

Worship February 7, 2021

Welcome

I welcome you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

We gather as God's beloved children – however glad we are, however out of sorts we are.
We come together as a people whom Jesus calls into community – so this becomes a time all are welcome.
We have come to give thanks, to pray, to sing – let us worship God.

Opening Prayer

O God who is our strength and safety: Grant us the wisdom to turn to you always
so that we may safely travel the path of life; through Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.

Hymn UMH # 98 (verse 1) To God Be the Glory

Scripture

Mark 1:29-39 (NRSV)

²⁹ As soon as they^[a] left the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. ³⁰ Now Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told him about her at once. ³¹ He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them.

³² That evening, at sunset, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. ³³ And the whole city was gathered around the door. ³⁴ And he cured many who were sick with various diseases and cast out many demons; and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him.

A Preaching Tour in Galilee

³⁵ In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed. ³⁶ And Simon and his companions hunted for him. ³⁷ When they found him, they said to him, "Everyone is searching for you." ³⁸ He answered, "Let us go on to the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do." ³⁹ And he went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons

Meditation Prayer

From 1992 until roughly 2004 I was a part of a group of four women that met weekly for renewal and prayer. Yes, we met weekly for roughly 12 years. As you can imagine in a 12-year period of time we got to know each other extremely well. We met once a week, from time to time the day of the week changed, but we always met about noon and we met at our church. During our times together we laughed, we cried, we solved problems, we talked about our kids and we just shared life together. No matter how the conversation went we always – yes always – shared in a time of prayer. Sometimes we sat in a circle and sometimes we knelt at a railing deeply in prayer.

This week I met with three United Methodist pastors. We came together to plan what we think will be a weekly gathering focusing on self-compassion, taking care of ourselves. At the close of our meeting we prayed, each praying from our heart, each reaching out to God, each giving thanks and praise to our Lord and Savior. As we concluded our time in prayer, I discovered I had tears in my eyes. These were healthy healing tears. The

kind of tears I have not experienced in a long time. I was not crying because I was angry, I wasn't crying because I was scared, I wasn't crying because I had laughed so hard, I was crying because I love God so much and it had felt so good to share that.

The Gospel story of Mark tells us that as well as healing, casting out demons, and preaching, Jesus was in the habit of going off to a quiet place to pray. He felt this need to be in touch with the fact that he was the Father's beloved. He must have found the lack of human affirmation very wearing.

It is not only necessary, but critical that we remain connected with God through prayer.

In 2007 an article written by Audrey Barrick, in the Christian Post Reporter titled, "The Obstacles to Growth Survey" reported on data collected from over 20,000 Christians around the world aged 15 to 88. The survey found that, on average, more than 4 in 10 Christians around the world say they "often" or "always" rush from task to task. I was not one surveyed, but I would certainly agree with these findings. About 6 in 10 Christians say that it's "often" or "always"

While busyness afflicts both men and women, the distraction from God was more likely to affect men than women in every surveyed continent except North America, where 62 percent of women and 61 percent of men reported busyness as interfering with their relationship with God.

Busy-ness is a problem in today's world when it comes to our relationship with God in Christ Jesus, and no one is immune from it, not even people working in the church, myself included. There was an article in the New York Times June 30, 2012 that offered an analysis of

what might be called "the busy trap." Listen to this excerpt: "If you live in America in the 21st century, you've probably had to listen to a lot of people tell you how busy they are. It has become the default response when you ask anyone how they are doing: 'Busy!' 'So busy.' 'Crazy busy.' It is, obviously, a boast disguised as a complaint. And the at ready response is a kind of congratulation: 'That's a good problem to have,' or 'Better than the opposite.'"

The article goes on to say, "Busyness serves as a kind of...hedge against emptiness; obviously, your life cannot possibly be silly or trivial or meaningless if you are so busy, completely booked, in demand every hour of the day...[We're] busy because of [our] own ambition or drive or anxiety, because [we're] addicted to busyness and dread what [we] might have to face in its absence."

Being busy may make us feel important, or it might hide feelings of emptiness or low self-worth, but it does nothing to enhance our relationship with God, even when we are busy in the Lord's work. Just look at Jesus in today's gospel lesson.

Jesus' first day of public ministry was a busy day. That first day went something like this - Jesus began early as he walked along the shore of the Sea of Galilee proclaiming the nearness of the kingdom of God and calling disciples to follow him and "fish for people." With his new companions, Jesus then headed inland a little way to the synagogue in Capernaum for Sabbath worship. There he taught with an authority all his own and then cast out a demon.

