled the room, hearts have been strangely warmed, old friends have been reunited, saints have been remembered, individuals have been voted in as delegates, messages have been preached, and legislation has been discussed.

According to John Wesley, holy conferencing (essentially, doing the business of the church), was included as one of the outlets he believed we could experience God's grace through. And experiencing God's grace is exactly what we are trying to do here in Wildwood. Not only can we experience God's grace through the practice of disciplines such as prayer, Scripture reading, and fasting, but we can experience God's grace through the practice of holy conferencing. When we come together and do the sometimes dreaded and not so sexy "business" of the church, God is present even there. And I think Colossians 3 has a lot to say about how we ought to conduct ourselves in the contexts we find ourselves in, whether they be at home, school, church, or in an annual conference session.

What are you wearing right now? What did you put on this morning? The writer of Colossians encourages us to clothe ourselves with kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Are these things that you frequently pull out of your wardrobe, or do you often leave them hanging up in your closet? Or have you sometimes tried these things on and then put them back in, thinking something else might prove to be a better look for you?

In the midst of a divisive time in our denomination when tensions are high and people are wondering what the future will hold, we are called not to strip ourselves of these important things, but to let them characterize us all the more, to be the clothing items that are displayed brightest and most clearly from the outside. And more than anything, we're called to clothe ourselves with love, for it is love that binds all the other things in perfect harmony.

I leave you with some guidelines for holy conferencing from the UMC's General Board of Discipleship. May they help you put on the right kind of clothes every time you approach your wardrobe, no matter what your day has in store. And may you, through your dialogue with others, find yourself experiencing the grace of God even more:

- Every person is a child of God. Always speak respectfully. One can disagree without being disagreeable.
- Listen patiently before formulating responses.
- Strive to understand the experience out of which others have arrived at their views.
- Be careful in how you express personal offense at differing opinions. Otherwise dialogue may be inhibited.
- Avoid using inflammatory words, derogatory names, or an excited and angry voice.

- Avoid making generalizations about individuals and groups. Make your point with specific evidence and examples.

Now go out and make this Tuesday terrific! And be sure to put on some clothes!

#terrifictuesday #devoswithdonald #AC2019

Tuesday, June 11, 2019

Terrific Tuesdays begin with an untold amount of emails in your inbox.

Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?...And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life?

– Matthew 6:25 & 27

As I was ending the last few hours of my last full day of vacation yesterday, I found myself starting to think about all the unopened emails I would have waiting for me when I checked my work email this morning for the first time in two weeks. And this, no doubt, was a cause of anxiety, something which even hindered me from sleeping as well as I could have last night. Even coming onto Facebook this morning to post this is a little anxiety-inducing, knowing that I may have a daunting number of notifications, tags, and such that have yet to be looked at from the past two weeks. Have you felt this way before? Unable to fully rest in and enjoy a moment or a day of rest, Sabbath, or vacation because you were too consumed with what was coming tomorrow, with what awaited you on the other side of the horizon as you went to bed?

Although Jesus told his disciples not to worry and wants to tell each of us every day not to worry, too often we give way to anxiety. In this well-known passage, Jesus is talking about not being anxious over what we will eat, drink, or wear. Perhaps you experience a bit of anxiety in these areas, which speak to worry over daily needs of provision. But I imagine there are even more anxiety-inducing realities than these for the average person living in the 21st century. What is it for you? What is it that gets your stress levels high and keeps you up at night?

Over the past two weeks, whether it was during our time in CA with my wife's family for her brother's high school graduation, or whether it was staying with a friend of my wife's in MA leading up to a wedding of a close friend of hers, I've been delving a lot into Proverbs lately. Proverbs talks a great deal about keeping wisdom, insight, and understanding close by. It encourages us to grace our steps and guide our ways with understanding and to seek wisdom above all else, that we might understand the fear of God and find knowledge of God through it.

There is no wisdom in anxiety. There is no value being added to our lives by worry. We can tell ourselves this, and even read this passage over and over again, yet still struggle. Perhaps that's why Jesus finishes by saying, "Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today" (Matthew 6:34). This is an ongoing battle, a daily challenge. Mindful of this daily and continuous struggle, what will you choose to keep close by today? Anxiety or wisdom? Your worries or God? What about tomorrow? Whatever each day brings, may you find yourself taking Jesus' wisdom to heart and keeping it close by.

Now go out and make this Tuesday terrific!

#terrificuesday #devoswithdonald

Tuesday, June 18, 2019

Terrific Tuesdays begin with playing with fire.

They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. – Acts 2:3-4 (NIV)



Two hours north of Bakersfield, at Sequoia National Park, lies a forest of giants. Once upon a time, park rangers of this national treasure tried to put a stop to any and all fires that raged, which often occurred naturally every 5-15 years due to lightning. However, over the years, they realized the consequence of this well-intended preventative measure. One article in the spring, 2019 visitors guide reads, “Fire suppression blocked important natural processes, which led to big problems.” And as a result of fires being suppressed, sequoias weren’t reproducing, for “fires create the conditions that sequoias need to regenerate.”

We’re told the disciples in Acts 2 saw what seemed to be tongues of fire coming toward them. But how did they react? We aren’t told. Did they see the tongues of fire and go, “Wow! I bet this is from God and God’s about to do something amazing with these tongues of fire. Bring it on!” Or did they say, “What the heck is that?! A tongue? On fire!” Perhaps they try to step back but then it comes all the closer. “What is it doing! It’s coming straight for me!” We don’t know how the disciples reacted. But we do know the end result: tongues of fire came and rested on each of them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

What fires are going on around you or coming toward you in your life that you might be tempted to run away from or put out, but are actually the means through which new life, growth, and empowerment will come? What fires have you been trying to put a stop to, and how might God be wanting to use that fire in a positive way?

The article in the visitor’s guide says that for over forty years, people at Sequoia National Park studied fire and its effects on the land. To protect human safety and benefit giant sequoia trees, they now work with fire to restore the benefits it brings. Because “excluding this natural agent of change only hurts what they are trying to protect.” How might you work with fire to realize the benefit it can bring? I believe God wants to bring fire into your life, refining fire to grow you into the person God is calling you to be. Will you shy away from it and try to put it out? Or will you receive it and allow God’s work to take form in your life?

Now go out and make this Tuesday terrific!

#terrifictuesday #devoswithdonald

Tuesday, June 25, 2019

Terrific Tuesdays begin with being rescued.

Save me, O God, for the waters have come up to my neck. I sink in deep mire, where there is no foothold; I have come into deep waters, and the flood sweeps over me. I am weary with my crying; my throat is parched. My eyes grow dim with waiting for my God. -Psalm 69:1-3



What do you need rescuing from today? Perhaps it's more than bad breath or a stubborn cowlick. Perhaps it's loneliness, worry, sin, or something else that you're dealing with; something you've been waiting on God now for a while. And perhaps you've tried everything imaginable to combat this difficulty, but are baffled every time at your failed attempts to draw yourself out of the deep mire you're in and the flood that has swept over you.

