

I Am An Echo Devotion

LCMS Servant Events

I Am An Echo:Theme Devotion

Scripture Readings

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me – practice these things and the God of peace will be with you.

Philippians 4:8-9

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death on a cross. Therefore, God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Philippians 2:5-11

Echoing the Humility of Christ

Can you remember a time when you were little and you unexpectedly discovered an echo? Maybe a school hallway or church sanctuary that was empty? Feel free to share that time with the group. Children love to shout nonsense into hollow space and laugh as their words repeat over and over.

Our theme this week is “I am an Echo.” Not the silly echo of a child, but an echo of Jesus. Jesus is the Perfect Source, God who took on flesh and lived a perfect life. Jesus lived, taught, healed, and performed

miracles. In His perfection, Jesus showed us how we should act as His followers.

→ Reread the Scripture Readings for today. What characteristics of Jesus are we called to echo?

We are the echoes of Jesus Christ, but echoes are imperfect things. Unlike the clear voice of the source, echoes are distorted and incomplete. Our echoes of Jesus are distorted because of our sinful nature.

→ Which of the characteristics from the list above do you find most difficult to echo?

→ Name or write down a time when you tried to live up to one of Jesus' characteristics and failed.

Even when echoes are imperfect or incomplete, by the power of the Holy Spirit, they can still share important news. Echoes can show the love of God, and they can point people back to the Perfect Source of our forgiveness.

We serve because Christ first served us. Philippians 2:5-11 show us how Jesus humbled Himself, even to death on the cross, on our behalf. He died for all the times we failed to follow Him and have imperfect echoes. It is only because of Jesus' humble death and resurrection that we can echo His love in service to others.

→ Where is one place God is calling you to echo His humility this week?

Reminder

Today I will seek to echo Jesus, even in my imperfection, because my echo can point people back to Jesus, the Perfect Source.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, You are the Perfect Source. We thank You that You sent Jesus as the perfect example of what we should echo in our own lives. We confess that we fail to love and serve our neighbor as we would ourselves. We echo You imperfectly. Fill us with Your Holy Spirit that we may serve others in Your name and point them back to You. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Monday Devotion

Scripture Readings

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me – Practice these things and the God of peace will be with you.

Philippians 4:8-9

And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God. Philippians 1:9-10

What is Our Echo?

In our theme verses, Paul lists the way our echo should sound. We are called to echo what is true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable, excellent, and worthy of praise. Why? Because these are the characteristics of Jesus.

→ What is your favorite Gospel story where you see Jesus show some of these characteristics?

Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. The life He led was honorable, just and pure. As the King of Kings, Jesus is worthy of praise. Jesus shows Himself to be all these things, displaying the fruits of righteousness. He did all this perfectly and still took all our sins on Himself, so that we too could be made righteous (2 Cor. 5:21).

In Philippians 1:9-10, Paul is praying for the Christians in Philippi who were seeking to be echoes of Jesus in a sinful city. That prayer is the same for us today. In our baptism, we have been made righteous before God and marked as His children. God's Holy Spirit is within you, helping you to grow in love and echo Christ more and more. When we fail, we are offered forgiveness and cleansing from unrighteousness. In God's Word and Sacraments, you are strengthened and renewed in faith.

→ What are some ways we can remind each other that we are filled with God's Holy Spirit?

In a broken world, it can be daunting for Christians to echo the characteristics of Jesus. In fact, it SHOULD be. Our world is sinful, and so are we. There is no way we can echo the characteristics of Jesus out of our own strength and abilities. As hard as we try, we will never measure up.

The best news is that when I echo Jesus, I'm using His righteousness, not my own. Because of Jesus' great love for us, the Holy Spirit empowers us to echo these characteristics to others. Even better, the more we echo, the more love abounds in us and we become clearer echoes of Jesus.

→ How might God ask you to echo Christ's love in a new way today?

