

WEEKLY DEVOTION – Tuesday, July 23, 2024
Pastor Bruce Kischnick, Grace Lutheran Church, New Albany, IN

“The Damage We Do to Ourselves”

READING: Daniel 5:22-28 – But you his son, O Belshazzar, have not humbled yourself though you knew all this. Instead, you have set yourself up against the Lord of heaven. You had the goblets from his temple brought to you, and you and your nobles, your wives and your concubines drank wine from them. You praise the gods of silver and gold, of bronze, iron, wood and stone, which cannot see or hear or understand. But you did not honor the God who holds in his hand your life and all your ways. Therefore he sent the hand that wrote the inscription. This is the inscription that was written: MENE, MENE, TEKEL, PARSIN. This is what these words mean: Mene: God has numbered the days of your reign and brought it to an end. Tekel: You have been weighed on the scales and found wanting. Peres: Your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians.

My brother has become the very good friend of our old varsity football coach, “The Bear”. He is about 6’3” and a big man. He played football for four seasons for IU, then was drafted by the Steelers, but blew out a knee in rookie camp. He’s 87 now but still formidable. His wife told Larry that Coach bought himself a Water-pik thinking that it would do a better job on his teeth than a brush. The first time he used the thing he had water all over the bathroom and managed to squirt himself in the face several times. The picture of Coach squirting himself in the face just cracks me up! He thanked his wife for sharing that information with Larry. I think it’s priceless.

I also heard about a young man who attended a Fourth-of-July party at a friend’s house. Everyone had a good time, and after most of the guests had gone home, he was helping his friend clean up. They were standing by the pool when without a word or warning, the young man dove into the pool. He failed to note the depth which was only three feet. He crashed his head into the bottom of the pool, his feet arched over his head, and he broke his neck. He died at the scene. What a sad and terrible loss.

People often do terrible damage to themselves, sometimes by accident, sometimes by negligence, and sometimes with full knowledge of what they are doing. Sometimes the results are comical as in the case of my old coach. Sometimes the results are tragic as in the case of the young man and the pool. We don’t always know all that we need to know. We don’t always heed the warning signs. We don’t always think things through and make informed decisions. We hurt ourselves all too often.

In our reading for today we have a man in his prime years who is king of a great empire. His father, Nebuchadnezzar, had built up the empire to unknown heights. When he died, Belshazzar inherited everything except his father’s acknowledgement of the God of the Hebrews. He was full of unfounded pride and arrogance. He disrespected Yahweh both by worshipping idols and by misusing the sacred vessels taken from the Temple. By his attitude and behaviors he set himself against the God of the Universe. He did this to himself, and the results would be tragic for him. His empire would pass into history, and he has gone down in history as a fool.

So it goes for the ones who count on their own abilities and take all the credit for their successes. Those who have no need for, thought of, or thanksgiving to the One True God stand themselves opposed to him. Sooner or later it ends tragically for them. If not in this world, then someday before the judgment seat of God. They will do the damage to themselves with no one to blame. “With my own strong right arm I have won the victory!” they seem to say. That is so often the precursor to a terrible fall.

Now, it’s not just the titans of business, sports, entertainment, or politics who are prone to this kind of damage. Just plain folks like you and me are also tempted to take the credit for our successes and pat ourselves on the back. One doesn’t need to be a king to swell up with pride and ignore “the God who holds in his hand your life and all your

ways.” Thanksgiving to God is a powerful deterrent to pride and arrogance. Being frequently reminded that all we have and all we do are gifts that start with our Lord and his grace helps us avoid the damage we can do to ourselves by setting ourselves against God.

Now if we could just be more aware and wiser in conducting our labors, our entertainments, and our travels. Just this week we had two broken legs, surgery to repair a broken arm, an MRI after a fall, and a hernia surgery amongst the members here at Grace. Yes, we do damage to ourselves on a regular basis. But we need not fall short of God’s blessings if remember the One who has called us by name, made us his children, and given us the promise of eternal life in the name of our Savior Jesus Christ. Under that name the damage stops. Under that name joy is given, and it is joy to the full. So, please be careful! Watch yourself! Keep your eyes open and your mind on what you’re doing. And above all remember our God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. May God bless and keep you to all eternity. Amen.

PRAYER:

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

- 1) **FRANKENMUTH BUS TRIP – September 29-October 2.** Registration is now open. Find information and forms in “News & Tidbits”, online, and in the Narthex. About 6-8 seats available.
- 2) **BARDSTOWN BUS TRIP – This trip is full with a waiting list. Join us next time.**