Our theme for Vacation Bible School this year is "Shipwrecked: Jesus Rescues." We're teaching children that when we are lonely, when we worry, when we struggle, when we do wrong, and when we feel powerless, Jesus rescues. What do you need to be rescued from today? Feelings of inadequacy? An addiction? Anxiety? The fear of failure? Pride? A financial difficulty? Health problems? A broken heart? Timidity? Literal floodwaters?

Last week, I read a story of a man named Boron in Southampton, NJ who lost his home to the recent floodwaters caused by the excessive rain. And, by the way, he did not have flood insurance. Boron says everything he worked for since he was 14 years old is now gone, and he doesn't know what he's going to do next. Boron needs rescuing from his worry, fear, and financial difficulty. What about you? And who will come to your rescue? There's a praise and worship song I used to sing in my youth group called "Rescue" by Desperation Band. The lyrics of the chorus are as follows: "I need you Jesus, to come to my rescue. Where else can I go? There's no other name by which I am saved. Capture me with grace. I will follow you."

Even if we lack the insurance needed to cover us, even if Flo or a funny gecko can't get us the help we need, or even if we find ourselves in deep waters with hardly any strength to keep us afloat, Jesus rescues; Jesus saves. He is the lifesaver we can grab onto, the never-ending circle of love that surrounds us, and the strong Deliverer who pulls us aboard. Jesus is the reason we have coverage, courage, and confidence even after the worst of shipwrecks. Jesus is the best insurance policy we can ever have, and this one doesn't even come with a deductible or premium. It may involve sacrifice along the way, but it simply starts with a willingness to grab onto the lifesaver, jump into the boat, and follow Christ wherever He leads. Will you let Jesus rescue you?

Now go out and make this Tuesday terrific!

#terrificuesday #devoswithdonald #shipwreckedVBS

Tuesday, July 2, 2019 (revised July 27, 2019)

Terrific Tuesdays begin with poetry.

Fireflies, fireflies, dancing in the night.
Fireflies, fireflies, burning oh so bright.

Elusive, yet beautiful, these lightning bugs are.
Tiny, yet radiant, inspiring from afar.
Ten here, twenty there, fireflies everywhere.
Holy light, shining bright, sparking times of prayer.

High as the tops of trees.
Low as the blades of grass.
More pulsating than the crashing waves,
More satisfying than our ceaseless craves.

This summer phenomenon, who can explain?
In the dead of winter, why won't they stay?
Luminaries against a darkening landscape;
Endurance in the face of a sun long gone.

I always wanted to be a bird that flies,
But what about a bug that silently cries:
Hope in the midst of despair;
Faith in the midst of doubt.

Creatures I actually like.
Friends that do not bite.
Potential realized when darkness dawns;
Presence revealed amidst sleeping fawns.

Noiseless, yet breathtaking, can't you all hear?
Joyous, yet baffling, what do you see?
Weightless weight lifters from which lightning strikes.
Peacemakers, life givers in the hardest of times.

Fireflies, fireflies, speaking in the night.
Fireflies, fireflies, come and be my light.

Now go out and make this Tuesday terrific!

#terrifictuesday #devoswithdonald

Tuesday, July 9, 2019

Terrific Tuesdays begin with home invasions.

The LORD God appointed a bush, and made it come up over Jonah, to give shade over his head, to save him from his discomfort; so Jonah was very happy about the bush. But when dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the bush, so that it withered.

-Jonah 4:6-7

Many think my wife and I live in the boonies. The parsonage we live in is tucked away in the woods behind one of the churches I serve. Our neighbors in the cemetery behind us are pretty quiet, and the foxes and deer don't make too much of a fuss either. But living in a place like this inevitably means encountering things that fly, crawl, or spin webs from time to time. And most recently, I feel as though God has appointed creatures that crawl on all 100s to teach me something.

I never saw millipedes inside the house during my first summer working here. But this summer, for some reason, they've decided to make an appearance. Late at night they make their way into the church office, which is in our home's basement. And from what I can see, they haven't really appeared anywhere else. I wish I could say I was kind to God's creatures and gently carried each one outside to safety. But when you come down first thing in the morning and you've got five here, five there, and millipedes showing up everywhere even after you remove the ones in sight, you can't help but go on a killing rampage. If the sixth commandment encompasses millipedes, pray for me, because I'm in deep water.

But I soon learned that if I didn't do anything to the millipedes, they would pretty much dissipate during the majority of the day. It was mainly at the beginning and end of the day that they would appear. Jonah was a grumpy guy when the worm God appointed came into his life, and perhaps I was too when these small creatures seemed to be invading my comfort zone. But God had a lesson to teach me through these creatures, a lesson too long to detail in a devotional like this. What might God be trying to communicate to you through the things that are coming into and out of your life? What in your life has God appointed to either provide for you or teach you a lesson?

When God appointed a bush to provide shade for Jonah, he was very happy. When God appointed a worm to take away the bush, Jonah was very angry, and he did not learn the lesson God was trying to communicate to him. Perhaps God has appointed creatures or people in your life to provide for you in a certain way or to disrupt your comfort zone in some way. What is it that God might be trying to teach you? Whether it's through millipedes, spiders, plants, pets, or people, I pray that your eyes and ears might be opened to what God is trying to show you and speak to you today.

Now go out and make this Tuesday terrific!

#terrificuesday #devoswithdonald

Tuesday, July 16, 2019

Terrific Tuesdays begin with things falling from the sky.

But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about those who have died, so that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. -1 Thessalonians 3:13

As I was walking our dog yesterday, I encountered a peculiar sight in the side corner of our yard: Two balloons, one mostly deflated and one still filled with most of its helium. Written on the more inflated balloon was, "Love you and miss you," followed by a name.

How far did this balloon fly before it landed? And what are the odds that this balloon would fall in our yard, especially in the midst of all the tall trees around the house? I later found myself looking up the name on Google to see if I could find the name in an obituary, but I was unable to discover anything conclusive. Nonetheless, I now had an additional family to pray for this week that was clearly missing someone they loved. Perhaps the person written on the balloon had recently died, or perhaps it was the anniversary of a death that happened long before.

Death will happen, sometimes expected, sometimes unexpected. And missing our loved ones will certainly be a part of that grieving process. This verse is not saying that we shouldn't grieve. It's saying our grief should not be devoid of hope. And the verses following give reason for why we should not be devoid of hope. It is because of Christ's death and resurrection (3:14), and because one day we will be caught up in the clouds with them and be with the Lord forever (3:17). I actually hope that you cry freely and liberally when you say goodbye to a close family member or friend. I hope that you even allow those tears to come when the difficult emotions arise months, years, or even decades after the loss. I want you to cry, but I just don't want your tears to be devoid of hope.

