

A Heart of Prayer

Means of Grace: Part 1 “A Heart of Prayer”

Rev. Cameron D St. Michael – September 13th, 2020

15th Sunday After Pentecost

Readings: Deuteronomy 6:4-9; James 5:13-18; Matthew 6:5-14

Reflection: Psalm 122

Greeting: May the grace and peace of our Lord, Jesus Christ, be with you on this day! I pray that as we join together in worship, in whatever way we join together, that we be united by one Spirit, serving the Father, in the truth of the Son. Let us celebrate the love of Christ that brings us together in God’s care. Praise the Lord!

Prayer: God, we seek you on this day. Guide us as we gather together this day, as you do in all things. As we lift up our prayers to you this day, we ask that our faith be lifted, and our resolve be strengthened. Let us be drawn together that we may worship in the grace and peace of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Reflection: Psalm 122

A Song of Ascents. Of David. I was glad when they said to me, “Let us go to the house of the Lord!” Our feet are standing within your gates, O Jerusalem. Jerusalem—built as a city that is bound firmly together. To it the tribes go up, the tribes of the Lord, as was decreed for Israel, to give thanks to the name of the Lord. For there the thrones for judgment were set up, the thrones of the house of David. Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: “May they prosper who love you. Peace be within your walls, and security within your towers.” For the sake of my relatives and friends I will say, “Peace be within you.” For the sake of the house of the Lord our God, I will seek your good.

(Psalm 122 NRSV)*

We read the words of Psalm 122 and we hear of being thankful. Being glad to go up to worship. Happy to go to the place where they find God. And we also hear about prayer. Prayers for the peace of Jerusalem, the place where God’s people gather. Do you pray for the peace of others? For peace in your own heart? Are there ways you can offer peace to the people around you? Do we pray for all peace, both big and small? Do you act on your prayers?

Prayer: God, our guardian and guide. Give us the wisdom that we may both pray and act according to your will. Grant us the faith we need to forgive others and seek forgiveness. Show us the way that we may find the words that help us and others to heal and find hope. Help us that we may grow in your grace and mercy, and that we may find peace in your love. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Now let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Sermon:

Our scripture readings for today come from the Common English Bible. Our first reading is from Deuteronomy chapter 6, verses 4 through 9.

Israel, listen! Our God is the Lord! Only the Lord! Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your being, and all your strength. These words that I am commanding you today must always be on your minds. Recite them to your children. Talk about them when you are sitting around your house and when you are out and about, when you are lying down and when you are getting up. Tie them on your hand as a sign. They should be on your forehead as a symbol. Write them on your house's doorframes and on your city's gates.

(Deuteronomy 6:4-9 CEB+)

Our next reading is from James chapter 5, verses 13 through 18.

If any of you are suffering, they should pray. If any of you are happy, they should sing. If any of you are sick, they should call for the elders of the church, and the elders should pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord. Prayer that comes from faith will heal the sick, for the Lord will restore them to health. And if they have sinned, they will be forgiven. For this reason, confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of the righteous person is powerful in what it can achieve. Elijah was a person just like us. When he earnestly prayed that it wouldn't rain, no rain fell for three and a half years. He prayed again, God sent rain, and the earth produced its fruit.

(Hebrews 11:1-6 CEB+)

Our final reading is from Matthew, chapter 6, verses 5 through 14.