Reminder

Today I will try to echo a new characteristic of Jesus because He has filled me with righteousness that comes through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, You are perfect. You sent Your Son Jesus to earth to live a perfect life and die in our place. Thank You for making us Yours in Baptism, and offering us forgiveness for our sins over and over again. Help us not to give into sin but to be empowered by Your Spirit to echo You in a sinful world. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Tuesday Devotion

Scripture Readings

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me – Practice these things and the God of peace will be with you.

Philippians 4:8-9

For it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. Philippians 2:13

God of Peace is with you.

I am always worried about something. From the moment I get up (after setting three alarms because I am worried I will miss one), I am worried about getting everything done. I worry about friends who are sick or in trouble. I worry about if my clothes match and about the state of our sinful, unpredictable world. Worry is something each of us struggles with in one way or another.

→ What are you worried about today?

We might even worry that our echo of Jesus Christ is too broken or incomplete to really do any good. When I share my faith, especially with someone who doesn't yet believe, I worry about using the right words. I worry about how they will respond when I speak about sin and our need for a savior. I worry about making sure they know the good news of Jesus' death and resurrection. But God never meant for us to worry. Our God is a God of peace.

Paul reminds the Philippians that as they practice echoing Jesus, the God of Peace will be with them. The God of Peace is with you too, through your baptism. God sent the Holy Spirit to work in you. God is with you to comfort and guide you every step of the way.

Our God gives us peace every day. He forgives our sins when we mess up. He gives us the words to say when we don't know what to say. He reminds us that ultimately, He is in control. We can have peace, not worry, because the God of Peace is with us always.

→ How does God's peace change your perspective on what worries you?

Reminder

Today I will remember that no matter what is happening, no matter where I am at, the God of Peace is with me.

Prayer

God, You are the God of Peace. You forgive our sins and remind us daily that we are not alone. Help us to leave our worry behind and trust that You will use us to do Your work in the world. Help us to trust the Holy Spirit to give us the words to speak so others may know You as well. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Wednesday Devotion

Scripture Reading

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me – Practice these things and the God of peace will be with you.

Philippians 4:8-9

Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God. Philippians 1:27-28

Learned, Received, Heard, and Seen

In 2015, The Common Sense Census found that teens consumed an average of nine hours of media every day. That's more time than sleeping and more time than is spent with parents or teachers on any given day. 46% of youth polled at the 2016 LCMS Youth Gathering said they use SnapChat "too often". 27% said the same about Instagram. We take in an extraordinary amount of media every day, more than any generation before.

→ Create a list of the media you take in every day. How much time do you spend on social media? Television and Netflix? Video Games?

What we fill our minds with has a direct effect on what we do and say. Our theme verse gives us a list of characteristics on which we should be focused. If God has called us in our baptism to be echoes of Jesus, our eyes and ears should be filled with things that keep us focused on Him.

Too often we fill our minds with things that don't focus us on Jesus. Instead we focus on celebrities, the latest craze, and ourselves. We break the First Commandment. We get in the habit of filling our minds with whatever comes across our feeds, our screens, and our Spotify stream. It's easy to say the media we take in doesn't affect us, but we can see the ways it affects our words and actions.

Technology and media aren't inherently sinful, but the way we use them and what we focus on can be. God calls us to be mindful of what we fill our minds with and gives us the Holy Spirit to keep our minds focused on the things of God.

→ What media might I need to take a break from so I can be better focused on the things of Jesus?

→ How might I need to change the way in which I use media to better reflect Christ?

Reminder

Today I ask the Holy Spirit to help me stay focused on the things of Jesus and not on the stuff that distracts me from Him.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, there are so many noises, images, screens and feeds around us. Many of them take our mind away from You and put it on ourselves or others. Forgive us when our focus waivers from You. Help us to fill our minds with things that point us back to You every day. In Jesus' Name we pray, Amen.

Thursday Devotion

Scripture Reading

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me – Practice these things and the God of peace will be with you.

Philippians 4:8-9

That you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vein or labor in vain.