What do you need to fall from heaven today? Is it strength? Comfort? Provision? Healing? The forecast is not cloudy with a chance of meatballs as Flint Lockwood would have us believe. The sky is not falling as Chicken Little would like to convince us of. But what from God's hand might be able to land in your yard and how might what lands change the way you live and pray this day?

This week, I invite you to pray for the sorrowful, for the lonely, and all others who cry. I just a led a funeral last week, and I know of two gatherings happening today for loved ones of people I'm connected with. And so, to conclude, I offer some of my favorite words that often make their way into a funeral service: "May God grant us grace that in pain we may find comfort, in sorrow hope, and in death resurrection." May the God of heaven rain down what you need this day and rain down what those you pray for need.

Now go out and make this Tuesday terrific!

#terrificuesday #devoswithdonald

Tuesday, July 23, 2019

Terrific Tuesdays begin with prayer.

First of all, then, I urge that supplication, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for everyone. -1 Timothy 2:1



In the book of 1 Timothy, the writer is giving Timothy, a young minister, instructions which will help him flourish in life and ministry. Three verses earlier it says, “I am giving you these instructions, Timothy...so that by following them you may fight the good fight” (1 Timothy 1:18). He wanted to pass along all he thought Timothy would need to succeed. What instructions do you need to receive and enact upon today in order to flourish?

Now, although there are some instructions contained within this chapter that would be rejected and looked upon unfavorably by many today, there are others which still ring true, which have great meaning for our life and ministries if we take them to heart, one of which I’d say is above. What was the first instruction given to Timothy? Ahead of the rest, what was foremost? What was of greatest importance? To pray. “First of all,” it was an urge to pray. If we are to fight the good fight, the fight begins in prayer. Not in rhetoric or learnings or persuasion or good deeds, but in prayer. Perhaps this is because the writer of 1 Timothy, a seasoned veteran in ministry, recognizes that without prayer, this young minister will go nowhere.

Which brings me to my new friend Manny, who’s always praying, who was sitting on one of our steps outside yesterday when I took the above close-up of him. National Geographic says “the praying mantis is named for its prominent front legs, which are bent and held together at an angle that suggests the posture of prayer.” But even with a scientific name like *mantis religiosa*, these pious looking creatures are not as quiet and unassuming as you think. A peaceable posture of prayer though they may take, these insects are predators equipped with features that make them quite a threat to other insects. Not to say they aren’t preyed on by others, but there is a striking air about these thin green contemplators.

John Wesley once said, “God does nothing but by prayer, and everything with it.” Perhaps this is why many types of prayers are listed, and why prayers are urged to be given for everyone; because there is so much value and power in prayer. In what seems to be quiet and unassuming exists an arsenal of sorts just waiting to be unleashed, stronger than any weapon any country could imagine or conjure up, and this weapon actually being for good.

Although the passage doesn’t give a mandate saying, “You must pray,” mindful of the great urging given, how might you pray this day so you can flourish and keep fighting the good fight?

Now go out and make this Tuesday terrific!

#terrificuesday #devoswithdonald

Tuesday, July 30, 2019

Terrific Tuesdays begin with undeserved anointing.

Then you shall bring Aaron and his sons to the entrance of the tent of meeting, and shall wash them with water, and put on Aaron the sacred vestments, and you shall anoint him and consecrate him, so that he may serve me as priest. -Exodus 40:12-13

Who is Aaron? Brother of Moses, yes. Mouthpiece of Moses to Pharaoh who helped to deliver the Israelites out of Egypt, yes. First of Israel's high priests, yes. But what about Aaron the leader who committed a terrible sin? Aaron who led God's people astray? What about Aaron the failure? Perhaps you couldn't have known this flawed character from simply reading these few verses of his anointing into the priesthood, but this minister of the Lord had some pretty strong marks against him if you look at his résumé.

Eight chapters earlier, In Exodus 32, we have the incident of the golden calf. Moses, the primary leader of Israel, has been up on Mount Sinai where he would receive God's commandments. Since the Israelites are getting antsy waiting for his return, they turn to Aaron and ask him to make gods who will go before them. Aaron, without objection, leads them into sin, inviting them to bring all their gold jewelry to him. He decides to form a golden calf out of all the gold, proclaiming to the people that this graven image is now what Israel will worship. He then proceeds to build an altar before the golden calf upon which people can make sacrifices, during a festival which he would be initiating the next day.

And yet, this leader who led God's people into a terrible sin, this flawed individual who failed in a big way, is the very person whom God allowed to be the first in a long line of priests. Not all pastors and priests descend from the tribe of Levi, like Aaron, but it is encouraging to know that the first of those who functioned as mediators between God and the people was a failure in many respects. Perhaps it goes to show that even our worst sins and failures do not prevent us from receiving God's grace and being used for God's purposes.

In spite of Aaron's big failing in Exodus 32, Aaron, along with his sons, were cleansed with water, given the symbols of authority for the work of a priest, consecrated, and made holy. Perhaps God has not called you to be a priest or pastor. But I know that God has called you to be a minister wherever you find yourself, shining Christ to others through your words and actions. Do you feel worthy to be an ambassador for Christ? Do you feel like God can use a person like you in the midst of any sins of your past, character flaws, or failings in your life? Friends, each of you are part of the priesthood of believers and God wants, like God did with Aaron, to wash you, clothe you, anoint you, and consecrate you this day for God's purposes. Even if you don't think of yourself as worthy or capable, God wants to use you. And what a gracious God we serve, that God would call us in spite of our many flaws and failings!

Now go out and make this Tuesday terrific!

#terrificuesday #devoswithdonald

Tuesday, August 13, 2019

Terrific Tuesdays begin with masterfully made creations.

For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago. -Ephesians 2:10 (NLT)

In 2009, as a senior in high school, I went to an event with my youth group called Acquire the Fire, sponsored through Teen Mania Ministries. It was there that a fire was lit within me and I first felt a nudge by the Holy Spirit to go on a two-month mission trip to Australia in the summer of 2010, a trip during which God would move in some mighty, powerful, and prophetic ways. Both myself and my good friend Justin McKeown would be going, and our first fundraising effort among many was to buy 1000 wristbands that we would sell for \$1 each. What did the wristbands say?: Australia 2010 - Ephesians 2:10. This would be our theme verse as we raised about \$9000 together (\$4500 each) over the course of 9 months to go on this trip.

Ten years later, while serving at a United Methodist middle school camp at Pinelands Center, this verse showed up again. It was our key verse last week with the theme "Created to Create." From Monday afternoon through Saturday morning, I had the privilege of serving 6th-8th graders as a cabin leader/camp counselor for GNJ's Next Generation Ministries. Each of the children and youth I interacted with are masterpieces, created by God to do good things in the world. Each of them have been uniquely gifted and God desires them to plant the seeds of their gifts into good soil, so those seeds can multiply and spread in impact.

