

ORDER OF WORSHIP with TEXTS
Sunday, May 24, 2020
Homework: Prayer

I. **Countdown** (Homework Square Graphic)

II. **Prelude** (Diane)

Shall We Gather at the River

arr. Craig Curry. © Lorenz Corporation.

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III. **Intro Reading: 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 CEB**

Rejoice always. Pray continually.

Give thanks in every situation because this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

IV. **Welcome** (Rachael)

V. **Opening Prayer** (Rachael)

Holy God, even from a distance, our spirits are gathered together to worship you.

Bless us with your presence and open our hearts to your Spirit. Hold us in grief, sustain us in waiting, help us to consider the needs of others, and draw us always nearer to you. We pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.

VI. **Song/Hymn**

Sweet Hour of Prayer

UM Hymnal 496, Public Domain

Words: William Walford; Music: William B. Bradbury

Sweet hour of prayer

Sweet hour of prayer

That calls me from a world of care

And bids me at my father's throne

Make all my wants and wishes known.

In seasons of distress and grief

My soul has often found relief

And oft escaped the tempter's snare

By thy return, sweet hour of prayer

Sweet hour of prayer

Sweet hour of prayer

Thy wings shall my petition bear

To him whose truth and faithfulness

Engage the waiting soul to bless

And since he bids me seek his face

Believe his word, and trust his grace

I'll cast on him my ev'ry care

And wait for thee, sweet hour of prayer

VII. Video Montage about Prayer (several folks from congregation)

VIII. Reading: Isaiah 40:26-31 CEB

Look up at the sky and consider: Who created these?

The one who brings out their attendants one by one, summoning each of them by name.

Because of God's great strength and mighty power, not one is missing.

Why do you say, Jacob, and declare, Israel,

"My way is hidden from the Lord, my God ignores my predicament"?

Don't you know? Haven't you heard?

The Lord is the everlasting God, the creator of the ends of the earth.

He doesn't grow tired or weary. His understanding is beyond human reach,
giving power to the tired and reviving the exhausted.

Youths will become tired and weary, young men will certainly stumble;

but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength;

they will fly up on wings like eagles; they will run and not be tired;

they will walk and not be weary.

IX. Song: Dave

Your Love is Strong by Jon Foreman

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X. Video: WHAT IS Prayer (Harris)

Basically, praying is talking to God.

And since God is always with us, we can pray anytime.

When you're not used to it, praying can feel a little bit strange, almost like talking to yourself. But the more you practice, the more comfortable it gets. Soon, you start to feel like God is listening.

Maybe you even start to feel like God is telling you something when you pray, and you learn how to listen better to God.

A good way to start practicing prayer is to choose a few times during the day when you will pray, like when you wake up, when you eat a meal, or when you are going to bed. If you need help, you can memorize a simple prayer to say every time.

When I was in preschool we had a fun prayer. We said, "God bless this bunch as we munch on our lunch!" It was easy to say and easy to remember.

You can also choose to pray whatever words come into your mind. When you are scared, you can say, "God, I'm scared. Please help me."

When you are sad, you can say, "God, I'm sad. Please comfort me."

God loves to hear your prayers. They don't have to be fancy or perfect. God loves you and cares about how you are feeling. God also wants to know what you are thankful for. Prayers are a good way to say thank you.

The most important thing is just to pray. And pay attention. Are you feeling more connected to God? Do you feel comforted? Are you more grateful for things?

Prayer has a way of doing that to us.

God, thank you for prayer. Amen.

XI. Offering Intro/Prayer of Dedication (Laura...already recorded)

XII. “Offertory” Music: *Heaven Came Down* (Bruce and Michael with Diane)

John W. Peterson. © 1961 John W. Peterson Music Company.

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XIII. Video Testimony about Prayer (Kay Van Dyke phone call)

XIV. Gospel Reading: Mark 6:39-52 CEB

He directed the disciples to seat all the people in groups as though they were having a banquet on the green grass. They sat down in groups of hundreds and fifties. He took the five loaves and the two fish, looked up to heaven, blessed them, broke the loaves into pieces, and gave them to his disciples to set before the people. He also divided the two fish among them all. Everyone ate until they were full. They filled twelve baskets with the leftover pieces of bread and fish. About five thousand had eaten.

