

October 28th, 2018

Pray for Love, Show Love

Prayer

May the words of my mouth, be meditations of our hearts, and be always acceptable unto thee. O Lord our strength and our Redeemer. Amen.

Sermon

I always find it fascinating the way Jesus engages with the people. He usually has the insight into the person that he's engaging with to go to a deeper level. But this encounter is a little different than most. We have Jesus and his disciples in Jericho. It's very quick the way Mark says it. They came to Jericho. The next sentence is they're leaving Jericho. I must assume that Jesus stayed, and he taught. Probably did some healing. It's time for him to leave and now we hear that it's not only Jesus and his disciples, but a large crowd are following Jesus out of Jericho or wherever he is going to next.

And the blind beggar who sits by the road because that is the only way he can provide for himself. He can't work because he can't see. So, he sits by the road and he listens. He has probably heard that Jesus has been teaching. That possibly Jesus has been performing miracles. So, when he hears that it's Jesus and the disciples and the crowd that's going by, he begins to shout out. Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me. He didn't say heal me. He didn't say I'm blind help me. Have mercy on me. And the people wanted him to shush, be quiet. Don't bother the teacher, he's going to the next place. He shouts even louder, son of David, have mercy on me.

So, Jesus stops, and he asks that the man be brought to him. Then he does this interesting thing. Now obviously this man is blind. You would think that Jesus, son of David, son of God, would say I can heal that for you. But he doesn't he asks him a question, "What do you want me to do for you?" Remember he's only asked for mercy. What do you want me to do for you? And Bartimaeus says what seems to me, obvious what he wants. Let me regain my sight. Let me see. Let me do for myself again. Let me live a whole and complete life again.

And Jesus doesn't do anything other than say, "Go your way. Your faith has made you well." He can see. Then we are told by Mark he followed him on the way. It doesn't say he traveled with them. It doesn't say he followed him on his way. But followed him on the way. He became a believer in who Jesus was and he followed him on the way. It always fascinates me that he asks the question, "What do you want me to do for you?"

In the Wednesday evening program for the adults, we've been studying prayer. The Lord's prayer. This last Wednesday Debra Kosche was leading the class. And it was about asking. What do we ask God? How is it that we come to God in prayer and what do we ask for? And immediately it made me think of this encounter between Jesus and Bartimaeus. Well what do you want me to do for you? What's your prayer? What is it that you want God, the son of God to do for you? And I'm trying to think of how Bartimaeus may have answered that differently. He could have asked for his life be made easier. That he would receive all the money and such that he needs to have an easy life. To pay for someone to take care of him. To pay for all the food and such and housing that he needed for the rest of his life. But he didn't. He asked for his sight, so that he could do for himself.

He asked for a healing that would have been very unexpected. And yet he had enough faith that Jesus, the son of David, was capable, was able to heal him. And in all the cases that we hear of in the scriptures when someone comes to Jesus who is broken. Who is blind. Who is lame. Who comes to Jesus and asks for healing, they receive it. Even some who have come on behalf of someone else. Would you heal my son or daughter? They are healed. And that gives us hope and that makes us feel good about how God answers prayers. What it never really goes into is what happens when someone of faith prays for something like a healing. And it doesn't take place.

What happens when we ask and yet we do not receive the answer that we are looking for? I had to experience that early on in my journey to become a priest. I had not yet been ordained. I was doing my CPE (Clinical Pastoral Education) at the University of Kentucky Medical Center. Because I was young, I guess, and the CPE person that came to seminary thought that I needed a quick course to gain experience in a hurry. I'm thinking that's what he said to the supervisor at UK Medical Center. I was put in charge being the chaplain of the central intensive care unit. And just for a kicker because I had a son that was less than a year old, they also put me in charge of pediatric ICU. I'm still trying to forgive those people.

But in the short three months that I was at UK Medical Center in the ICU, two young men not much younger than myself at the time were brought in with gunshot wounds to the head. One had a large family that came and stayed at the hospital. And their prayer and their asking of me as the chaplain on duty. Pray for a miracle. Now the doctors have already done all that they can do. They have him on a ventilator. There using drugs to keep his heart beating. There trying to give every opportunity for any healing to take place. None is happening. Yet the only thing that the family could ask for was that miracle. To heal this

catastrophic trauma to the brain. That their son, brother could be brought back. To be healed of this wound. That never took place. They were people of faith. Their prayers were sincere. They couldn't quite understand why God would have allowed this to happen to begin with. And truly could not understand why God would not answer their prayers that they were asking faithfully. What do you want of me? What do you want me to do? I want you to heal my son, my brother. I want you to take this away. That never took place.