Where we pick up this morning, Jesus has now gone with his friends to the home of Simon's mother-in-law. It was the custom after synagogue worship to gather for a midday meal, which would have been the primary meal of the day. Jesus and his companions must have gone to the home of Simon's mother-in-law thinking they could eat there, but what they find is a sick woman, whom Jesus immediately heals. Once her fever is gone, she begins working on that meal, but in the meantime, word is really starting to spread about Jesus and people are coming from all over the place to be healed. So Jesus begins to heal these people, too, one after another, all afternoon and into the night. Jesus was incredibly busy, wasn't he? And this was only on the first day of his ministry!

But look at what Jesus did the very first thing on his second day of ministry. Mark tells us that very early, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, went to a deserted place, and prayed. Busyness, my friends, is not a badge to wear, it is a simple fact of life today that we must learn to cope with. And one of the best ways to deal with the chaos of our lives and stay focused on God in the midst of all the busyness? Prayer.

As Jesus taught in the synagogue, Mark tells us he did so as “one having an authority all his own, not like the legal experts.” After he was done teaching, Jesus showed the power of that authority when he cast out an “unclean spirit” from a possessed man. But here’s the thing, even though Christ is one with God, he still had to be intentional about staying connected with God in order to maintain that power of God flowing through him. Jesus knew that the best way to do that was to talk to God, to get away from all the distractions and all the demands, to kneel in solitude, and to draw from God’s strength in prayer. And here’s the thing, what was true for Jesus is true for us too.

In Jesus Christ, we are promised God’s presence and even God’s power. But this is contingent upon our staying connected with God. Even in the midst of our extremely busy lives, if we do not take intentional time to step away from the distractions and enter God’s presence in prayer, then our relationship with God will suffer, as will our ability to faithfully serve God in the world. There is no doubt in my mind that when Jesus woke up very early on the morning of his second day of ministry with the intention of finding a quiet place to pray, he did so knowing that without that time, he would not have the strength, patience, or power to continue at the pace of the day before; to teach and preach and call and heal. He knew he needed time alone with God, and so he made sure that happened. We can do no less.

I do not know if there is any way I can stress to you all how extremely important the practice of prayer is, even as I acknowledge how difficult it can be. Prayer is considered a spiritual “discipline” for a good reason, and we must be disciplined in order to sustain this practice and remain connected with God. So, I urge you, find what works for you! For Jesus, he needed quiet and solitude. But perhaps you work better if you can say a prayer at any moment; when you pass an ambulance, when you are excited about some great news, when you sense God nudging you in a new direction, and so on. If prayer is easier for you in the moment a need hits you, then lift a prayer to God right then. One practice I have is to immediately pray whenever I hear the helicopter overhead. Do whatever you need to do, but no matter what, make sure you are intentional about connecting with God through prayer. Because here’s the thing, it’s not only about you, but also about the way that Christ touches lives through you. Christ needed to stay connected with God so that he could continue to heal people and to offer salvation.

Numerous studies have been done to test the effectiveness of prayer on patients suffering from similar illnesses. One study had the patients grouped into two groups, the first group of patients, in addition to regular medical treatment, had an assigned prayer partner, who was instructed to pray for the ill patient daily. These prayer partners each knew the patient they were praying for in a personal way, mostly through church. The second group had no prayer partners and simply received medical treatment for their illness. As treatments progressed, each patient was monitored closely, and compared against the progress of the other group of patients. In the end, the results were clear and undeniable. The members of the group who had people praying for them regularly showed earlier a noticeable difference in improvement and quality of life.

When we stay connected with God in prayer, God’s power flows out into this world in amazing ways. It pulls us into a deeper relationship with God in Christ Jesus, providing us with more and more of God’s abundant life, grace, mercy, and love. Then, it energizes us to do the work of God in the world. Do you begin to see how vitally important a disciplined prayer practice is, especially in our busy lives? We lose so much if we are not constantly connecting with God in prayer, and others suffer also.

Look what happened as Jesus prayed early on the morning of his second day of ministry. We get the sense that he was not there long before his disciples were interrupting him, reminding him of the “busy-ness” of his life. They were urging Jesus to return to Capernaum and continue his healing ministry. Certainly, there was work for Christ to do in that place, but Christ came for the world, and the time he spent in prayer that morning energized him for just such work. Though it will mean many more days of preaching, teaching, and healing, Jesus instructs his disciples to head in the other direction, to other villages and towns. “That’s why I’ve come,” he said. And so he went through all of Galilee, preaching in the synagogues, and casting out demons. Jesus was a busy man, but he was able to sustain his work because he took time to soak in God’s presence through prayer.