Right then, Jesus made his disciples get into a boat and go ahead to the other side of the lake, toward Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd. After saying good-bye to them, Jesus went up onto a mountain to pray. Evening came and the boat was in the middle of the lake, but he was alone on the land. He saw his disciples struggling. They were trying to row forward, but the wind was blowing against them. Very early in the morning, he came to them, walking on the lake. He intended to pass by them. When they saw him walking on the lake, they thought he was a ghost and they screamed. Seeing him was terrifying to all of them. Just then he spoke to them, “Be encouraged! It’s me. Don’t be afraid.” He got into the boat, and the wind settled down. His disciples were so baffled they were beside themselves. That’s because they hadn’t understood about the loaves. Their minds had been closed so that they resisted God’s ways.

XV. Sermon (Rachael)

Homework: Prayer

When it comes to prayer, people who do it a lot tend to fall into some patterns. There are praisers, who constantly lift up the glory of God for no other reason than to celebrate who God is. Thankers, who could pray for days and days about the many blessings they have received. Stream of consciousness-ers, who encounter God mid-thought and ride the thought train wherever it happens to go. Meditators, who quiet everything and listen in stillness. Intercessors, who are compelled to the ministry of prayer on behalf of others. Power-invokers, whose prayers always build the energy in a room. Check-listers who want to accomplish several things with each prayer as efficiently as possible and move through a series of items, often including several of the categories I mentioned already.

And just as there are many types of prayer, which any one of us may engage more or less often, so there are many different formats our prayers can take - ritual, routine, beads, bowed, kneeled, showering, driving, walking, breathing, writing, spontaneous or pre-written, fresh or ancient, at the same time every day or whenever the impulse strikes. All of these are good. All of these are prayer. All of these draw us nearer to God, individually and as a community.

This morning I asked Pastor Laura to start reading the gospel lesson right in the middle of a story, then into the beginning of another story. Two stories, set back to back in Mark's gospel, that aren't specifically about prayer and yet teach us so much about the power of prayer and perhaps also about what can happen when we neglect prayer in our life together with God.

The stories she read to us are some of the more well-known stories in the Bible, even among those who don't frequent the book. We don't always choose to read Mark's telling of them, as he tells the short version of things, without a lot of the plot twists or added details. Jesus feeds a crowd and Jesus walks on water. Two miracles in one day. These are stories for sermons about miracles. What do they have to do with prayer?

Let's start with the story of Jesus feeding a crowd of thousands who had gathered to hear him preach with only five loaves of bread and two fish, all that the disciples had available to them. We picked up at the moment when Jesus gets to miracle making. He tells the disciples to organize the hungry people, thousands of them according to the gospel writers, into smaller groups of fifty to one hundred. Then, once the large unruly crowd has been seated in smaller community groups, on the green grass, Jesus makes a miracle. And that miracle starts with prayer.

Jesus took those five loaves and two fish and he looked up to heaven. He turned to the God and creator of the universe, the one who cares for the hungry. And Jesus offered a prayer of blessing on the loaves before they were divided up, along with the fish, to be passed out among the crowd.

The miracle began with a prayer. A blessing over what God had provided. A blessing over this community of people who had gathered. A mission to feed the hungry crowd.

At this moment, as the miracle is happening, it is covered in prayer and taking place right in the center of community – the community of faith prays together. In so many ways we pray together. The community of faith hears one another's confessions with love and compassion. The community of faith prays for healing, anoints with oil, trusts that God will give healing and forgiveness. Together we ask God for miracles. Together we listen for God's voice to lead us forward. Together we remember Jesus with the words he taught us to pray.

When we practice prayer as an essential skill of our faith, we do so to draw nearer to God, but also to draw closer to each other so that we can be a true covenant community, formed and strengthened in mission and vision and purpose. If we truly wish to live out the powerful vision

God has placed before us of providing hope to our community, especially now when we must find new ways and new tools, we must pray together. For patience, for forgiveness, for healing, for comfort, for strength, for unity, for reconciliation, for power. The community that prays together is bonded in Christ. The community that prays together experiences the power of God in small and in big ways - miraculous ways. The community that prays together is fortified for the times when storm and sorrow approach, and is prepared to sit in the dust for as long as it takes when grief and loss overwhelm. The community that prays together saves lives, honors stories, loves beyond what the world can imagine, offers hope, and hears God's voice. The community that prays together experiences the kingdom of God.

And there's more.

After the crowds are fed and the gathering comes to an end, prayer continues. Jesus knows the source of the miracle he has just performed. He knows where to go for rest, for renewal, for time to listen and prepare for what is to come. He goes off by himself to pray. He takes time to step away from the crowds and the momentum and all the work that remains undone. To realign himself with the divine.

