

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Below are the readings and sermon for Sunday August 16, 2020 and Zoom links for various church happenings this week.

In Christ's Peace,

Pastor Steve

### **Coffee w/Pastor Steve**

Mondays from 9-10AM on Zoom. Its name is what it is. All are welcome!

- **Video:** <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86839470399>

Or

- **Phone** (Land line or mobile)
  - o Dial +1 646 558 8656 US
  - o Enter Meeting ID: 868 3947 0399#
  - o Press # as you are a participant.

### **Bible, Bagels and Brew Bible Study**

Join Pastor Steve and friends Tuesday mornings at 9AM on the Zoom app. This is a time of bible study, sharing and caring from the comfort of your home. All are welcome.

No bible experience needed, just an openness to learning and experiencing God's love for you in Jesus Christ.

- **Video:** <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85180298593>

Or

- **Phone** (Land line or mobile)
  - o Dial +1 646 558 8656 US
  - o Enter Meeting ID: 851 8029 8593#
  - o Press # as you are a participant.

### **BLAST! A Youth Group for PK to 5th Grade**

BLAST! (Bible Learning and Sharing Together) for PK to 5th graders begins **Wednesday August 19 from 6:30-7:30PM**. Dr. Shonda Staudtski (Not really a doctor. Just plays one on Zoom. LOL.) will lead the kids in a fun faith-filled experiment. Please RSVP

to [blastnativity3@gmail.com](mailto:blastnativity3@gmail.com) with your child's name today so we know how many experiment kits to assemble. Experiment kits will be available for pick up on church front steps Monday 8/17 in a plastic storage bin. We will be utilizing the Zoom video conferencing platform. Instructions will be included in our response to your RSVP email.

## **GROUNDING An On-line Men's Group**

All types of fellas are welcome to a weekly gathering of faith and fellowship on **Wednesdays from 7-8AM** on the Zoom app. via video or phone. The format will be conversation centered around a biblical devotion. Start your day off right. Get that midweek recharge. Be GROUNDED in your faith with men of all walks of life wanting to do life right. GROUNDED begins Wednesday August 12<sup>th</sup>.

- **Video:** <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86767586678>
- Or
- **Phone** (Land line or mobile)
  - o Dial +1 646 558 8656 US
  - o Enter Meeting ID: 867 6758 6678#
  - o Press # as you are a participant.

## **Readings for Sunday August 16, 2020**

### **Deuteronomy 15:1-2, 7-11**

Every seventh year you shall grant a remission of debts. And this is the manner of the remission: every creditor shall remit the claim that is held against a neighbour, not exacting it from a neighbour who is a member of the community, because the Lord's remission has been proclaimed.

If there is among you anyone in need, a member of your community in any of your towns within the land that the Lord your God is giving you, do not be hard-hearted or tight-fisted towards your needy neighbour. You should rather open your hand, willingly lending enough to meet the need, whatever it may be. Be careful that you do not entertain a mean thought, thinking, 'The seventh year, the year of remission, is near', and therefore view your needy neighbour with hostility and give nothing; your neighbour might cry to the Lord against you, and you would incur guilt. Give liberally and be ungrudging when you do so, for on this account the Lord your God will bless you in all your work and in all that you undertake. Since there will never cease to be some in need on the earth, I therefore command you, 'Open your hand to the poor and needy neighbour in your land.'

## Luke 15:11-32

### The Parable of the Prodigal and His Brother

Then Jesus said, 'There was a man who had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, "Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me." So he divided his property between them. A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and travelled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself he said, "How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.'" So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. Then the son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son." But the father said to his slaves, "Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!" And they began to celebrate.

'Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. He replied, "Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound." Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. But he answered his father, "Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!" Then the father said to him, "Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found." '

## Sermon

If you have ever been in debt (American thing to do), you know how good the feeling is when that debt is paid off. House, vehicle, credit card, student loans...it feels great knowing the debt is no longer hanging over your head. Right?! Your financial resources are freed up a bit and now you can allocate them elsewhere. The banks are "happy" too, they got their money back and then some. For them it was not a personal transaction. It was all business.