We often talk a lot about God loving us and God creating us in God's image. But do we realize we are God's masterpieces? Not only were we created by God, but God considers us to be masterpieces. Dictionaries define masterpiece as a work done with extraordinary skill; an incredible artistic achievement. A masterpiece is often deemed an artist's greatest piece of work, which means we are God's greatest pieces of artwork, beautiful and amazing in God's sight. When God looks at us, God sees beautiful works of art that fill God with great pride and joy. What a travesty when we don't view ourselves as the beautiful people we were created as.

Also, did you know there are good things God desires you to do that God planned for you in advance from long ago? Did you know God has created and called you to do good things? It may not be serving God in Australia or being a pastor of a church, but what is it for you? May you not only be mindful of your worth and value in the eyes of our Creator God, but may you discern and discover what God has created you to do. John Maxwell once wrote, "People say there are two great days in a person's life": the day they are born and the day they discover why. I pray that each of us might discern what God put us on this earth for, and then do those things with joy and extraordinary skill, like the incredible masterpieces we are.

Now go out and make this Tuesday terrific!

#terrifictuesday #devoswithdonald

Tuesday, August 20, 2019

Terrific Tuesdays begin with nailing it.

Desire without knowledge is not good, and one who moves too hurriedly misses the way.
-Proverbs 19:2

Yesterday, my wife and I desired to have rice with our dinner. Usually, this particular rice takes 20 minutes to cook. But this time, it only took 11 minutes. A new record! Although, when we started to smell something burning, we knew why it had cooked so quickly, and we were not cheering. We forgot to turn the heat down to simmer after it started boiling! Thus, the bottom of the pan was burned, which would make the clean-up job a much more elongated process.

If we have the desire to do something, but don't have the knowledge to do it, it could be a disaster waiting to happen. Just watch the cooking show "Nailed It!" to see what I mean, a place where cooking disasters happen on a regular basis, and where even the most unqualified chef can feel good about themselves. But both my wife and I know how to cook rice. We've done it countless times before, and it's one of the easiest and simplest things a person could make. But even though we had the appropriate knowledge when it came to cooking rice, we moved too hurriedly and had too much going on at once in the kitchen, which caused us to not care for this dinner item in the way we needed to. In the cooking show mentioned, the clock is on the contestants, and they often move too quickly, missing the simplest of things, even when the directions are right in front of them.

My wife's great grandmother once said, "The hurrier you go, the behinder you get." At least one of those words is not in the English dictionary, but I think there is great wisdom in that quote, and it remains one of my favorite sayings from her side of the family to this day. Although we didn't mean to move more quickly, our actions inevitably caused us to. And now, as a result of that hurriedness, we have a longer clean-up time with less rice to fill our bellies.

What are you cooking up in your life to serve to others, and what areas of your life are you moving too quickly in? Where do you need to turn the heat down and let things simmer so that they'll turn out a little better? What things have you burnt as a result of your hurriedness or lack of attention? Are there some mistakes you need to clean up? Could there be dishes you need to even let soak in some hot water and clean the next day? Katherine and I got the job done more quickly last night, and a good amount of the rice we cooked was edible. But for the rice closest to the bottom of the pan, it was unsalvageable. Whatever amount of desire or knowledge we have to do something, may we not move too hurriedly, so as to miss the way. By the way, I wonder what God has in store for each of us today. Whatever it is, I pray we may not move too quickly, so as to not miss out on what God wants to cook up in our lives today.

Now go out and make this Tuesday terrific!

#terrificuesday #devoswithdonald #nailedit

Tuesday, September 3, 2019

Terrific Tuesdays begin with getting off of our busy feet.

So [Ruth] came, and she has been on her feet from early this morning until now, without resting even for a moment. – Ruth 2:7b

Although Ruth expended great energy as she was gleaning behind the reapers in the field to make a good impression on Boaz, one of the last of Naomi's kinsmen, this was not the norm for her; nor should it be for us. Perhaps there are times when we will be forced into long hours or choose to work overtime for good and justifiable reasons. But oftentimes, if we get caught up in this habit of overworking ourselves, we will pay for it in the end.

In our labor, what are we trying to glean? Gleaning can mean gathering grain after the reapers come through, as Ruth was doing, but it can also mean "to gather slowly and laboriously, bit by bit." What are we trying to accomplish through our toiling? What are we trying to prove? That we have self-worth and value? That we are capable of this or that? In the late 1800s, there were people working on their feet from early in the morning to late at night in America, working 12-hour days seven days a week in order to earn a basic living. It seemed there was no rest for them, even for a moment, as they worked out of necessity, rather than by choice. Eventually, people protested their low wages and long hours, going on strikes, acts which ultimately led Congress to pass a law that would make Labor Day a federal holiday in 1894.

Perhaps there are days when we find ourselves on our feet from early in the morning until late in the evening, without resting even for a moment; more days than we wish to admit. For the student, for the single parent providing for their children, for the struggling business owner trying to keep their head above water. But if we can separate the inherent value we have from our work, we will have done a great service to ourselves. For too often, it seems our society tries to make us find our worth in our work.

The fact of the matter is, God claims us valuable and worthy before we even go out to glean. Sure, there are plenty of proverbs that chide a person who is lazy and will not work, and we need to be careful not to fall into that sin, especially since sloth is considered to be one of the seven deadly sins. But there is something to be said about resting from our labors. Dr. Matthew Sleeth once wrote, "A weekly day of rest is like Cherry Garcia ice cream and hugs: we can survive without them, but we can't really live." Are you giving yourself adequate time to rest in the midst of the busy life you lead? I believe we can survive without a weekly day of rest. I believe we can get by on minimal hours of sleep and several cups of coffee. But I, like Dr. Sleeth, would venture to say, we can't really live. Don't buy into the lie that you're not enough or not doing enough. You are enough and you are loved, not for what you do, but for who you are.

Now go out and make this Tuesday terrific!

#terrificuesday #devoswithdonald

Tuesday, September 10, 2019

Terrific Tuesdays begin with cool hairdos.

He 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 that way. -Luke 19:3-4



My wife has a ground rule for bugs: You come into the house, you die! There is no mercy shown to creatures such as spiders, ants, and mosquitos. If they're outside, we don't bother them; but inside, they're in trouble! However, yesterday a creature came into the house that I did not have the heart to exterminate. Scientists call him *Acronicta Americana*, but I'm just going to call him Harry. Harry is a caterpillar that will eventually become an American Dagger Moth. Instead of climbing up a tree to see what he could see though, he climbed down a tree to see what he could see. And he found me! But rather than eating more leaves to get ready to go into his cocoon, he was grooming himself and collecting more hair. He heard that a black dog was living in our home and wanted to add some black hairs to his yellow fur coat. We often think of butterflies when we think of what caterpillars will transform into, but moths are also transformed creatures which start out as caterpillars.