"When you pray, don't be like hypocrites. They love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners so that people will see them. I assure you, that's the only reward they'll get. But when you pray, go to your room, shut the door, and pray to your Father who is present in that secret place. Your Father who sees what you do in secret will reward you. When you pray, don't pour out a flood of empty words, as the Gentiles do. They think that by saying many words they'll be heard. Don't be like them, because your Father knows what you need before you ask. Pray like this: Our Father who is in heaven, uphold the holiness of your name. Bring in your kingdom so that your will is done on earth as it's done in heaven. Give us the bread we need for today. Forgive us for the ways we have wronged you, just as we also forgive those who have wronged us. And don't lead us into temptation, but rescue us from the evil one. If you forgive others their sins, your heavenly

*Father will also forgive you.
(Matthew 6:5-14 CEB+)*

This is the word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

We start a new series about “Means of Grace” this week. Our first message deals with prayer. Each week we will be looking at spiritual practices that help us grow closer to God as we grow in discipleship. Having a heart of prayer is a foundational part of our faith journey. We know that prayer is important, but do we always pray for the right things? I wanted to begin with the way we pray and why we pray. Because sometimes our why gets a little muddled up. The problem is, is that if we're praying for the wrong things, we're going to be expecting answers that will never come, because we're asking the wrong question. One of the things that we can say is, some of the ways that we're not supposed to pray. And we see that in our Gospel reading from Matthew. That Jesus talks about the hypocrites who stand in the synagogues and on the street corners and they pray out loud so that people can hear them, showing off wanting others to know they are praying for no other purpose than to be seen. And the thing is that that's really not what prayer is about. It's also not about just putting up a big flourish of words just trying to fill your prayer with as many God words as possible. And you know, I've seen so many people do that. And the honest thing is that we've probably all done it at some point or another. We say something in prayer that we think sounds like a God thing to say. Which often means that we're saying something to make it sound like it is out of the King James Bible. And you know, there's nothing wrong with praying that way. I want to stop here and say that it is okay. However, we have to be careful that we don't just heap those in because we want our prayers to sound right. Because the more important part is that they come from the heart. That we don't just have a mouth of prayer, but a heart of prayer.

Now, there's a big difference between reading a prayer that was written to sound a certain way so that it conveys a feeling and forcing yourself to try to pray in a certain way so that it sounds right. Because the important part is that your feelings come through and that the words aren't empty. If there is meaning in them, then that's good. Now it might be that you think the words are all wrong, but the feeling is all right. And that's okay. God will figure it out. Now we do get an example of how to pray. And it's not to fill it up with words, but it's to sort of to ask for the basics. So, here we get the Lord's Prayer. And it's going to sound a lot different than what we usually say. And this is one of those cases where because of how we've learned it and the meaning that we often have and the way that we've memorized it, that any other version is going to sound different. Sometimes it's good to stop and pray in a different way to make sure that we're not lost in memorizing. And I kind of like the way it's worded here: “Our Father who is in heaven, uphold the holiness of your name. Bring in your kingdom, so that your will is done on Earth as it's done in heaven. Give us the bread we need for today. Forgive us for the ways we have wronged you, just as we also forgive those who have wronged us. And don't lead us into temptation, but rescue us from the evil one.” You know, this is one of those important things that I find in prayer is that there's a back and forth in this. It's a petition to God and it's asking God to be active in your life. And that's a lot of what prayer is. It's not just, God, I need you to do this. It's sort of God, I want your will to be done. And I hope it lines up with what I

want. But there's also an active part for us that if we're not forgiving those who have wronged us we can expect forgiveness.

Our other readings for today highlight the importance of prayer. In James, there's reasons to pray and why you should pray. It talks about how the prayer of the righteous person is powerful and what it can achieve. And there's one thing in here that I think sometimes we can lose track of it. It's really a statement that Elijah was a person just like us. And the reason I think we lose track of that is sometimes we look at biblical figures and we place this marker on them that they're no longer people. And I think it's important to remember that God works through people. And that's the whole point. For all I know you could be the next Elijah. That's because the power of prayer is something that connects us to each other and connects us to God. And it strengthens us, and it humbles us, and it builds us up. And we see all those things in Deuteronomy. At first, it may not sound like it's talking about prayer. But to me, this part of Deuteronomy explains prayer. Because you're supposed to love God, and we show God's love by praying. That's one of the ways we do it. And we do it with all that we are. And the words that are always to be on our minds is being in constant prayer. When we recite them to our children, that's teaching prayer. Talking about them sitting around, going about, getting up, lying down, sitting still, working; Let prayer be on you. If we let our words to God be that important, that we always carry them around in our hand. That they be on our head, that our prayers are always meaningful.