Philippians 2:15-16

Echo in a Crowded Room

Let's get science-y! Echoes are made when sound waves hit a solid reflecting surface and return to our ears undisturbed. If you put stuff or people in between you and the surface, the sound waves will be disturbed and die out. That's why you get echoes in places like hallways or canyons but not in rooms with furniture or people. There is one place you won't ever find an echo: in a crowded room.

There are a lot of disturbances out there that can block our echo of Jesus Christ. In our second verse today, Paul is reminding the Philippians of just that. They are forgiven children of God and that makes them a light in a dark world. The people around them can be crooked and twisted, working to block out the message of God. There is so much sin and brokenness in our world today too. We act and speak as echoes of Jesus, but it can be as frustrating as trying to get an echo in a crowded room.

→ What things have you seen and heard personally or in the world that tries to block our echo of Jesus?

People who hear your echo of Jesus may dismiss you as misguided. Your service may seem useless against the broken world. People will twist and dismiss your words and your actions. In a crowded room, it can seem like no echo will ever get through.

We serve because Christ first served us through His life and death on the cross. God empowers us with His Spirit to echo Jesus, no matter the response from the world around us. We are to hold onto God's Word and our faith in Jesus' forgiveness of our sins. It is not for nothing; it is for that day when we will get to see Jesus face to face.

→ What encourages you to continue to echo Jesus even when it is hard?

Reminder

Today I will remember my baptism by letting the Holy Spirit help me echo Jesus even when it is hard.

Prayer

God who loves us, You make us blameless and innocent through Jesus' blood on the cross. You forgive us and fill us with Your Spirit so that we can be Your echoes in the world. Help us not to be frustrated. Help us to continue to echo You and You alone, even in a crowded room. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Friday Devotion

Scripture Readings

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me – Practice these things and the God of peace will be with you.

Philippians 4:8-9

Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Philippians 3:12-16

Practice Doesn't Makes Perfect

What one thing does every coach, every teacher, every director, and every parent say when you are learning something new? Practice makes perfect. Whether you are learning your lines for the school play or learning to shoot the perfect free throw, the only way to get it right is to try over and over again. When it comes to learning a new skill, practice makes perfect.

→ What is something you had to practice hard to perfect?

→ What are you currently trying to perfect?

In our theme verse, Paul says to “practice these things”. Practice echoing the characteristics of Jesus Christ. In the second verse today, Paul uses athletic language to talk about pressing on toward the ultimate goal of heaven. But Paul does not say, “Practice makes perfect.” In fact, he says that even he, with all his practice, hasn’t quite gotten it yet. The great apostle Paul was never a perfect echo of Jesus, but filled with the Holy Spirit he kept straining towards it.

When we are echoes of Jesus, practice doesn’t make perfect. We are never going to perfectly echo the humility of Jesus. No matter how many times we try or how much we prepare, we are never going to perfectly echo Jesus’ purity, loveliness, excellence. Only Jesus is perfect, and no amount of work or practice on our part will get us close to that perfection. If we were able to be perfect, we wouldn’t need Jesus’ redemptive death on the cross.

→ How does knowing we aren’t perfect free us to echo Jesus in a new and different way?

→ How do we show our gratefulness to God for His forgiveness?

That doesn't mean our echo isn't important. We continue to practice and strive because God uses our imperfect echo to share the Gospel and care for our neighbor. Paul doesn't want us to give up because we won't ever get it right. Instead, we press on to the goal by serving, sharing the Gospel, prayer, worship, and being an example to others. Our echo of Jesus will never be perfect, but we practice and practice in response to God's great love for us.

→ Why does our echo of Jesus matter if we can't do it perfectly?

→ How can you be an echo of Jesus today?

Reminder

Today I will recognize that I will always fall short of perfection and live in gratitude for the perfect saving life of Jesus.

Prayer

God Almighty, we come to You imperfect and broken. We have tried to reach perfection on our own and we have failed. Remind us daily that You sent Your son, Jesus, to die on the cross to forgive our imperfection and sin. Cover us in Your forgiveness and grace so our imperfect echoes point others to You. In Jesus' Name, Amen