



Prayer: (From “The Prayer of St. Francis”)

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.
 Where there is hatred, let me sow love;
 Where there is injury, pardon;
 Where there is doubt, faith;
 Where there is despair, hope;
 Where there is sadness, joy.

For this week’s devotional, I (Nathaniel) am writing on behalf of Ramon. For my inaugural entry into the world of Saginaw UMC devotions, I thought I should go ahead and play into the most stereotypical story possible for a recent Duke graduate and talk about Duke Basketball.

Connect to God:

Where have you seen God at work in your life this week?

Last semester, I attended a Duke basketball game. While I was waiting in the walk-up line, I conversed with another graduate student about what we were studying and our post-graduation plans. Hearing that I was in the Divinity School and was going into the ministry, she politely asked why I believed in Christianity. I briefly shared my testimony: Several years ago, during a time in which I was questioning my faith, I heard a lecture by James Cone about “The Cross and the Lynching Tree” (note: this is available to watch on YouTube for free). I was overwhelmed by Cone’s witness to a God who, in Christ, identifies with “the crucified of history,” providing a power to resist evil and a hope for redemption.

Connect to Neighbor:

What good have you done for someone else this week?

Yes, the Holy Spirit was at work in Cameron Stadium!

Connect to Scripture: 1 Corinthians 13:1-7

13 ⁸ Love never ends; as for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. ⁹ For our knowledge is imperfect and our prophecy is imperfect; ¹⁰ but when the perfect comes, the imperfect will pass away. ¹¹ When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became a man, I gave up childish ways. ¹² For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall understand fully, even as I have been fully understood. ¹³ So faith, hope, love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

My new friend was appreciative of me sharing my story, and her response was fascinating. She said it was the first time a Christian shared their testimony with her but did not mention a supernatural or miraculous event.

As I reflect upon her words, I'm reminded that not all miracles are signs and wonders that launch us into the "Twilight Zone" of the supernatural. Any time our finite and imperfect selves can catch a glimpse of the Infinitely Perfect God is a miracle. The love of God that transforms our hearts and fills the hopeless with hope is supernatural. These moments of grace and care that transform us into the image of Christ are the true signs and wonder of faith. Other kinds of miracles are great too, but we mustn't be restrictive in recognizing the supernatural movements of the Holy Spirit in even the smallest actions of love.

Connect to Context:

In 1 Corinthians, Paul engages with questions presented to him by the Corinthian church concerning signs, wonders, and gifts of the Holy Spirit. Of course, those things are all wonderful and bring glory to God — but only insofar as they are grounded in love. Without love, these supernatural gifts are like a "noisy gong" — aimless noise without a higher purpose. Love is both the foundation and the goal of all Christian practice because love is eternal. Faith and hope will one day no longer be needed because we will be connected to God in the most intimate way possible and our hope will be realized. But love will never cease. It is through love that the future redemption of all things in Christ (cf. Colossians 1) is breaking into the present moment.

When we give and receive God's love, we participate in the miraculous and the supernatural because, according to Paul, "Love never ends."

Loving God, grant us a perception of life that is permeated by Your grace so that we might recognize the miracles of Your love that exist all around us. Amen.

Connect Heads:

Why does Paul say that love is greater than faith and hope?

How does love transform our worship practices?

How might love transform the way we perceive miracles?

What are three things we can do to help us love like Christ?

In what other ways might love be miraculous?

Connect Heart:

In what ways have you experienced “miraculous love”?

When do you most feel God’s love?

What are some biblical examples of love that inspire you?

Connect Hands:

Did you cause harm in word or deed to someone this week? (self-examination). If so, confess your sin to God, then seek to reconcile with your brother or sister.

Share your prayer concerns and celebrations.

Ask a member of the group to pray for the concerns and give thanks for the celebrations.

Notes Sections

Prayer Concerns:

Celebrations:

Daily Reflection Questions

Where have I seen God at work in my life today?

What is one thing that I am thankful for?

What is one thing that broke my heart today?

What is one good thing did I do for someone else today?