

Today is a very humbling first for me--speaking God's Word, PUBLICLY!! And, I confess it has been overwhelming, confusion/fear if I have interpreted today's readings correctly and downright scary! But, as God has so often done in my life, I have prayed He will not forsake me yet again, and I have had the good fortune of having Pastor Hahn's guidance.

Why pray? Simply stated, but a short answer is: Because Jesus did. Author Philip Yancy further noted, and I quote: "He bridged the chasm between God and human beings." Preparing for today's Word, and reading the scripture, has led to my exploring prayer and what it does to and for our lives.

For just a few minutes, let's place ourselves sitting in the Upper Room with Jesus and his disciples along with Jesus' mother and his brothers on the night before he would be crucified:

What does the image of this group look like in your mind's eye?

Do you feel the pain Jesus' mother must have been feeling?

Is it noisy in the Upper Room?

Or, are the disciples talking quietly, awaiting Jesus to speak further about his going to his Father?

Do you sense fear among them? Would you be fearful?

What stands out most to you in this reading?

The unknown by them (and us) can be a frightening, foreboding experience. But, Jesus offers an earnest prayer to God about his desires for them.

Are you feeling that something amazing is about to happen?

Do you feel God's presence in that Room? In this sanctuary?

In today's Gospel, we read a prayer and conversation between Jesus and his Father. He is praying FOR God's protection of these chosen persons after his crucifixion. He prays that his Spirit would remain with them as they were about to go out speaking, baptizing & teaching in his name. The world at that time, & not so different today, was dangerous especially for the

downtrodden, the hungry and the sick. Jesus' magnificent prayer for them was his greatest gift to them.

Something I've never forgotten was when our former church members, Tommy & Anita Kennedy, felt they were no longer physically able to contribute to the life of our church. The "only thing (they felt) they could do" was to pray for those on our weekly church prayer list. It didn't seem to be enough to them as they had previously been active in any church they had attended. They were quickly reassured that their prayers are the highest calling they can do! Our weekly Prayer List seldom reflects changes in the global and national concerns. Those on our list in need of God's strength & healing also remain fairly constant. However, what we are doing, as a community of faith, is interceding on their behalf for God to embrace, guide, provide them comfort and possibly healing. God knows their needs.

In the reading of Acts, the disciples through prayer were determining God's will to ascertain who would be selected as the 12th disciple. While both Barsabbas & Matthias had

witnessed Jesus' ministry and resurrection, casting lots was their way of choosing the disciple God had chosen. Their listening to, & trusting, God's will enabled them to act faithfully when Matthias was chosen.

Last month our book club read, *Sensible Shoes*, by Helen Garlough Brown, about 4 women with varying relationships and in varying stages of their lives. They meet at a retreat center in western Michigan. The story gives background behind each of their lives and faith journeys. They were introduced to a variety of ways to communicate with God which slowly led them to understand that they were never alone. The Holy Spirit walked beside and within them. While there, they, each in their own time and way, discovered that God is IN them and they are IN God. This was an eye-opening concept to me--that I, and you, are IN God! How can that be?? In his book, "Prayer, Does It Make any Difference?", Yancy writes that "prayer invites God into my world and ushers me into God's." We are IN God's world.

When we are attentive to God walking alongside/in us, joy is ours! As written in Verse 3 in today's Psalm: "They are like trees planted by streams of water, bearing fruit in due season," This speaks to our being fed and nourished by God our entire lives-- a metaphor to water flowing through us. By praying and reading scripture, God enables us to withstand even when we do not receive the answers to prayers right away, or as we had anticipated. Our fruits are harvested and our spirituality evolves. Prayer, like streams of water, nourishes us and helps us to know God.

Perhaps the (my) hardest aspect about prayer is the "listening" part. A quote from Martin Luther states, "If the Holy Spirit should come and begin to preach to your heart, giving you rich and enlightened thoughts.. .be quiet and listen to him who can talk better than you; and note what he proclaims and *WRITE IT DOWN. . .*" At this mature stage of my own life, I believe that is excellent advice! As we have learned through scripture, waiting for God's answers or guidance can be long, even hundreds of years; the feeling of desolation might arise. However, It might

be that God is about to bring you through trials leading into a deeper understanding, and very likely, direction AND answers.

Again, let's return to the Upper Room, Jesus further prays in verse 20 for those who will come to believe in Jesus through the disciples' work. He prays that all of them may be one, just as his Father is in him and Jesus is in Him. Because of their witnessing, belief and faith, they received the same glory as Jesus received. These 12 chosen individuals would face great obstacles as they witnessed to others. But, with God's Holy Spirit, they would be able to confront them and know they were never alone bringing the Good News about Jesus to unbelievers.

I am sharing a daily devotion from a book entitled "Jesus Calling, Enjoy Peace in His Presence" written by Sarah Young. This author changed her prayer life from a monologue to dialogue with Jesus. Another new idea to me! Throughout her journey waiting in God's presence, praying for others' needs

and her own, she increased her intimacy with Him and has discovered the balm of Jesus' Peace in her life.

She writes as if Jesus is speaking to us: “Learn to listen to Me even while you are listening to other people. As they open their souls to your scrutiny, *you are on holy ground*. You need the help of my Spirit to respond appropriately. Ask Him to think through you, live through you, love through you. My own Being is alive within you in the Person of the Holy Spirit. If you respond to others' needs through your unaided thought processes, you offer them dry crumbs. When the Spirit empowers your listening & speaking, *My streams of living water flow* through you to other people. Be a channel of My Love, Joy & Peace by listening to Me as you listen to others.”

Prayer can, and does, make a difference, whether it be for you alone, for those you know, or might not know, in need of God's wisdom, guidance, strength and healing. God is patient and awaits hearing from us. May God's will be present in your

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lives today and the days ahead. And, let Jesus hear what is on,  
and in, your hearts. He is waiting. Amen.