I urge you to do the same. It’s not going to change the busy-ness of our lives, but it will change us, and it will change others too. And isn’t that what God’s kingdom is all about?

Pastoral Prayer and Lord’s Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, when you walked on dusty roads or sat by glistening waters, you met people where they were.

When you bent down low to touch the leper, or raised your eyes to touch Zacchaeus’ heart, heaven and earth were met.

And so our prayer today is that our world will know your healing touch and your forgiving heart. That those who have been hurt by insincere actions and damning words will hear your healing voice. That those whose lives are filled with dark thoughts, or unimaginable fears, will know your peace.

Walk beside those who are close to giving up hope and where life seems to have no point; where people struggle to make ends meet and fear the bailiffs’ knock on the door.

May children living in sewers or tending AIDS-racked parents feel the touch of a caring hand and an end to injustice and fear.

And may all who weep and mourn, or feel abandoned and unloved turn towards your voice, move towards your arms
and hear the whisper of your presence in the long hours of night.

Inspire us and encourage us to bend down low; to embrace those for whom society has no time or patience.

Raise our eyes upwards to see the struggling patient and the exhausted care giver.
And where young and old stumble and fall, may we be there to offer support, that all will know your love that transcends all others.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior who taught us to pray as one

— *written by Reverend Eleanor Macalister and posted on the Church of Scotland’s **Starters for Sunday** website.*

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name
Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses,
As we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen

HYMN #273 (Verses 1 and 2) Jesus' Hands Were Kind Hands

Communion and Prayer of Thanksgiving

On the night in which he gave himself up for us, he took bread, gave thanks to you, broke the bread, gave it to his disciples, and said:

"Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you.

Do this in remembrance of me."

When the supper was over, he took the cup, gave thanks to you, gave it to his disciples, and said:

"Drink from this, all of you; this is my blood of the new covenant, poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins.

Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me."

And so, in remembrance of these your mighty acts in Jesus Christ, we offer ourselves in praise and thanksgiving as a holy and living sacrifice, in union with Christ's offering for us, as we proclaim the mystery of faith.

Christ has died; Christ is risen; Christ will come again.

Pour out your Holy Spirit on us gathered here, and on these gifts of bread and wine.

Make them be for us the body and blood of Christ, that we may be for the world the body of Christ, redeemed by his blood.

By your Spirit make us one with Christ, one with each other, and one in ministry to all the world, until Christ comes in final victory and we feast at his heavenly banquet.

Through your Son Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit in your holy Church, all honor and glory are yours, almighty Father,

now and forever. **Amen.**

The body of Christ, given for you. **Amen.**

The blood of Christ, given for you. **Amen.**

Prayer of Thanksgiving

Eternal God, we give you thanks for this holy mystery in which you have given yourself to us.

Grant that we may go into the world in the strength of your Spirit, to give ourselves for others, in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Offering

A gentleman named Doug Michael posted a piece May 9, 2017 that resonated with me and I have rewritten it a bit to talk about my thoughts on giving. You have heard the expression – "Something's got to give."

That explains why I give to the church. It comes in two parts, let me talk about each.

First, something's got to give because of the pressure of life. I give to church things you probably didn't want —I give my fears, my failures, my transgressions – because life's pressures are sometimes too much to bear alone. And you, Ogilvie and Mora UMC's, have accepted me just as I am.

But second, and more importantly, I see the good which God's people do when they work together. Together we bring the word and love of God and the teaching of Jesus Christ to each other, our children and our community.

We bring shelter to the homeless, sanctuary to the refugee, communion and companionship to the prisoner, and we come together in a worshipping community of believers so that we can continue to do these things, and to do them more abundantly. And in this way, something's got to give, not because of the pressure of my life, but because of the pull the Holy Spirit, showed the needs of others.

When I see the world to which the UMC ministers, my little abundance is simply ripped from its place of deposit and is pulled here. I bring my treasure, my time, and my talents (such as they are) because I have to. If I didn't bring them, they would likely find a way to bring themselves. Something's just got to give.

The gifts work both ways, you see. The Church literally touches you in two different ways – with the plate for your offering, and the communion for your salvation.

So — I know something's got to give. I know that something is me, and I hope and pray that it is you, too.

Prayer of Dedication

Generous God;

Over and over your grace sustains us, over and over your love provides for us, over and over your arm steadies us.

We give you these gifts, with gratitude and joy, thankful that you are God over all. Amen.

HYMN

UMH # 569 (verse 3)

We've a Story to Tell to the Nations

Benediction

Hear some good news! The prophet Isaiah says this: "Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted; but those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint." (*Isaiah 40:30-31*) People of God, trust in the Lord and be strengthened!