Prayer brings us closer to each other and closer to God, because it helps us to stop and think. Because if our prayers are always a jumbled mess, we're not quite sure what we're praying for. And if we're not sure what we're praying for, we should probably spend more time thinking about it. Which means more time in prayer. If our prayers are always about one particular thing, then maybe our focus is off. And maybe that's where our prayer needs to be, in regaining our focus. And I think one of the overall messages that we get from the Bible on prayer is that the line of communication is a two-way street. And it opens up this pathway that helps to strengthen us. And it builds us up. And it helps us. And as we grow in discipleship, our prayers become stronger. And as we pray for others, we grow more connected to them. And as we prayed together, we grow connected to each other in a common cause. And I think that prayer is one of those foundational things that sometimes we do wrong just because we want to make sure we do it.

And, you know, it's tempting sometimes to say, "well, you know, is there a wrong way to pray?" Yes. One of the things that that I have seen others do, and it's that they pray in a way that belittle someone else. And that sticks out to me right now because I think about it when I think about what it means to pray from the heart and not just praying to pray. I think sometimes about the way that we pray for people and sometimes you see street preachers, pray praying for all the sinners and all the terrible things they're doing. I think the problem is, is that if the point of our prayers to point out how awful everyone else is, the real problem is we're telling God how awful we are. Because we're telling God that's all we see in the world. We seek out other people's faults and other people's flaws, and that we need God to open our eyes. I also think it's important to remember that prayer is a two-way conversation. Prayer doesn't always

mean talking. Sometimes praying means listening. And it may just be that you start in prayer and then you listen. I don't know what you'll hear. But I know that God works in mysterious ways, that God works through us in ways that we can't even possibly imagine. But prayer is that conduit. That means of grace that connects us. It's one of the most active we have. And we have so many options for that it's practically endless.

One of the greatest things is that you can pray pretty much anywhere, pretty much anytime. I mean, people want to talk about taking prayer out of fill in the blank. And the only way that happens is if we tell people to stop praying. Maybe it's only inward prayer. But, you know, Jesus seems to put a lot, and I mean a lot, of emphasis on inward prayer and being alone and praying. Honestly, we see more prayer from Jesus in private than we do in public. Because Jesus is always taking time to get away from everybody to go pray by himself. To be alone with the Father. We can do that too. We can find those secret moments between us and God where we can be in prayer any place we are. But we also have to remember that prayer isn't about showing off. It isn't about having somebody lead us so that we pray the right words. Jesus tells us to shut the door and pray in secret. So it's between you and God. I don't need anybody to jump up and lead me in prayer to remind made a pray. I pray all the time. What I do need though, is a reminder that others are praying *for* me because that strengthens me too. It reminds me that as I lift others up in prayer, they lift me up in prayer and we raise up together. Not trying to lift ourselves up, not trying to hoist ourselves up. Prayer is about being humble and bringing concerns before God, admitting that we don't have the answers. Lifting up our concerns for others. Accepting our humanity and seeking divine guidance. And prayer builds a bridge between those, and it builds bridges between people, and it builds bridges between communities, and prayer heals, and it helps. Prayer works. Just not always how we expect it to. And doesn't matter if you read a daily prayer from a book or you always pray spontaneously, or you mix it up or however you pray. The important part is that you do that you take that time to talk, to listen, and to be. To let yourself have a heart of prayer that connects you directly to the God that loves you and keeps you. That as you join together with God you grow in discipleship by the means of grace, strengthening your faith, and building up love for God in your heart that will always guide you and lead you to righteousness. Amen.