We, ourselves, are getting ready to go into a season of transformation. Green leaves will soon be turning into reds, yellows, and oranges, and many moth caterpillars like Harry will soon be forming their cocoons, eventually emerging from them in the spring as new creatures. What might God want to do through us in this next season? And whether we're short or tall, what do we need to do to see Jesus in this upcoming season? Do we need to go up a tree like Zacchaeus, or down a tree like Harry? And what might hinder us from seeing Jesus? For Zacchaeus, it was the crowd. What is it for us? Jesus is passing our way every day, and Jesus can show up in the most unexpected places, sometimes even in a fuzzy yellow caterpillar. How will we go out of our way to see Jesus today and in the season ahead? Because I guarantee you, he will want to come into our house today and every day.

There was once a time that when we tried to enter God's house, we would die. There would be no mercy shown. God was so holy that we would drop dead on the spot if we went into the tent of meeting where God's presence resided. But now, when we enter God's house, when we enter God's presence, we come by way of Christ, who tells us we are forgiven and freed. And so, in spite of our sin and the ways we fall short, we have access to God through Christ, because the veil has been torn and we have been declared beloved children of God. Whatever your hairdo may look like this morning, know that you are loved, forgiven and freed, and that God wants to come into your house and transform you today.

Now go out and make this Tuesday terrific!

#terrificuesday #devoswithdonald #iwokeuplikethis



Tuesday, September 17, 2019

Terrific Tuesdays begin with going to Gilead.

Go up to Gilead, and take balm, O virgin daughter Egypt! In vain you have used many medicines; there is no healing for you. -Jeremiah 46:11

Lately, I have been feeling the after-effects of cut grass and buzzing bees: allergies. Perhaps you know the feeling! When I lived in Texas, I had allergies, but when I came to New Jersey, I was grateful to discover I had none whatsoever...at least, not for the first few years. But apparently, it's typical for allergies to redevelop in a new place after about three years of living there. Claritin can do the trick for many, but yesterday, when my allergies were raging more than usual, not even a Claritin could fix the problem, and there was no healing for my sniffing. Have you ever had medicine, prescribed or not, that you tried turning to in order to heal a problem or difficulty you had, whether physical, mental, or other? How did that work for you? In our passage today, Jeremiah the prophet addresses Egypt saying, "in vain you have used many medicines; there is no healing for you." In ancient days, Egypt was considered to be very skilled and knowledgeable when it came to the healing arts. Thus, it's ironic they're being described as people who have failed to find healing in the many medicines they have created and used.

But I wonder what each of us need healing from today? Perhaps it's much more than allergies. Perhaps it's healing from the negative effects of something that happened in our family of origin. Perhaps it's healing in a relationship we have that's currently broken or severed. Perhaps it's physical healing from the after-effects of a surgery or cancer treatment we went through. Perhaps it's healing of a financial difficulty that we're not sure how to come up out of. Perhaps we, like Egypt, know a thing or two about remedies, but perhaps we've been unsuccessful in determining what's wrong and how to fully fix it. Do you believe there is a balm in Gilead waiting for you, a remedy that can make the wounded whole and heal the sinsick soul? Egypt was told to go up to Gilead and take balm, because Gilead was a place known for its medicinal herbs.

I was never one who was a big fan of taking medicine, and always tried to avoid taking it growing up. But I wonder if there are things we're bearing that could be lifted off of our shoulders to an extent if we take them to Gilead, take them to God, and surrender them there. Whether thorns in our flesh remain thorns in our flesh, whether the wounds we carry are healed, what would it look like for us to take a trip to Gilead and take some of God's medicine today? Although I do not have local honey in the house, I'm looking forward to buying some once our non-local honey runs out. I'm hoping it will be a source of healing come spring. But even more than going local in terms of honey, I hope turning to the one who is most local, the Holy Spirit in us, will be a source of help and healing, as we go through whatever challenges or difficulties we're facing.

Now go out and make this Tuesday terrific!

#terrificuesday #devoswithdonald #gesundheit

Tuesday, September 24, 2019

Terrific Tuesdays begin with spending quiet time with God.

"The apostles gathered around Jesus, and told him all that they had done and taught. He said to them, 'Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while.' For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. And they went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves. Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they hurried there on foot from all the towns and arrived ahead of them." - Mark 6:30-33

Is it hard for you to find quiet time with God in the midst of all you do or in the midst of what others expect of you? And when you try to get away for some quiet daily retreat, what hinders you most? Is it your job? The responsibilities of being a parent? Not wanting to wake up? For me, it's usually a heavy and overwhelming workload. But yesterday, it was chirping crickets. As I went down to my preferred place of quiet retreat, it was frustrating to hear the worst and most monotone yodelers known to humankind: crickets; even worse than bleating sheep in your ears.

The disciples of Jesus had been doing a lot for God when we find them in Mark 6. And Jesus, who himself spent countless hours of quiet solitude with God, encouraged them to come away to a deserted place with him to rest and recharge themselves. But even as they cross the lake, the people, or rather, chirping crickets, saw them, and beat them to the other side, keeping them from finding that quiet space of retreat. Sure, crickets chirping through your walls will quiet down when you get close to that wall, but it won't be for long, and they'll start their chorus yet again as soon as you turn away

When I was on a mission trip in Australia for two months in the summer of 2010, that's when the discipline of a daily quiet time with God was first instilled within me. And it became a source of such life, meaning, and growth for me. There have been seasons where I have been very good about it and seasons where I have let other things get in the way. But no matter what the season, I find I am my most healthy spiritually, emotionally, and personally when I take time daily to go away to a deserted place all by myself and spend time with Jesus. When I went on a retreat called Walk to Emmaus last fall, this important daily discipline was impressed upon me again, and I was convicted of how I had let investing in my personal relationship with God go by the wayside. As one individual wrote to me in a letter received during that weekend: "I want to encourage you to always take time EVERY DAY to 'recharge your batteries' and commune with God in a quiet setting, even if just for 15 minutes...This is such a critical part of your life to prevent burnout or harm to your [most important relationships]! Rest and renew with God every single day." What is it that might tempt to keep you from daily quiet time with God, even if those things might be good in and of themselves? However many crickets may be chirping in your ears, may you strive to take daily intentional quiet time to be with Jesus.

Now go out and make this Tuesday terrific!

#terrificuesday #devoswithdonald

Tuesday, October 1, 2019

Terrific Tuesdays begin with not getting into fights.

When Rehoboam came to Jerusalem, he assembled all the house of Judah and the tribe of Benjamin, one hundred eighty thousand chosen troops to fight against the house of Israel, to restore the kingdom to Rehoboam son of Solomon. But the word of God came to Shemaiah the man of God: Say to King Rehoboam of Judah, son of Solomon, and to all the house of Judah and Benjamin, and to the rest of the people, "Thus says the LORD, You shall not go up or fight against your kindred the people of Israel. Let everyone go home, for this thing is from me." So they heeded the word of the LORD and went home again, according to the word of the LORD.

