

When I was much, much younger, every Sunday, my Grandma Duling would go home and she would take the bulletin and she would stack them, so she made sure she had every bulletin from every Sunday throughout the year. And periodically she would go through them, and she would find the scripture in her Bible. And she'd make a little Mark next to it, so as to keep track of how many times Ira read the same scripture lesson. She wanted to make sure she was getting her money's worth. She wanted to make sure he wasn't just recycling the same one all the time. So she was determined to get the right thing, and she noticed that every four years he read the same scripture. Well, that's what he did, but then he went with a lectionary series that rotated every four years or every three years. I'm sorry, ours rotates every four years.

Now if you were as diligent as my grandma Duling, you would recognize that from September until Christmas we read Old Testament stories. From Christmas until Easter we read a gospel. From roughly Easter until Memorial Day we read the letters of Paul, and in the summers a free-for-all. Generally, we try to keep it in a system. We try to keep a general book that we're reading, and we work our way through it this year.

If you've been keeping track, we have been literally everywhere. We haven't followed any pattern. We have started in the Old Testament and worked our way through the Apostles. We have been literally everywhere. We have read Amos, Galatians, Isaiah, Matthew, Psalms, Proverbs, Matthew again, Luke, First Samuel 17, the entire chapter we did in one day, Genesis, Matthew, another Psalm, Ecclesiastes, Ephesians, and Philipians. We've had a busy summer.

Why do you think we've chosen all those? If this was Bible study, I'd start calling names. If you notice I said, "Why do you think we chose," because we did choose all of these? All of these scriptures for this summer is something that at least one of you has told me means something to you. Somebody in this room right now. Somebody that watches online. Some one that joins us for worship from Saint John's. All of the scriptures we spent this summer reading are scriptures that mean something to each and every one of you. They're all scriptures that give you strength. They help you out in trouble, when you're feeling low, when you need something. One of those scriptures is the Lord's Prayer, Psalms 23. Easy ones that we've learned all of our lives and are able to recite without even thinking about it in trouble.

Today's reading is the second most cited scripture at any sporting event, only behind John 3:16 because it talks about God giving Paul strength. Paul understands and appreciates all the gifts the church has offered him. And Ironically enough, that letter was written to the women of that church, something that a lot of us don't talk about, how much support that they gave him while he was in prison, while he was going around from church to church and everybody was talking and just ignoring what he was saying. They continue to support him. They continue to build him up. They continue to give him anything that they could to help his ministry At a time when nobody else would, and he thanked them, because everything that built up to that day gave him the strength and the courage to continue on, gave him the reassurance that even though he knew he was in prison and was probably going to die, they helped him get through it.

Much like this summer, each one of these scriptures are gifts that each one of you gave to one another and didn't know it. It was a gift that you gave to yourselves, to me, and to everyone. You helped build that confidence; you helped build that reassurance. You helped give food to a hunger that you didn't know existed. You helped give warmth and love and guidance.

So many times, we think that the words that we share go unheard. The things that we do go unseen. And sometimes they do, but it doesn't mean they don't leave a mark. It doesn't mean that they don't give strength and reassurance to somebody who needs it at the most inopportune time. A simple smile, a simple hello. Children's laughter in the background. It's amazing. Those things can give you peace, and I hope the scriptures this summer did that. I hope that they gave you peace. They gave you the strength and the knowledge that God's word isn't just meant to be heard. It's to be shared. It's to be filled within you. It's for you to also share.

We know Paul went through a really hard time. He went from being the exact opposite of who he was to a wonderful, I'm not going to say caring because I never bought the Paul was really ever caring, but he at least tried. He tried to share God's word in ways that people would understand and that they would hear.

I think that's what God really means for all of us. We want to treat one another as we want to be treated. We want to live a life that we can look at the end and say we did our best. And we do that by our actions, our deeds, and sharing God's word. Even when we don't realize we're doing it. It's a wonderful message each of you have shared this summer without even realizing you were doing it. It's a way that we can see how much God means to us and how much it means to us to share it in a way that is so easy that we don't even know we're doing it. We get to be a part of the wondrous world we live in, knowing that it's crumbling and falling. And there are so many people that are lost and searching for a way, and as many times as we say we can't help. You just by being us, we are helping others. That's reflective in all we do around us, because God gives us strength. God gives us family. God gives us community, and God gives us a reason knowing that even though we're suffering now, it'll get easier. We'll understand. It'll be a much better time and a much better place. And in my world, my world is a much better place thanks to all of you. Thanks to the people that are here. The people that sent us messages online, asking questions because we don't even think about the people that we touch outside of that screen. I'm pointing there, because that's where the camera is. I'm not pointing to anyone in particular. Our little family seems so small sometimes, but our touch is so grand. And I think you should celebrate the wonderful works that you do in God's name.

Let us pray.