I was too young and too immature on my journey to be able to offer them much. Now might be a little different. The second wound was the same kind of thing. But only his mother was there. And again, she asked me to pray for a miracle. Pray that this might be healed. Pray that he might become the son that I have known and loved. And the doctors of course talked to them, talked to me. And medically that was not going to happen. He was not going to be healed by what they had to offer. And so, they turned to prayer. The mother turned to prayer. And I dutifully offered prayer for his healing. But knowing in my heart of hearts that that was not going to take place. And it didn't. Twice. Young men, younger than myself, died. Even though their families prayed for that miracle of healing.

What do you want me to do for you? Now I might have suggested that you know, sometimes God's plans are beyond what we can see and know and understand. That it's not simply a matter of faith. Jesus, after all one of the prayers that we know that Jesus prayed was in the Garden of Gethsemane. That this cup might pass from him. That he might not have to go through the ordeal that was set before him. And it wasn't because of the lack of faith. But the obedience to God and trust in God that the cup was not taken away. That he did go through the trauma, the arrest, beating, and death on the cross.

Because God had a bigger plan. A plan that we can't always see. A plan that we can't always understand. So many times, in dealing with pastoral situations over the years, the prayers of the faithful have been lifted. Prayers for loved ones, that they might be healed. That they might find peace. That they might find a way to live together. And those prayers never seem to be answered. So many times, the question has turned in, "What am I doing wrong?" Do I not have enough faith? Have I done something to displease God?

Not unlike Job that we've been hearing about the last few weeks. Trying to figure out why this would happen to him. And I am convinced that it's not based on the amount of faith that I have but, on the plan, that God has. That somehow, someday, and maybe this is what we should be asking as part of our prayers. Just as Jesus said not my will but your will be done in the garden. Might help me to know and understand how this can change who I am to address the world around me. How can I be changed by what's going on to be a better servant? So that I can be a better follower. So that I can be a more faithful Christian on the way.

It doesn't mean that we give up the prayers of our hearts. But it does mean it gives room for God to be trusted to do what is best. Because we can't always see, know, and understand the best course. It's about trusting in God. And allowing that to take precedence in our prayers and in our life.

As I was working on this sermon about asking and prayer. Yesterday, we got word that someone's hatred so filled their hearts and mind. And he went into a synagogue with the intent on killing as many Jews as he could. And one wonders with all that has taken place in our country. And the killings that have taken place. Why now? Why one more? Why are the prayers of the faithful not being answered?

Haven't we all asked for God to intervene? To take the hatred that motivates any person to take the life of someone else. To hate so deeply that their lives seem inconsequential. Haven't we prayed that there might be a lessening of the hatred and the discourse that's going on in our country. So that we might find a way to love and care for one another regardless of race, creed, color. And yet it goes on. One asks oneself, "What can I learn? What can I do?"

If you've been on Facebook, if you follow the Episcopal church. I'm unapologetically Episcopalian. I love that. The presiding bishop Michael Curry has a video and I encourage you to look at it. And he talks about prayer. Each time after this happens, pray, pray, pray. Then nothing happens, or it happens again. But I echo what our presiding bishop said, continue to pray. Pray that the hearts that are filled with hatred might be filled with love instead. Understanding, trust in God.

But Michael Curry also said something else, act. Not only pray for love, show love. Reach out. Be neighbors. Accept the people around us. Share with them, encourage them. Give hope to them, regardless of what they look like. Regardless of the religion they practice. Regardless of where they come from. What do we ask when we pray?

So many times, it's asking for something very personal. Sometimes it comes across as something selfish. I encourage you to ask for peace for those who have been affected by such tragedies as what happened yesterday at the Tree of Life Synagogue. I ask that you pray for those whose hearts are filled with hatred. That they might find another way. That that might be replaced with compassion and caring for all human life. I ask that you pray for all those who are trying to find the path that God has for them. That they might be able to put their trust in God. Even when that path takes them to a place that they are not familiar with. I ask that you pray for our leaders who are trying to bring us a kind of

unity. It sometimes doesn't seem like much. But it's putting our trust in God. To lead, to guide, to heal, and to love.

Gregory Hein – Rector

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