We, too, need to practice time alone with God. The world is a noisy place. Many voices compete for attention, power, control. Prayer is where we find comfort in God's presence and where we find alignment with God's vision. Prayer strengthens us and gives us direction. In his book, *We Make the Road by Walking*, Brian McLaren describes it this way:

The world won't change unless we change, and we won't change unless we pull away from the world's games and pressures. In secrecy, in solitude, in God's presence, a new aliveness can, like a seed, begin to take root. And if that life takes root in us, we can be sure it will bear fruit through us... fruit that can change the world.

Prayer is something we do together AND something we do alone. Prayer is something we do because we believe God can change the world AND because we believe God can change us. Prayer is something we do out of gratitude for what is right AND something we do when nothing feels right and the only place we know to turn is to the creator of the universe.

Of course, while Jesus is taking just one evening off, just one evening to himself... of course that's when the disciples find themselves in a terrible storm. And let's not minimize it. It sounds like it was a very bad storm - bad enough that experienced fishermen were struggling against the wind and the waves.

Jesus went out to them, walking on the water. And get this - Mark says that Jesus planned to walk past them. They were taking the boat across to the other shore, and he was planning to walk past them and meet them over there on the other side after he had a little time. A little time to clear his head. A little space. A stroll on the water.

The disciples, seeing Jesus coming toward them walking on the water, reasonably assumed that he was a ghost and they became terrified. Perhaps they had been watching too many spooky movies on Netflix. Or perhaps it had all just been too much for them. Crowds, miracles, and now a storm.

It had been so easy to trust God back on land where they were safe and fed and Jesus was right there beside them. Where they could see him and he could explain what he was doing one more time for the disciple in the back.

But out here? This was different. They were in a boat, in a storm, and now a ghost was walking toward them on TOP of the water. And all bets were off. This was too much. Who could practice faith under such circumstances?

Jesus changed plans, came nearer so they could recognize him, and climbed into the boat. The storm around them stilled. They were baffled, utterly astounded, completely amazed. Mark tells us that's because they didn't understand what had happened earlier with the loaves and the crowds. It was easy to believe then, but they didn't understand. Now, the storm quieted and Jesus in the boat, they were still surprised at what he could do. They were still learning who he was and what it would mean to follow him.

This is one more reason, friends, why we pray. We are still learning, all of us, who Jesus is and what it means to follow him. We pray during the storms, and when we are afraid, so that we will be aligned with God and not be overcome by fear. Prayer, in this way, is an act of humility. When we acknowledge that we don't know or understand everything, we are more ready to fall on our knees before God.

In this way, prayer becomes like a cumulative exam in our homework series. When we pray, we learn patience, we approach God with humility, we build compassion for the hungry among us in body, mind, and spirit. We ask for and offer forgiveness.

Paul encouraged the churches in his letters to pray continually, or to pray without ceasing. How could we possibly do this with so much else to do unless prayer is woven into and throughout everything we do? It was Kay, who shared her testimony about prayer, miracles, and hope with us this morning who reminded me recently of this. Pray continually: when someone's face comes into your mind unexpectedly, when you are exercising like Missy or reading like Elaine or journaling like Brittany or setting intentions for the day like Cori. Pray when things are great; pray when things are lousy. Pray to understand God more, pray for God to change your heart. Pray for forgiveness and for the strength to forgive. Pray in the moments of rejoicing and in the storms and struggles and sorrows. Pray alone and pray together.

Pray always. Amen.

XVI. Song: *On Eagle's Wings*

UM Hymnal 143. Words and Music: Michael Joncas

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You who dwell in the shelter of the Lord
Who abide in his shadow for life
Say to the Lord: "My refuge,
My rock in whom I trust!"

And he will raise you up on eagles' wings
Bear you on the breath of dawn
Make you to shine like the sun
And hold you in the palm of his hand

The snare of the fowler will never capture you
And famine will bring you no fear
Under his wings your refuge,
His faithfulness your shield

For to his angels, he's given a command
To guard you in all of your ways
Upon their hands they will bear you up
Lest you dash your foot against a stone

XVII. Pastoral Prayer

XVIII. The Lord's Prayer

XIX. Spoken Benediction, Share Practicing Prayer (Rachael)

XX. Sung Benediction: The Lord Bless You and Keep You

XXI. Postlude

played by Diane Gronewold on the UMCA organ

Praise! by Gilbert M. Martin

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