- 1 Kings 12:21-24

Rehoboam, son of Solomon, was getting ready for battle. After Solomon died and Rehoboam became king in his place, the kingdom had been torn from him, with ten of the twelve tribes of Israel being given to a man named Jeroboam, leaving only the tribes of Judah and Benjamin for Rehoboam to rule over. Rehoboam had fled to Jerusalem, which was in the territory of Judah, and was gathering troops to fight against Israel, so he could restore the entire kingdom from Jeroboam and bring all twelve tribes under his rule again. But then God speaks through a man named Shemaiah who essentially says, "Don't go up and fight against your kindred. Instead, go home, because this separation between Israel and Judah is from God. You don't need to try and restore the other tribes to your rule. You need not shed blood unnecessarily."

Has there ever been a time in your life when you were feeling the need to try and restore something that had been taken from you or perhaps to fix a broken relationship that had once been whole? But in the end, the thing was actually meant to be and the separation was even of the Lord? As we prepare for week three of our Label Free Church series, speaking to the topic of "intolerant," I wonder what things we are fighting about that God is not calling us to wage war in, but to respect the territory of others and allow them to live as they are, even if we're not happy with how much of the kingdom, what slice of the pie, we've been left with. But I also wonder if there are certain things we are called to wage war about, and when it's appropriate to do so.

I wonder who the Shemaiahs are in our lives; the people through whom God speaks a word that counters what we were planning to do, but, instead, gives us new perspective. I wonder who the Shemaiahs are who keep us from unnecessary conflict and try to keep things peaceable, even if they don't end up being that way in the end. Although it seems God wanted to avert war in this scenario and prevent one king from trying to usurp another, war would continue between the territories of Judah and Israel, the first mention of which is in 1 Kings 15:6. But when differences arise and vengeance is thought to be had, perhaps taking a step back, looking and listening for the Shemaiahs in our lives, and not going into battle too quickly, could be appropriate first steps.

Now go out and make this Tuesday terrific!

#terrificuesday #devoswithdonald

Tuesday, October 8, 2019

Terrific Tuesdays begin with our eyes being opened.

When an attendant of the man of God rose early in the morning and went out, an army with horses and chariots was all around the city. His servant (Gehazi) said, "Alas, master! What shall we do?" Elisha replied, "Do not be afraid, for there are more with us than there are with them." Then Elisha prayed: "O LORD, please open his eyes that he may see." So the LORD opened the eyes of the servant, and he saw; the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha. -2 Kings 6:15-17

Because the king of Aram thought Elisha, the prophet, posed a threat to him, the king of Aram sent a large army to Dothan where Elisha and his servant were. His army came by night and surrounded the city of Dothan. Thus, when Elisha's servant, Gehazi, awakes and goes out to scope the area, he is alarmed to find a huge army. Fearing for their lives and struggling to know how they will get out of this situation, he says, "What shall we do?!"

When have you felt surrounded or overwhelmed by a difficulty? Perhaps it was a financial burden that left you unsure if you would be able to pay the bills. Perhaps it was the loss of a loved one or a broken relationship that left you swallowed up in despair. Perhaps it was a sin or bad habit that you struggled to overcome. Or perhaps it was a new challenge you were facing that you were unsure if you possessed the skills and talents to accomplish. Not knowing how to overcome this difficult reality and feeling stifled by fear, perhaps you cried out like Gehazi, "What should I do?!"

When we feel surrounded and don't know what to do, sometimes it's helpful to have others who can open our eyes to the things we don't see. As Gehazi's blood pressure and anxiety were rising, Elisha was calm and unafraid, saying, "Do not be afraid." Why? Because he knew there were more with them than there were with the king of Aram. Thus, Elisha prayed that his servant's eyes would be opened. And there behind them, standing with them, was revealed a heavenly army, with horses and chariots of fire all around.

When you feel surrounded and outnumbered by enemies, who are the people or what are the things that can help your eyes be opened? I invite you to listen to the song "Surrounded (Fight My Battles)" today and to pray the following: LORD, open my eyes, like you did for Elisha's servant, so that I may not approach any battle line or overwhelming situation with fear, but stand confident, courageous, and unafraid, with a mountainside full of your horses and chariots behind me.

*It may look like I'm surrounded, but I'm surrounded by you.
It may look like I'm surrounded, but I'm surrounded by you.
This is how I fight my battles. This is how I fight my battles.*

Now go out and make this Tuesday terrific!

#terrificuesday #devoswithdonald

Tuesday, October 15, 2019

Terrific Tuesdays begin with dead people coming back to life.

So Elisha died, and they buried him. Now bands of Moabites used to invade the land in the spring of the year. As a man was being buried, a marauding band was seen and the man was thrown into the grave of Elisha; as soon as the man touched the bones of Elisha, he came to life and stood on his feet. -2 Kings 13:20-21

If you ask Alexa to tell you a joke, she's apparently pretty fond of zombies right now as we approach Halloween. But this devotional is not about zombies. Perhaps the closest thing to zombies can be found in Matthew 27:52, when many tombs of the saints were opened and those who had fallen asleep had been raised after Jesus had been crucified. In general, there aren't too many stories of people coming back to life, but perhaps it's enough to get you spooked: the story in Matthew 27, Paul bringing back Eutychus after falling out of a third story window (Acts 20), Elijah bringing the son of the widow of Zarephath back (1 Kings 17), Elisha raising the Shunamite's son (2 Kings 4), Jesus raising a widow's son at Nain (Luke 7), Jairus' daughter living after being told she had died (Mark 5), Jesus raising Lazarus from the grave (John 11), and most well-known, Jesus himself rising from the grave. But it's only in 2 Kings where we find a story of one dead guy bringing another dead guy to life.

We make an impact when we're alive, but what impact will we have on others when we're dead? Will others be impacted by us long after we're gone? Elisha, the prophet, had a big impact on others when he was alive, and that impact continued even after his death, such that, a dead person thrown into his grave came back to life! It's one thing to leave a legacy, but to keep making a further impact after we're gone is another. This is what we all want, is it not?

I was surprised one day when I was talking to my wife about this story. I guess I've always had the desire to be a world changer and difference maker, to make as big of a splash as possible in the sea of life, creating the most good for the most people possible. But when I talked to Katherine, I found out she's not all that interested in making a big splash. She's not worried about leaving a lasting legacy. And for her, it's okay if she ends up being forgotten. If her life results in simply one person's life being changed for the better, then she will be satisfied and content when she dies.

