**November 29: Why Give: Prayer Part 1: 8:30 am service**

**Scripture- Deuteronomy 8: 7-18**

**Preacher: Kirstie J. Engel**

We are concluding our why give sermon series; a series that is looking at why we might give in the areas of presence, prayers, gifts, service and witness and this week I am inviting us to look at why we might give in the area of prayers.

So questions that this sermon will attempt to address on an individual level are; why should we pray, what should we be praying for and how our individual prayers impact our lives and the world?

The passage that we will be including in our conversation as a consideration and springboard for our thoughts, comes from Deuteronomy.

And why I am excited about this particular passage is because although this scripture does not directly talk about prayer, I believe that it may address the question of why we should pray.

For in taking in all that our Israelite friends have endured through their wilderness experience for some weeks now, I believe the successes that we are reading about today is nothing but the result of what prayers can do.

For as I reflect on my ministerial training over the years, I remember in my first ministry context that I served in Wichita KS; Saint Mark UMC; one of the common phrases that we would say as a congregation before prayer time was ; **much prayer, much power; little prayer, little power, no prayer, no power.**

So the significance for why I mentioned this memory, is to let you know that **I believe in the power of prayer.**

In fact my testimony and how I came to be where I am in life….is because of prayer;

Whether it is Prayers that I have lifted up from my own mouth;

Or prayers from my family and close friends when I felt too burdened to be able to open up my mouth;

**Prayer is what** sustains me;

**Prayer is what** uplifts me;

**Prayer is what** informed me;

**Prayer is what** keeps me from losing my mind or losing my hope;

So Church, I believe that **there is power in prayer.**

Furthermore, we can see the power of prayer in our passage this morning.

 For when the Word tells us that God was bringing the Israelites into a good land, **a land** with flowing streams,

**A land** with springs and underground waters welling up in valleys and hills,

**8 A land** of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey,

**9 A land** where they may eat bread without scarcity,

**A land** where they will lack nothing,

**A land** where they can eat their fill; where beforehand they were literally starving;

 I stopped by to suggest that all of these good things that were about to happen to these people were ultimately a direct result that came from prayer;

For if you remember the scene where Moses approached the burning bush that could not be consumed ( Exodus 3);

And in Ex 3:7 the Lord tells Moses, *“I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering.”*

This passage as I am experiencing it today reflects an answer to the Israelites’ prayers.

And so some may be tempting to interject here and say to me, “Kirstie this does not say that the people prayed to God, but it says that they cried to God.”

And this is when I would like to implicitly address some of the myths that typically come from people’s thoughts of what prayers should sound like;

For although I appreciate and accept the wisdom from Jesus that the ultimate prayer that humanity should strive to embody is the Lord’s Prayer;

This is because this prayer truly covers what the follower of Christ should be focused on; praises and adoration to God first, spiritual/physical sustenance; forgiveness, confessions of sin and hope for transformation;

I would also like us to consider that our cries, meditative silence and daily conversations with God are also forms of prayers that God appreciates and pays attention to.

In fact, according to **St**. **Augustine**, we **need not** **pray** for what we need, because God already knows what we need before we even ask. Instead, we ought to **pray**, he suggests, to increase our desire for God, and so that we might be able to receive what God is preparing to give us.

So sometimes how you and I begin to unpack this process that our theologian here is suggesting, **it takes some** crying;

**Sometimes it takes some** deep soul searching;

**Sometimes it takes** tons of conversations between us and God as we work out all of our experiences, questions, thoughts and growing pains;

**Sometimes it may take** sitting silently absorbing the quietness of the Spirit of the Lord

So prayers you see, does not have to contain fancy language or even require a vast amount of biblical knowledge.

On the contrary prayers, are how you and I connect with God.

Furthermore, prayers can consist of journaling, silent meditation, crying, reciting the Lord’s prayer or simply saying the word help and more!

Regardless of the prayer discipline we choose to adopt, God understands us;

God knows us and will meet us where we are;

And the great thing about the prayer process, is the longer we spend in discovering what our prayer language is, the more that God will continue to enhance our prayer experience

**Through prayer** we will discover how truly loved we are;

**Through prayer** we will discover how important we are and to God’s mission;

**Through prayer** we will begin to understand the impact that the Spirit of the Lord has on us and the world.

This is the essence behind the term **much prayer, much power.**

For **it is through** **prayer** that we begin to see how our metaphorical mountains will move from here to there;

**It is through prayer** that we find our true purpose and in many ways ourself.

So I can go on and on about the benefits of prayer but I will stop here and let this settle in all of our hearts and minds.