The context of today's Deuteronomy scripture speaks to the relationship between debt and our relationships with one another. Wherein the debts I just eluded too are more business-like, this scripture passage feels as if it lends itself more to personal debts. It all boils down to the expectations between the two parties. In our scripture, the Israelites are in complete dependence on God while in the wilderness. From enslavement in Egypt to complete reliance on God. Self-determination is not theirs. In the midst of pacing the wilderness, anticipating the promised land, God drops a decree on his people. Every seven years all debts are cancelled. Everything is reset. Grace is extended to those who are in debt. The living field is made even. Debts are to be erased. Loan forgiveness is to reign supreme.

God knows God's people. They were enslaved in Egypt, and now they struggle along in the wilderness. Depravity is no stranger to them. God has seen their attempts at getting ahead, to be in the lead, to have the most, to have the best. God has witnessed their attempts at getting head by getting over on someone else. Success at the expense of another's needs troubles God. By commanding a debt reset every 7 years, loan forgiveness if you will, God is ensuring that there is less of a chance of a monopoly and consolidation of power. In theory, this should help them see each other as equally responsible for the care of one another. As God cares for them without impartiality, so should they. If at the end of 7 years a debt has not been paid in full, let it go. Before it alters your attitude towards the person, let it go. At the end of the seventh year of a debt, be released from the need to collect on something owed you. Be released from anger and ill feelings aimed at someone who may not have the wherewithal to pay you back.

There will always be need on earth. **We** will never be able to fix the entirety of the world's needs, but we sure can join God in ongoing attempts to meet the needs of one another. The closer we come to one another, the more we learn of one another, the better equipped our hearts become to care for the needs of one another.

We never stop trying to live up to someone's expectations. Our worth is forever tied to what we produce. But we are reminded that God loves us as we are, as we were, and as we will be. To live into that understanding that God has you coming and going, when unrighteous and when good is indeed rest for the soul. Rest, yes Sabbath. However, we are human and measuring is what we do. God doles out grace as God see's fit. In the end God has the last word. Our part is to abide in God's unearned love for us and encourage one another in joy. Let's take a look at the parable of the Prodigal Son as model of God's debt perception...yes debt perception. It is a powerful parable about grace and forgiveness.

So the younger son comes to his senses and returns home. His time away from home with his early inheritance was plagued with ruinous behavior. He tried to make it out in his own, apart from his Father. Upon returning home he realizes he is not in the dog house as one would think, but instead is showered with love and adoration. He is loved. Just because he is a beloved child of the Father. He is welcomed back into the fold. He need not repay what he squandered. He takes up residence in his father's home once again. No questions asked. Living life forward. Be still your restless heart, you are forgiven. Know what it is to be whole, enough and rested.

The older son has the same arrangement as the younger son, but he see things differently. It proves too hard for him to grasp the realization that he could never earn residence in the father's house. Conventional wisdom says the harder you work the more you get in return. The father flips this on end by heaping grace upon the one who needs it. Your brother was dead, now he is alive. He was lost, but now is found. The father did as the father desired. You are forgiven. Let's move on. His debt, the waisting of the inheritance, a transgression against the father is erased. He does not want to hold onto any possible angst towards his son. No, he lets it go. Reset. Start over. Perhaps, this crazy dose of love will hold his attention, grip his heart, and forge a promising future. No rules, just love.

So, if the rules of this world are out the window, if we cannot judge our value by how fruitful, prosperous or good we are, the remaining grace and invitation to simply abide in the love that claims us can feel disturbing. But we too can find ourselves shifted from slavery to freedom, awakened from death into life, feeling our joy made complete, and experiencing rest for our souls, if we can just **stop** and let God meet us just as we are. Rest, and give that rest too others. Bestow God's peace on others.

God's debt perception is that there is no debt. The debt has been paid. Jesus, nailed to the cross for the forgiveness of sins as all that was needed. Can you abide in this? This world's debt perception is at best about postponement, not forgiveness. The banking and political powers have graced us debtors with payment postponement. What would it look like if all debts were forgiven? What if this were year 7 worldwide? How about year 7 for you?

How freeing it must be to let go of what is **owed**...

How freeing it must be to be let go from what you owe...

Our Heavenly Father let go of his highly valued and only Son Jesus so that we may not be in debt to Him, but be in love with him. He holds nothing over our head. He doesn't postpone our forgiveness to a later date. He has granted our debt paid in full. How might you and I live in response to this love? *Amen.*