Prayer of Confession and Pardon: Lord, forgive us we pray. We come before you as those who have sinned against you in what we say and do. We come before you as those who have sinned against you in what we do not say and what we do not do. It is in our doings and our failings that we seek your grace and your mercy. We haven't loved you how we should. We haven't loved each other how we should. We are a people who are sorry, who humbly seek your forgiveness. Help us to live with one another in your mercy and your grace. Let us always remember the sacrifice made by our Risen Savior, Jesus Christ, that we may understand your deep love for us. May we honor that love by sharing it with one another, loving as you love and caring as you care. Help us to be of one body redeemed by one blood, serving one God. Amen.

Offering: If you are so moved to make an offering, you may send it to the church treasurer, or you may send it to the PO Box listed in the weekly update. If you are interested in online giving, please contact me. We are still the church, and the church still needs your support to keep doing all the important work that we do.

Lord's Prayer

Dismissal with Blessing: We go forth now that we may be ministers of the good news wherever we go. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Until we meet again. **Amen.**

Prayer List

Rev Charliam Renner	Bishop Frank Beard	Our Conference	Our Healthcare Workers
Angie Veach	Diane Washburn	Bill Calvert	Eric Veach
Cathy Devall	Brock McMorris	Ed & Verna Titus	Hayden Kanizer
Henry Catey	Jake Kiser	Laura Eubank Allison	Nancy Sowers
Cindy Cisney	Patti Corder & Crew	Nancy Hoke	Don Wells
Tricia Adkins	Ty Bradley	Ronnie & Elaine Carlen	Pat Nebel
Don Stewart	Earlene Shupe	Brenda Hurt	Anne Winkler Heinrichs
Robert Fryman	Ken Bushur	Family of Brad Winnett	Tommy Jester
Michael & Makenzie Reynolds		Bryce Carlen Family	Bill Gilbert
Richard Durham	Kathy Hanks	Nora Werner & Family	Wayne & Charlotte Carrell
Gary & Mary Winterrowd	Lois Woolever	Mary White	Nick Nichols
Family of Novella Claiborn	Leo Smith	Dan Eubank	
Greg Williams	Eloise Buffenmeyer	Martha Roberts	Charlie & Charlotte Baxter
Paul Schulte	Lyle Whitley		

Offerings may be mailed to your local treasurer or addressed to:

Rev Camron D St. Michael

PO Box 54, Charleston IL, 61920

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Our Current Series – Means of Grace

This series looks at the things that we do to connect to God so that we grow in discipleship.

September 13th – *A Heart of Prayer* – Prayer connects us to God.

September 20th – *Fast with a Purpose* – How should we fast?

September 27th – *A Mind for Study* – Study helps our spiritual growth.

October 4th – *A Thirst for Justice* – Seeking justice is part of the mission.

October 11th – *The Poor and Hungry* – Caring for others is care for God.

October 18th – *Worship Together* – We come together to grow together.

9/13/2020 Update from Pastor Cameron

Greetings! Time for a weekly update!

We are continuing in both online and in person worship at this time. I am thankful for all of the work that everyone has done to make this possible. As we return to in person worship, please contact me for details or see prior weekly updates for all of the current safety precautions.

Numbers have been putting the area into a warning that we may see some restrictions rolled back. Please us caution in everything. I will continue to offer online and printed resources. If you would like to see something that has not yet been part of these services, let me know.

Charge conference is set to be a virtual meeting on October 8th at 7pm. I would like as much of the church council to meet as possible. I will have more details soon about that.

If you know someone who would like to receive printed information every week, please let me know. If you come to this online, feel free to share it.

The church is still active and working, and as such, still needs your financial support. Please contact me or the church treasurer for options. Thank you for your continued support.

Please see the CDC website for information on the Coronavirus.

Please stay safe. You are all in my prayers. I will keep you updated as best I can. If you have any questions, feel free to contact your Church Council Chair or myself.

Rev. Cameron D St.Michael

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