So shifting back to our text, we are seeing the power of prayer at work.

The people are about to experience better days.

But there is one thing that is being lifted up to the people in the mean time;

Verse 12 as I paraphrase some it says;

When you have eaten your fill and have built fine houses and live in them,

**13**and when your herds and flocks have multiplied,

and your silver and gold is multiplied,

and all that you have is multiplied, **do not forget the Lord;**

**Do not forget the Lord** andexalt yourself instead,

**Do not forget the Lord** your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery,

**Do not forget the Lord,** **15**who led you through the great and terrible wilderness,

**Do not forget the Lord,** who made water flow for you from flint rock,

**Do not forget the Lord16**who fed you in the wilderness with manna

**17 Do not say to yourself**, “My power and the might of my own hand have gotten me this wealth…..

**Do not forget the Lord** Israel;

**do not forget the Lord** First UMC;

**Do not forget the Lord,** Lincoln Nebraska;

**Do not forget the Lord** oh great Universe ;

Oh where oh where would we all be if it weren’t for God’s Grace and Mercy and Love?

*It is by God's grace I am what I am, you are who you are; and the grace that God gave all of us was not without effect.* (1 Cor 15:10)

Let the church say Amen!

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**November 29: Why Give: Prayer Part 2: 10:45 service**

**First Lesson:Psalm 65**

**Gospel Lesson: Luke 17: 11-19**

We are concluding our why give sermon series; a series that is looking at why we might give in the areas of presence, prayers, gifts, service and witness and this week I am inviting us to look at why we might give in the area of our prayers.

So questions that this sermon will attempt to address on a collective level as a church community are; why should we pray, what should we be praying for and how our collective prayers as a church impact our communities and world?

The passage that we will be including in our conversation as a consideration and springboard for our thoughts, comes from the gospel of Luke.

Now our gospel today does not directly address prayer, but I stopped by to suggest that this does not mean that prayer is not what has fueled this outcome.

Unpacking our gospel, this incident is found only in Luke.

 It happened as Jesus and His disciples were **on the way to Jerusalem** for the climax and completion of the Jesus’ ministry.

The Word tells us that As Jesus entered a village in this area, He was met by ten lepers, **who stood afar off**.

This separation was required by the Law (Lev. 13:45, 46).

They called loudly to Him: **Master** [*epistata*], **have mercy on us** (v. 13). No one else could help them.

In reply Jesus said: **Go and show yourselves unto the priests** (v. 14).

Only the priest could legally pronounce them clean (Lev. 13).

But while they went, **they were cleansed**. Blessing came in the path of obedience, as it always does.

One of the ten, when he saw that he was healed, returned to Jesus, **with a loud voice glorifying God** (v. 15)—a typically Lukan expression.

He fell on his face at Christ’s feet, thanking Him; **and he was a Samaritan** (v. 16).

 Once more Luke places the foreigner in a good light, as he does in the Parable of the Good Samaritan. This was part of his emphasis on God’s interest in the Gentiles as well as the Jews.

So where I am seeing prayer occur is when the lepers called out in verse 13; ***Jesus, Master have mercy on us.***

And this is because as I shared in the earlier message; prayer in my eyes comes in many forms.

Now in our ministerial context, the Lord’s Prayer hold a lot of value as it should.

This is because Jesus encouraged us all as his disciples to use this prayer because it essentially covers all of the important things that God holds value for as well.

The Lord’s Prayer starts out with praise, acknowledgment and adoration for God.

Then it moves to prayers for our kingdom on Earth as it is heaven; prayers for sustenance; prayers of confession and forgiveness and prayers to remain spiritually centered and holy.

So this is an important prayer for the church to retain an model.

However, I believe that there are other aspects of prayer that also needs to be affirmed and acknowledged.

According to **St**. **Augustine**, we **need not** **pray** for what we need, because God already knows what we need before we even ask. Instead, we ought to **pray**, he suggests, to increase our desire for God, and so that we might be able to receive what God is preparing to give us.

