

Monday March 31, 2025

Philippians 4:6

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.”

Prayer serves us best, when we engage in it regularly. Jesus teaches us the importance of prayer. He prayed regularly by himself, and he left us the prayer that he taught his disciples long ago, the prayer we recite together, known as the Lord’s Prayer. The Lord’s prayer reminds us of God’s sovereignty. We are reminded of the movement of God in the world to bring about the realities of Heaven right here on the earth. We release ourselves to the Holy Spirit when we pray. Prayer is a way of us showing that we understand we are not alone.

One of our youth was invited to pray at the 11:00 service. I sat with her to teach her what we call the ACTS method of prayer. It is modeled after the Lord’s prayer in rhythm. The (A) stands for Adoration, (C) Confession, (T) Thanksgiving, and (S) simplification. She prayed so beautifully during that service that many were brought to tears. I know she must have had things to lift in prayer for herself, but she prayed over our congregation, our leaders, and she named the name of every one of our youth in her prayer.

Remember, prayer serves us best, when we engage in it regularly. We are more connected with God and we are more connected with each other when we hold fast to regular prayers. I sent home some food from a meeting with one of our members last week. She shared with me later that there was someone who needed it more. The blessing of food was delivered to just the right person and my guess is this was because of the regular prayer for her. God awakens us to the abundance of life through our prayer and inspires us with the steps we can take to experience life more fully. Keep constant in your prayers.

For your reflection:

1. What do you need to lift to God in prayer?
2. Who might you need to surround with prayer?
3. Consider praying for our congregation, for our leadership, for us to have the resources we need to continue our mission of building bridges between Christ and our community.

Prayer:

Spirit of the Living God,

You are the author and perfecter of my faith. You are my provider, my way maker, and my source of all that is good. When I fall away from prayer, draw me back in. Remind me that you never leave me or forsake me. Thank you O God, for your constant presence in my life.

Amen

Tuesday April 1, 2025

Proverbs 14:7-8

“Stay away from a fool, for you will not find knowledge on their lips. The wisdom of the prudent is to give thought to their ways, but the folly of fools is deception.”

Well, today is April Fool’s Day! It is going to be hard to stay away from all the tricksters in the world! I love a good April fool’s joke, but I have also witnessed some of them go dreadfully wrong! I had a friend who had a job interview scheduled and her roommate thought it would be funny to mess with her shampoo. You can imagine the roommate squabble over that. The pranks I love most are those that are done by people you would never expect to be up to something.

The proverb today is a word of wisdom to live by. It is giving guidance on where to seek knowledge in your life. People surprise you. Certainly, we know to be leary of seeking wisdom from people who are foolish with their choices, but wisdom can come from unexpected places. Some of our children and youth say things that bring a smile to my face with their wisdom. Our Special Gathering friends with disabilities say things sometimes that move me almost to tears. I learn a lot from people who are very different than me.

My colleague in ministry, Scott Smith, was here last week for a conversation we entitled, Facing our Finances! Scott is known for being a jokester! He once sent me balloons with pictures of him on them when I was in the hospital. Scott is a jokester, but he is no fool. He is very wise and very knowledgeable. We had a great conversation with he and thirty of our members. It is good to circle yourself with people who have a good sense of humor and people who are wise. If they are both, even better, but wisdom can be witnessed in others. Always remember that wisdom can also take you by surprise.

For your reflection:

1. When has wisdom caught you by surprise?
2. Who are the people you trust to give you guidance in your life?
3. Who might you need to share your wisdom with?

Prayer:

God of Love & Laughter,
May we survive the pranks of this April fool’s day. May we draw close to those who are wise and be influenced by them in our living. Surprise O God with where your seeds of wisdom are planted in those around us. Let love and laughter fill this day and may we bless you and others along the way.

Amen

Wednesday April 2, 2025

Hosea 12:6

“You must return to your God; maintain love and justice and wait for your God always.”

Love and justice are two hallmarks of God’s activity in the world. Jesus embodies both in his life, death, and resurrection. The work of justice, I would argue is for all, but it is especially important for the Christian community. A simple biblical definition of justice is “right relationship.” Desmond Tutu used to tell a story about a community where loving people were rescuing babies from a river. Before they would rescue one another would be floating down the river after it. Eventually some broke off from the rescue team, traveled upriver to work to stop the babies being thrown in the river. This story helps us to learn the difference between mercy ministries and justice ministries.

