

**November 5 – Read Matthew 5:13-16.** This was the keynote of Jesus’ call to citizens of “the kingdom of God.” He didn’t specify that those who follow him should “go” to a certain place. He called them to live in a certain way for God. In Pennsylvania, the Tri-County Church gave their members T-shirts. On the front, they read, “I don’t go to church,” and on the back, they said, “I AM the church.” That reflected Jesus’ message. As we let God’s light shine through us, we truly ARE the church. Have you ever flown over a city at night? Or driven along a highway from the dark countryside into the light of a city? Think about what it felt like to go from darkness to light. What are the dark corners of your neighborhood, city, and world that need to experience God’s light? What can you do to help shine God’s light into these dark corners? In Jesus’ day, with no refrigerators, people used salt to preserve food as well as to flavor it. Jesus called his followers to be “the salt of the earth,” living in ways that add flavor to our world and “preserve” life’s God-intended goodness. As one teacher put it, Jesus did not say, “You are the vinegar of the earth”! In what ways are you living out your faith in ways that flavor life positively, and preserve its goodness?

**November 6 – Read 1 Peter 2:5-10.** Peter’s description of what it means to belong to God’s people, the church, showed how New Testament Christians found Jesus’ work and its effects all through the Old Testament. Verse 6 quoted Isaiah 28:16; verse 7 drew on Psalm 118:22; verse 8 used Isaiah 8:14. Verse 9 took language that first applied to Israel in Exodus 19:6, and verse 10 played off the sadly symbolic names of Hosea’s children in Hosea 1. Peter’s point was that God’s mercy draws and shapes us all into a community in order to bear witness to God’s marvelous light. Some Bible scholars believe 1 Peter may have been adapted from instruction given to new converts at their baptism. (The church pictured glowingly in Acts 2:41-47 included 3000 or more people who joined the church after Peter’s sermon at Pentecost.) How, if at all, do you remind yourself of your confirmation, baptism or other time when you first “owned” your faith in Jesus? How do you purposely let your identity as a Christ-follower shape your daily life?

**November 7 – Read 1 Corinthians 12:4-11.** The apostle Paul explained to the Corinthian Christians that God gives each Christian gifts and talents that empower us to join in the divine mission of changing the world for the better. But no one person receives all the gifts and talents needed for the job. There aren’t “good” and “bad,” or even “important” and “unimportant,” sets of abilities and gifts. God wants each believer to fill a place that makes the overall body stronger. In what ways are you already using your particular gifts and talents to bless others and bring glory to God? Have you ever seen your gifts become more effective when they work together with other people’s various gifts? Think and pray about one way, in the next 12 months, that you might more fully integrate your gifts and abilities into the “the body of Christ’s” overall mission. “Different gifts”— “same Spirit”; “different ministries”— “same Lord,” “different activities”— “same God.” Have you ever seen people with different gifts or ministries yield to the all-too-human temptation to see other gifts or ministries as “rivals” for attention or resources? Naturally, we’re all inclined to believe what we’re involved in is the “most important.” How can we allow the “same Lord” behind them all to help us avoid unhealthy siloing or infighting?

**November 8 – Read John 4:19-29.** Jesus met a person with three strikes against her in the eyes of the religious leaders of his day: a) she was a Samaritan, b) she was a woman, c) she'd had multiple husbands. To his disciples' surprise, he treated her as valuable. In fact, verses 28-29 show her as the first "preacher," the first witness to Jesus in John's gospel! Jesus needed his disciples to know that human prejudices or boundaries did not limit his kingdom. The woman expected Jesus, a Jewish man, to despise and avoid her. But he spoke to her seriously, asked her help and treated her with dignity. He refused to argue about whether Jerusalem or Gerizim was the true holy mountain. He said the key was that people worship "in spirit and truth" (verse 24). What makes it necessary to honestly open your whole inner life to God's love and grace in order to worship in spirit and truth? For what reasons were Jesus' disciples surprised when they found Jesus talking with this woman? In what ways did they not recognize her value? Who do you know who is like the Samaritan woman? Do you tend to look right past those people because they are unlikely or unsuitable candidates for God's kingdom? How can you better engage with people like this woman who are already members of your congregation?

**November 9 – Read Ephesians 3:10-21.** God has a big dream—to restore our world to total wholeness (cf. Revelation 21:1-5). In divine wisdom, God seems to believe that faithful humans are the best means to carry out that mission. Paul wrote that the church is God's main instrument to show his wisdom and glory. And "the church" is people—is us. In Greek, "the many different varieties" in verse 10 was one word—"polupoikilos." It meant "many colored," as though Paul was picturing God's grace and wisdom as a kind of cosmic rainbow. In what ways have God's grace and wisdom added color and beauty to your life? How can you help your church reflect that beauty to all who come in contact with us? Reflect on verse 20: "Glory to God, who is able to do far beyond all that we could ask for or imagine by his power at work within us." Do you believe that God can really do far more than we can ask or imagine? If not, what holds you back from that belief? What God-sized hopes, hurts, dreams and challenges can you identify, trusting that God's mission can go to work through you to help to address them?