So sometimes how you and I begin to unpack this process that our theologian here is suggesting as a church community, **sometimes** **it takes some** crying;

As a church it is ok and highly encouraged for us to cry out at the injustices of our world for it should disturb us.

**Sometimes it takes some** deep soul searching as a church; to ensure that we are living out our purpose for God’s mission and ministry.

**Sometimes it takes** tons of conversations between us and God as we work out all of our experiences, questions, thoughts and growing pains; for what we seek to do by God’s grace is not always easy to do or get right the first time or even the 100th time….

**Sometimes it takes us** sitting silently absorbing the quietness of the Spirit of the Lord as we wait to hear our next steps from the Lord;

So when our friends the lepers cries out when they see Jesus, Master save us; this is a prayer.

And our response would be the priests in our passage.

For Jesus told the lepers to go and show themselves to the priests and as a result the lepers were made clean. (Vs 14)

Now this is when this passage gets a little murky for me as it may for you as well, because we don’t know what those priests said or did so that the lepers would be made clean.

It most often involved some sort of ceremonial act similar to the OT days involving birds, cedar wood, scarlet. And possibly hyssop.

But I have a theory as it applies to us as the church.

You see so many times, the greatest hurt that a person experiences is from the church.

 For I have encountered so many stories where people talk about how they felt judged and unseen in their churches, hence why they don’t go to church.

In fact one of my most memorable books that I read in my ministerial career was the book ***They like Jesus but not the Church by Dan Kimball.***

What a powerful title the book alone has without you or I really needing to unfortunately read the book.

Because I am certain that some of us could write the book with all of the church hurt we have endured;

(Just this past Tuesday for instance I had a woman from another country who inboxed me after listening to my sermon; blaspheming me and calling me everything but a child of God after sentencing me to a life of horrific death in hell.

It hurt… although I wished it didn’t.

It was clear that she was speaking from her own culture and traditions.

But nevertheless it hurt.

My response to her was to reply in a scripture; *No weapon formed against me shall prosper (Isaiah 54:17)*

I thanked her for her feedback and then wished her a Happy Thanksgiving with the smiley emoji and hearts.

She did not respond back.)

So getting back to the book it highlights how many people today, especially among emerging generations, don’t resonate with the church and organized Christianity.

 Some are leaving the church and others were never part of the church in the first place.

Sometimes it’s because of misperceptions about the church.

Yet often they are still spiritually open and fascinated with Jesus.

So this is a ministry resource book exploring six of the most common objects and misunderstandings emerging generations have about the church and Christianity.

The objections come from conversations and interviews the church has had with unchurched twenty and thirty-somethings at coffee houses.

So in reading this book and looking back at our gospel with the role of the priests it occurred to me that although we would not most likely perform a ceremony with birds and hyssop to let people know that they are in a safe space of love and transformation as a result;

Perhaps a metaphorical ceremony of some sort should be relayed to those the church have deemed as unclean for whatever the reason;

A ceremony that would affirm and restore the loving sacred worth of all people;

A ceremony that is built on the foundation of complete love and inclusion;

A ceremony that is built on humility, transparency and forgiveness;

A ceremony that might lift others up verses tear them down.

This is why I appreciate pastoring a church that is professing to be a Reconciling church to all people.

But the aha moment is that the church cannot fulfill this mission without prayer.

For none of us are perfect by any means;

Not to mention old habits of church tradition and culture that have felt exclusionary are difficult to change over night.

So it will take prayer as a church for wisdom…

It will take prayer as a church for guidance;

It will take prayer as a church for flexibility;

It will take prayer as a church for a transformation;

To ask God to help our work and efforts reflect love to the entire world;

It will take prayer for guidance on how those who have been made to feel unclean can trust that they can come to the church and their wounds be mended.

So this is why I love this passage with the perspective that the Holy Spirit has given me

For the church to be able to reset this narrative in the hearts of some of those who have been made to feel unclean will take work.

The fact that only one of the lepers in our gospel came back to say Thank you, tells us just how tough our work will be.

But I stopped by to say that I believe in the power of prayer.

I believe that the Holy Spirit will continue to guide us as we seek to meet people where they are.

For I will reiterate as I preached in the earlier service (so check out the message for context) **but where there is much prayer, there is much power;**

**Little prayer…little power…**

**No prayer…no power.**

**Let the church say Amen!**

Let the Church say Amen