Last night the Bright organizing network should have met for its Nehemiah Action night. This is when action is taken to hold elected officials accountable towards goals that have been set. One of the goals is to improve reading levels for third grade children. Statistics show that 44% of third graders in Brevard County are not reading at grade level. The other goal is to improve housing options in Brevard County. 33,000 families pay more than half of their income on housing. Almost every week I have a conversation with someone in our community who is struggling to find housing they can afford. One of the first conversations I had with the principal at MILA involved a story of teachers needing more affordable housing. I encourage you to ask questions about the impact of this night of action.

There is no real way to escape politics in our religious life. We might be able to avoid table talk conversations with family, but if we are following Jesus, we follow him to houses of power and we follow him in advocating for those who do not have the ability to advocate for themselves. Justice is about partnering with God to right wrongs in the world. Jesus entered right into the power dynamics of his day. He flipped a table after witnessing the way the poor were being taken advantage of at the temple. Jesus’ ministry reveals to us his priorities. Our challenge is to be sure our priorities align with the priorities of Jesus and the Kingdom of God.

For your reflection:

1. Consider spending some time reading through one of the gospels. Record all the places Jesus goes. Notice the people he meets with.
2. What would motivate you in righteous Christian anger to flip a table like Jesus did?
3. What does biblical justice look like to you? How might you engage in it?

Prayer:

God of Justice,

Open our eyes to the realities of our neighbors. Allow our ears to hear their cries. Work within us, that we might grow in our ability to partner with you in your work of making the realities of heaven alive all around us on this earth.

Amen

Thursday April 3, 2025

John 16:33

“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble, but take heart, I have overcome the world.”

Jesus' hope in this scripture is that those who love him might have peace. When we reflect on the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, we reflect on the miraculous power of God to overcome the “powers that be,” in this world. We find peace when we remember all that God has already done. We are not promised that everything in our lives will be perfect. As Jesus says, we will have trouble. The truth we hold fast to is that we are not alone. We are stronger with God and with each other.

Years ago, I was scheduled to travel to Zimbabwe with Bishop Hope Morgan Ward for an ordination service for pastors there. The area we were traveling to was struggling with a cholera epidemic, the President of the country was dangerous, and people were really struggling. When we took our seats on the plane, we reflected on the reality that most of the people at the airport were leaving Zimbabwe because of the struggle, and we were flying in. I asked her if she was worried and she said, “No, strangely I feel a deep sense of peace.” I responded by saying, “Me too.”

There are things that we are meant to do, places we are meant to stand, to honor the truth of the realities of the Kingdom of God. We are not all called to travel to other countries to be with people there. Most of the time we are called to be disciples right in the place where we live. Bishop Ward and I were able to visit with a community in Zimbabwe. I will never forget a mother asking us to pray for her and her children. All five of her children had cholera and none of them were expected to live. This woman had seen trouble in her life. The look on her face when we placed our hands on her and her children and prayed over them was a look so filled with thanksgiving. I remember processing on the way home that we were instruments in that moment, standing with them as representatives of our God.

For your reflection:

1. When in your life have you experienced the presence of God during times of trouble?
2. Have you ever experienced that deep sense of peace that the scripture speaks of?
3. Take a deep breath in and a deep breath out. Consider spending 1-5 minutes in quiet. Set an alarm and simply be present with God.

Prayer:

Holy God,

In moments of struggle, in times of trouble, remind us to breathe out all that brings us stress, and breathe in your holy spirit. Allow us to feel your presence and deliver us that peace that passes all understanding.

Amen

Friday April 4, 2025

Esther 4:16

“Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days...”

Fasting is a spiritual discipline that we often must build ourselves up to. Not everyone understands fasting and the importance of it in our spiritual walk. Esther clearly understands the importance of fasting for herself and the importance of calling others to this practice in times of great trouble. She is facing a life-threatening act and she calls upon her people, the Hebrew people, to fast and pray on her behalf. She is essentially calling upon the power of God to save her people.

I was having coffee with a friend in South Africa one Friday. Desmond Tutu was gathering with some of his priests in the same café. I had just recently returned from a trip to the US. He approached me and asked about my time at home. He then said this to me, “Well, I’m sorry that you are going to hell.” I looked at him with a stunned expression on my face. He continued to share with me, “my priests fast on Fridays.” He then burst into boisterous laughter. Desmond Tutu is known for being a jokester. He is full of life and joy. Yet, he does fast every Friday. It is his way of making sure that he is committed to a life of prayer and God’s Kingdom.