Perhaps we put too much pressure on ourselves when it comes to making an impact with our life or in our death, but there is one man's death who did wonderworking miracles for those of us who were dead: Jesus Christ. What happened to the dead man taken by the marauding band and thrown into Elisha's grave is kind of what happened to us. For when we find ourselves thrown at the grave of Jesus, we find ourselves coming back to life and standing on our feet. A dead man brought dead people (us) back to life, and through Christ's death, as well as his resurrection, we can truly live.

Now go out and make this Tuesday terrific!

#terrificuesday #devoswithdonald

Tuesday, October 22, 2019

Terrific Tuesdays begin with long lists of people we don't know.

So all Israel was enrolled by genealogies; and these are written in the Book of the Kings of Israel. -1 Chronicles 9:1a

Here we come to the end of the first major section of Chronicles. If you were a chronicler who was writing an account of history, what would you write and focus on? What sources would you use? Apparently, the person who wrote 1 Chronicles thought writing genealogies was important, and he wrote this after much of the Hebrew Bible had already been written, utilizing various sources, including the Books of the Kings of Israel. Although we may struggle through names we can't pronounce and start to doze off after the umpteenth million reading of "the descendants of _____" in chapters 1-8, each of these individuals in these genealogies has a story, and that story is connected to a much grander narrative.

What's your story? And how is it connected to the larger narrative? According to Gary Knoppers, "in traditional societies, genealogies explain and justify the place and function of various individuals, people, and institutions." What is our place and function in society? Do we know what it is for us? Because I guarantee you, we all have an important place and function, no matter who we're descendants of or what people group we belong to. But where do we fit in with the grander narrative?

If Ancestry.com could take us as far back as the chronicler did, what would be the story our genealogies tell? What would our family tree look like? It's important to know where we came from and all the people who came before us. Because even it may be a long list of people we never met, even if we don't know much of what those people did or who they were, we are connected to them and a part of their story, just as they are a part of ours.

Know this day and every day you have a story to live and a place and function in the world that only you can fill. Your name and story are worth chronicling and I pray you help others see their value and their connection to the grander narrative we're all a part of.

Now go out and make this Tuesday terrific!

#terrifictuesday #devoswithdonald

Tuesday, November 12, 2019

Terrific Tuesdays begin with lifting our eyes to the hills.

I lift up my eyes to the hills—from where will my help come? My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth. -Psalm 121:1-2

This weekend, my wife and I went to a wedding down in Cleveland, SC. The chapel the wedding was held in was called Pretty Place. I'll let you determine why.

May your eyes be lifted to God in all the beautiful places that surround you, and may you find strength and hope for whatever it is you're going through this day and in the days to come.



Now go out and make this Tuesday terrific!

#terrifictuesday #devoswithdonald

Tuesday, November 19, 2019

Terrific Tuesdays begin with going to the innermost place and cleaning things out.

Listen to me, Levites! Sanctify yourselves, and sanctify the house of the LORD, the God of your ancestors, and carry out the filth from the holy place...The priests went into the inner part of the house of the LORD to cleanse it, and they brought out all the unclean things that they found in the temple of the LORD into the court of the house of the LORD; and the Levites took them and carried them out to the Wadi Kidron. -2 Chronicles 29:5, 16

Sitting in my closet in my parents' home in Texas is a large conglomeration of things that need to be cleansed (i.e. removed): My 6th grade binder with all its papers inside, an 8th grade Algebra workbook that belongs in the recycling, a jacket I hardly wore that deserves donating, and much much more (my wife's stomach must be churning at just the thought of all this). Yes, it's true. My top strength from StrengthsFinder is "Input" which basically means I see value in practically everything I have and struggle to throw it away. In other words, this strength is just a nice way of saying, "I'm a hoarder." This Thanksgiving season, when I have the opportunity to be with family, it's going to be the time when I purge my closet of all its contents. There may be some things worth keeping, but, most likely, 90% of it needs to be disposed of.

Perhaps your closet from the days of your youth is better looking than mine, but when might we be called to do the same thing the Levites did? To go into the innermost part of our houses and cleanse it, bringing out all the filth we find? This cleansing of the temple took eight full days for the Levites to accomplish. It took them more than a week to sanctify the house of the LORD of all the ungodly things within it. What do we need to cleanse in our innermost selves and how many days or weeks will it take to do that? If our body is a temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19), what is it in our own life that needs sanctifying? Is there filth in us, sin that has kept us from God, that needs to be purged in order for us to walk more in step with God's Spirit? Even if there's a lot of filth within, more than we wish to admit, would we be willing to do the hard work of "getting clean"?

I don't know about you, but yesterday I did not have a Christ-like attitude at several points in my day, and I was not the person I wanted to be. Therefore, I felt the need for confession by the end of it. I felt the need to purge that which was not good and create space for something better. Perhaps there are many days when we are not the people we want to be, whether to ourselves or to others. But as King Hezekiah did and encouraged God's people to do, may we turn to God and allow God to help us be a "sanctuary, pure and holy, tried and true." Lord prepare us and sanctify us, even as we remind ourselves of your cleansing work that has already been made effective for us by way of the cross. And may we find our worship and lives being renewed at the end of this sanctifying process, as it was for the people of Judah.

Now go out and make this Tuesday terrific!

#terrificuesday #devoswithdonald

Tuesday, December 3, 2019

Terrific Tuesdays begin with snow-covered landscapes.



The latter splendor of this house shall be greater than the former, says the LORD of hosts...
-Haggai 2:9a

As I look out our windows upon a snowy landscape, I'm reminded of God's ability to transform. In the book of Ezra, Haggai is one of two prophets who speaks to God's people about rebuilding the temple. After the Babylonians came, the temple had been destroyed, and the people were sent into exile. In the midst of this reality, which was largely the result of their disobedience to God, their lives seemed like barren trees, and hope seemed to be lost. Yet, later on, God was able to bring transformation to the barren landscape around them and within them. Around them because they were given the chance to be freed from exile and rebuild what was destroyed under the rule of the Persians. And within them because they were forgiven of the sin they had committed, even if they didn't deserve it. Not only that, God proclaimed through Haggai that the temple to be rebuilt would be better than that which was formerly there.

What feels barren in your life? What seems hopeless? Even if that which defined you seems to be shattered and destroyed, the God of transformation is able to bring hope and beauty to the realities around you, much like the snow did to the barren trees after our first snowfall here in New Jersey.

Centuries after the temple was rebuilt, a person named Jesus Christ would come onto the scene and transform what we thought to be a hopeless landscape: us. In the midst of our sin, much like the sin of the people who had gone into exile, we were not worthy. And yet Jesus paid it all, rebuilding us and washing our sin as pure as the snow that transforms our barren landscapes.

Now go out and make this Tuesday terrific!

#terrifictuesday #devoswithdonald

Tuesday, December 10, 2019

Terrific Tuesdays begin with unexpected awakenings.

An angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."

