

## **“Pray Always”**

**First Presbyterian Church  
Pastor Dave Carlson  
October 27, 2019**

**New Testament Lesson: Luke 18:1-8**

**Old Testament Lesson: Habakkuk 1:1-4**

The combined adult Sunday school class just finished their study of Habakkuk. During last Sunday’s class – as we looked at passages such as the one Vicky just read for our Old Testament lesson, where it says, “O Lord, how long shall I cry for help and you will not listen?” – when we looked at such passages, Judy Lewis said she often feels that way about the state of our nation today.

Of course, Habakkuk was crying out amidst the fall of the Israel nation at the hands of the brutal, murderous Babylonians, led by King Nebuchadnezzar. And Luke, in today’s New Testament lesson – where the widow cries out for justice before a self-righteous, corrupt judge – that is actually giving voice to the anguish of first-century Christians suffering under a heartless Roman emperor.

We know this is about the faith of Christians amid seemingly hopeless situations – and not about an actual widow and judge – because Luke tells us this. He says, “Then Jesus told them a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart,” the Parable of the Widow and the Unjust Judge.

Parables are made-up stories with a lesson. As Luke said, Jesus is teaching about the need to pray always. Why do we need to pray always? What do we get out of praying always? And how are things changed when we do pray always? Why is it needed, what do we get, and how are things changed through prayer. These are the questions we will explore during our sermon time today.

First, why do we need to pray always? The short answer is that God answers prayer in his time and his way. In the vastness of God’s existence, there is always something more to pray for.

In other words, God is eternal and this means that God works beyond the limits of time and space. When your prayer is not answered in the way that you like – when a loved one gets ill and dies, when you lose your job and can’t find another one, when the love of your life just isn’t feeling it – in any time of grief, need or loneliness, remember God is bigger than all of it. In the face of illness and death, remember that true life is with Christ, eternal in the heavens. In the face of need and want, remember that our true vocation is Child of God, and as such, we are loved and cared for regardless of our wealth and status.

When faced with rejection and loneliness, remember that God’s love for you is greater than anyone’s hate or disinterest, and God will show you this through the people he brings into

your life. Remember, and pray always, so that you will see and appreciate how God is answering your need in ways far beyond what we could hope for or conceive. And yet, if the answer to our prayers is beyond what we fully conceive and enjoy right now, what do we get out of praying always? That's our second question for today.

When we pray, our actions and attitudes are more fully aligned with God's will. And so really, our prayers are central to God working out his plan and purpose. Take for instance what Robert Brown writes in his book "Making Peace in the Global Village." Describing the Vietnam war protests of the 1960s, Brown tells about a meeting between Henry Kissinger – one of the architects of Nixon's Vietnam policy – and Sloane Coffin, a chaplain at Yale University. Kissinger challenged Coffin, asking, "How would you get the boys out of Vietnam?" Coffin answered, "Mr. Kissinger, our job is to proclaim that 'justice must roll down like water, and righteousness like a mighty stream.' Your job, Mr. Kissinger, is to work out the details of the irrigation system."<sup>1</sup>

In other words, God has told you what the Lord requires – "To do justice and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God" – and it's our job to help bring about justice, kindness and mercy, and to do so with humility before God, or suffer the consequence – consequences not brought on by God, but by us and our misguided ways. Until more people get that – until all people get that – we need to pray always.

By praying always, we reorient our priorities and allegiance toward God and God alone. And in doing that, we get an inner sense of peace that comes from having faith in God, over and above faith in our world, which always disappoints, when it stands opposed to God's will, which too often it does. Too often the world seems hell bent against God, doesn't it, in both big things and small?

Take for instance another little parable I ran across, but not in the Bible. I call this The Parable of the Greedy Judge and the Two Crooked Lawyers. A judge takes his seat in his chambers across from the opposing lawyers. "So," he says, "I've been presented – by both of you – with a bribe." The lawyers squirm uncomfortably. "Attorney Leon, you gave me \$15,000. And you, attorney Campos, gave me only \$10,000." The judge reached into his pocket and pulled out a check. "I'm returning \$5,000 to Leon and we are going to decide this case fair and square." An equal \$10,000 from both of you. Fair and square – not!

When we lose sight of true justice, when we allow immorality to rule the day, we get what we get – a nation of injustice and corruption. That is not what God would have for us.

---

<sup>1</sup> Robert McAfee Brown, Making Peace in the Global Village (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1981), 19.

Our country needs to be in prayer, always, seeking to reorient our priorities and allegiance to God and God alone, the God of justice, the God of kindness and mercy, the God of those who serve the Lord with a sense of selflessness and humility. That is what we get out of praying always – we get a world of justice, kindness and humility, even if we can't yet see it.

But how are things really changed for us when we pray always? That's our third question for today. When we are living a life of prayer we are living into the sacred covenant between God and humanity, that he would be our God and we would be his people. Through prayer, we become God's people. It is only by constant prayer – by having an element of prayer in all we say and do – that we rise above our earthly limitations and become people – not of the flesh – but people of the Spirit, people of God.

When you hold everything in prayer, you draw closer to God. Being closer to God, you can actually recognize and celebrate just how close God is to you – to us, just how much God cares for us. As theologian Frederick Buechner said, when you call upon God in prayer, “even if he does not bring you the answer you want, he will bring you himself. And maybe,” says Buechner, “... that is what we are really praying for, ...at the secret heart of all our prayers.”<sup>2</sup>

In prayer, we draw closer to God. That is how things are changed for us - for you. And what more could we truly want, what more in life could we truly need? Why do we need to pray always, what do we get out of it, and how are things changed? We need to pray always because our prayers align us with God's will. When we are aligned with God's will, we get a world of justice, kindness and humility.

And for us, individually, we get a closeness to God that comes in no other way. We are changed through prayer by drawing closer to God. And what more could we want or truly need than to be close to God and to know and feel just how close God is to us, through prayer. Amen.

---

<sup>2</sup> Buechner, Frederick, “Prayer,” *Wishful Thinking: A Seeker's ABC* [San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, (1973), 1993], 87).

## PASTORAL PRAYER

O God, you call us into agreement with one another. You urge us to end the divisions among us. How is this even possible?

With fists clenched and jaws set, we grip tightly our perspectives and opinions, ready for battle with any who would challenge us.

We worship the god of Being Right. Desperate to belong somewhere, we claim allegiance to tribes of our own making – tribes of doctrine, of politics, of social status.

Our quarrels reach your ears, and even as we stammer out our excuses, we know it is not your way.

Your way is excellent. Your way is relationship, discipleship, neighborliness, servanthood.

Your way transcends the dim truths we might fashion from earthly assets. And your way seems impossible for us to imagine.

Help us to imagine it, O God. And where we can't, imagine it for us. Imagine it within us. Show us our true identity in you, and help us to live up that identity.

Make us into your people. Let us be your faith community, a tangle of faults and foibles yet held close by you and set firmly on your path of peace.

Also, Lord, we pray for those in need of an extra special measure of your care and compassion, and especially those we know and lift up in your hearts.

May they know your sense of peace, feel your healing touch, and receive your blessings in abundance.

We pray this, using the words that you taught us, saying:

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.  
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts,  
as we forgive our debtors;  
and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.**