I learned a lot from that moment with him. I learned that joy and laughter should be a part of our rhythm of life. Joy and laughter help us keep good perspective and they also bring healing. I also learned that fasting should be a part of my regular spiritual discipline. It is not always easy for me to fast from food. Yet, I do know it is important for me, because in the moments of fasting from food, I feel God’s strength rise in me. I don’t fast from social media during lent, like some do. The reason I don’t is because I feel called to be a guide through the Lenten season for others. I fast from social media after lent. I have fasted during times of big decisions in my life, and I have always been thankful afterwards.

For your reflection:

1. Reflect for a minute about how you feel about fasting. Is it something. You are comfortable with? Is it an area where you feel you might need to grow?
2. Wonder about a way you might be able to enter a regular fast from something that takes up too much of your time, so that you can redirect that time.
3. Consider spending at least 1-5 minutes in quiet. If you struggle to find quiet, maybe put on some instrumental music that will help you find rest.

Prayer:

God of us All,

You reign over this beautiful earth we call home. You shower us with blessings. You are with us in moments of great suffering and moments of great joy. Grow us in our capacity to reshape our lives through regular practice of spiritual disciplines. May your spirit guide each of us towards the fast that will be most meaningful in our growth. **Amen**

Saturday April 5, 2025

2 Corinthians 9:7

“God loves a cheerful giver.”

I was preaching at my home church years ago. It was a sermon that was going to be reviewed by the institute of preaching. My pastor, Jim Harnish, leaned over before the service began to tell me to invite the congregation to prepare for the offering after the sermon. I stood delivered the message and then sat down directly following. He looked at me with piercing eyes communicating without saying a word that I forgot something. I gasped inwardly, stood up, went to the pulpit, and said, “I’m so sorry. I forgot to ask for your money.” The sanctuary erupted with laughter and Jim told me later that it was one of the highest giving Sundays in their history. God does love cheerful givers!

Giving is important in our life of faith. Generosity of spirit is important in our life of faith. When we sit and remember all that God has given us, it is nothing to in return give back to the Kingdom of God through our tithes and offerings. The pastor I served with in South Africa, Alan Storey, shared once about his parents’ commitment to their tithing. He wanted to play a sport at one point in his childhood when things were very tight for them financially. His mother told him that they could not afford for him to play that season. Later, he witnessed her writing a check to the church. When he questioned her, she told him that their commitment as a family was first to God and then they paid all other things.

Alan did get to play many sports as a child. Things worked out later for them to do that, but his story has always stayed with me because I did not grow up as a church person. I had to learn over time about the importance of financial giving in our commitment to God and our community. Now, I give at least 75% of my tithe to the general offering and the rest is to areas I want to support. If the church is in a tight space, I redirect all my tithe to general and sometimes give above and beyond to areas of interest. I do this because the general offering is the budget we commit to as a congregation. When I was a missionary, I learned so much about the difference giving makes to Kingdom work. I literally survived on the generosity of others. We work out our giving with God.

For your reflection:

1. Do you feel comfortable with your discipline of giving? Are there ways you need to grow?
2. Consider spending time in the scriptures with the passages that teach on giving.
3. Wonder about the ways God might be calling you to redirect resources or bless another through a gift.

Prayer:

God of our every blessing,

You provide for us our every breath, you decorate our lives with the beauty of your presence in every bit of your creation, and you are with us when we are in need. Grow us in our generosity of spirit, that we might grow in support of your beautiful kingdom rising all around us on this earth.

Amen

Sunday April 6, 2025

John 12:1-8 (CEB)

I invite you to read this scripture, using the practice of Lection Divina. Read it once through to allow the words to stand alone. Read it a second time through listening for a word or phrase that stands out to you. Read it a third time through wondering what God might be calling forth from you in response to this scripture. There is a message in the text for us all. In preparation for worship, wonder about these questions:

1. What does this scripture teach us about God?
2. What does this scripture teach us about the relationship between God and humanity?
3. What does this scripture teach us about the relationship between humans?

A poem from me to you:

Extra

That seemed like an awful lot
Maybe even too much
Why would you do something,
Something so extravagant such
As that?

What gain do you have
Is there something in
This for you?
Are you trying to be
Extra
More special than everyone else?

What do you see
That maybe I am missing?
Is there something about
This person that you
Are being extra
With?

What do you see
That maybe I am missing?
Might he be the one,
the one who risks it all?
Might he be the one that
defines the gift of
giving for us all?