-Matthew 1:20b-21

As many of us sometimes do, last night I struggled to turn my brain off to go to sleep. When have you found yourself lying in bed, wanting sleep, yet feeling unable to attain rest? I wonder about Joseph and that first night of sleep he took after finding out Mary was pregnant. I imagine finding the off switch in his brain was a difficult task, as he went through all the different scenarios in his mind of what happened and what he should do now that he has discovered this reality.

But when Joseph finally did get to sleep, he was awakened by an angel who gave rest to his reeling thoughts by saying, "Don't be afraid to take Mary as your wife," for this child is from the Holy Spirit; God is in this. Oh, and by the way, this child you'll be the father of? "He will save his people from their sins."

This is the first descriptor we get of Jesus: someone who is a Savior. Someone who rescues us and was born to deliver us. As we journey through this Advent season, what do you need saving from? Is it from a sin that clings closely that you struggle to shake off? Is it a literal or figurative restlessness? Is it sorrow or anger in your heart? Selfishness or callousness? What is it for you?

This morning, I was awakened unexpectedly from a terrible dream in which I needed saving. In this dream, myself and several others I knew were victims of human trafficking, being treated unjustly and not quite sure if we would make it back home. As the nights get longer and the days shorter, what situations do we find ourselves needing saving from? There are many people who are needing a Savior for one reason or another. A person trapped in human trafficking, although they may wish to have hope, often struggle to see beyond the darkness and tears that seem to be their daily bread. And for them, they wonder if there will ever be a day when the nights get shorter and the days longer. What about for you? Do you struggle to see beyond the dark realities of life?

Yet Christmas is the day, three days after the winter solstice, when the naked eye can first begin to perceive that light is growing. No matter how restless you feel or what you need saving from, may you have hope that God will transform and bring light to your darkness. As we wait, as we long, as we hope this Advent season, may we find ourselves not found wanting at the end of it. And may our restlessness find true rest in the One who saves us from that which we can't save ourselves from.

No matter how rested you feel, go out and make this Tuesday terrific!

#terrificuesday #devoswithdonald

Tuesday, December 17, 2019

Terrific Tuesdays begin with light dawning on our darkness.

And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways...By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace. -Luke 1:76, 78-79

When I was younger, I liked to underline parts of the Bible that were especially meaningful or spoke to me. In one of my Bibles, some letters of Paul and certain Psalms are practically underlined in their entirety! Now, instead of underlining scripture, I have one primary unmarked Bible I use, with insights and key verses written in composition notebooks. In both the Bible I used as a teenager and the Bible I used during college, I had the first description of John the Baptist preparing the way in v. 77 underlined: “to give knowledge of salvation to his people by the forgiveness of their sins.” Because John was the one saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near” (Matthew 3:2), this descriptor makes sense. This is the aspect of John we are most familiar with. And what good news that Jesus would be our path to salvation and forgive us of our sins!

But what about the second part of Zechariah’s prophecy in Luke 1 that also spoke to how John would prepare the way? What about the part I never underlined or really understood in v. 78?: “By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death.” When have we ever thought of Jesus’ coming like the breaking of dawn from on high? Not the dawn we’re used to seeing each morning on earth, but a heavenly breaking forth of light that we had not yet known or been exposed to? When have we thought of John the Baptist’s “preparing the way” as getting us ready for a heavenly dawn to shine forth on our darkness? Zechariah prophesied that Jesus would come to those of us who were sitting in darkness, those of us sitting in the shadow of death (remember Psalm 23?). What powerful, poetic language and beautiful imagery. In John 1:7-8, we are told that John the Baptist “came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light.” Here, Christ is described as light once again.

So, how can we prepare the way for Christ this Christmas? How can we make room in our hearts and our homes for the Light of the world to dawn in places of darkness? Perhaps you feel shrouded in darkness or know others who are. Well, John said that Jesus was coming to give light to those who sit in darkness. Perhaps you feel overwhelmed by the shadow of death and find yourself in mourning or feeling lonely. Well, Christ was going to give light to those people as well. John was preparing us for the day when, by God’s mercy, the dawn from on high would break upon us. Thus, as we, like John, strive to prepare the way for Christ being born in us and our world, I invite you to do the same, to find ways in which you can help light break forth and shine in darkness.

Now, go out and make this Tuesday terrific!

#terrificuesday #devoswithdonald

Tuesday, December 31, 2019

Terrific Tuesdays begin with rebuilding our gates.

Then [Nehemiah] said to them, “You see the trouble we are in, how Jerusalem lies in ruins with its gates burned. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, so that we may no longer suffer disgrace.” -Nehemiah 2:17

There were a lot of gates in Jerusalem. If you read Nehemiah 3 and 12, you’ll discover there was a Sheep Gate, Fish Gate, Valley Gate, Dung Gate, Fountain Gate, Water Gate, Horse Gate, East Gate, Muster Gate, Gate of Ephraim, Old Gate, and Gate of the Guard. What were all these specific gates for? Your guess is just as good as mine, but each gate served as an entry point into some part of Jerusalem and had some sort of function and purpose, I’m sure. If the gates are demolished, unwanted things will come in and out, the city will be vulnerable to attack, and systems won’t work as properly as they should. We know this to be true of our physical bodies. If our defenses are not up, if certain gates are not established or in good working condition, not so good things will enter in and cause infection and other unwanted things.

What entry points in your life have been burned or demolished and are needing rebuilding, especially as we enter into a new year? Perhaps it’s a gate related to your physical health, emotional health, or financial situation. Perhaps it’s your spirituality or particular relationships in your life. Or perhaps you too, like Jerusalem have a Valley Gate, Dung Gate, Fountain Gate, or other that you want to keep intact or build back up. Starting January 19th, just after the time you’ll probably want to give up on your New Year’s resolutions, we’ll be going through a sermon series focused on what it means to rebuild and strengthen various aspects of our lives.

Nehemiah wanted the walls and gates rebuilt so God’s people would no longer suffer disgrace. What disgrace are you suffering due to certain gates being down, and how can you better set yourself up for success? Whatever it may be, perhaps one of the most important things to remind ourselves of as we head into a new year and as we think about all the ways in which we want to rebuild and strengthen our lives, is that the God of heaven is the One who is able to give us success (Nehemiah 2:20). God’s gracious hand was upon Nehemiah (2:8), and Nehemiah would even have adversaries that were determined to not let the job get done (4:1-2, 8). But because God was with him, he was able to get the job done.

Countless years after Nehemiah helped to rebuild the destroyed gates of Jerusalem, Jesus was born to help rebuild what was demolished: our very lives due to the sin we let infect us and our world. Jesus is described in John 10:9 as the Gate of Life through which we are saved and through which we go in and out to find pasture. Whatever gate(s) we’re striving to rebuild in 2020, may we remind ourselves of the One through whom all rebuilding is possible: Jesus Christ.

Now, go out and make this Tuesday terrific!

#terrificuesday #devoswithdonald