

Home Service for 10/16/22

Welcome and Announcements

You may also find listening to some of your favorite hymns helpful in worship.

Pray without ceasing. Pray without giving up. Pray with tenacity, courage and hope.

Call to Worship:

Called by God to be people of prayer, we gather today as people of prayer. Come let us worship and pray together.

Opening Prayer:

Lord, everywhere we look we see the imprint of your creative love. The wondrous works of nature show your majesty. As we gather today to celebrate your love and creation, keep us mindful that we are part of that created order, meant to be stewards and not destroyers. Prepare us to work for you in ministries of peace and justice. AMEN.

Prayer of Confession:

We can get caught up in selfish pursuits and completely overlook the wonders of your creation, O God. All around us are majestic reminders of the beauty you offer to us. But we are weak and easily trapped into attitudes of indifference or destructive behavior. You have not given this world to us that we should destroy it, but rather that we should cherish it and make sure that all receive from its bounty. Forgive our overwhelming greed and selfishness. Help us to let go of the petty desires for wealth, position, and power, and bring us into a ministry which proclaims your love and justice for all your people. These things we pray in the name of the Master Servant, Jesus Christ, our Lord. AMEN.

Words of Assurance

God hears the cries of our hearts, sees our actions, knows our attitudes. In the midst of our sinfulness, God reaches out to heal and forgive us. Receive the forgiveness which God has offered to you. Live in God's love. AMEN.

Read Psalm 19

The heavens declare the glory of God;
the skies proclaim the work of his hands.

²Day after day they pour forth speech;
night after night they reveal knowledge.

³They have no speech, they use no words;
no sound is heard from them.

⁴Yet their voice^[b] goes out into all the earth,
their words to the ends of the world.

In the heavens God has pitched a tent for the sun.

⁵It is like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber,
like a champion rejoicing to run his course.

⁶It rises at one end of the heavens
and makes its circuit to the other;
nothing is deprived of its warmth.

⁷The law of the LORD is perfect,
refreshing the soul.

The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy,
making wise the simple.

⁸The precepts of the LORD are right,
giving joy to the heart.

The commands of the LORD are radiant,
giving light to the eyes.

⁹The fear of the LORD is pure,
enduring forever.

The decrees of the LORD are firm,
and all of them are righteous.

¹⁰They are more precious than gold,
than much pure gold;

they are sweeter than honey,
than honey from the honeycomb.

¹¹By them your servant is warned;
in keeping them there is great reward.

¹²But who can discern their own errors?
Forgive my hidden faults.

¹³Keep your servant also from willful sins;
may they not rule over me.

Then I will be blameless,
innocent of great transgression.

¹⁴ May these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart
be pleasing in your sight,
LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer.

Prayers of the People:

We are so competitive, Lord. We want to know who will be best and first, and we hope that it is each one of us. You call us special and we interpret it to mean "the best". And we feel that we are entitled to all that is due to the "best". Jesus reminded us that the best of us will be the servants, will be those who are willing to help and witness to others, not for their own honor but for God's honor and praise. Far too long, we have decided that we know what is best for the whole world. We want to run the "whole show", but we don't want to listen to you, God. You want us to bring peace, to listen to others needs and wants. We want to impose our wills on everyone. We have gotten way off the track of discipleship. Bring us back, patient God. Shake the dust of arrogance from us and nourish us with humility and joy. Help us to be the kind of disciples that serve you faithfully. For we ask these things in Jesus' Name. AMEN.

Lord's Prayer

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 and ever. AMEN

Read the Lesson: Jeremiah 31:27 – 34

“The days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will plant the kingdoms of Israel and Judah with the offspring of people and of animals. ²⁸ Just as I watched over them to uproot and tear down, and to overthrow, destroy and bring disaster, so I will watch over them to build and to plant,” declares the LORD. ²⁹ “In those days people will no longer say,

‘The parents have eaten sour grapes,
and the children's teeth are set on edge.’

³⁰ Instead, everyone will die for their own sin; whoever eats sour grapes—their own teeth will be set on edge.

³¹ “The days are coming,” declares the LORD,
“when I will make a new covenant
with the people of Israel
and with the people of Judah.

³² It will not be like the covenant
I made with their ancestors
when I took them by the hand
to lead them out of Egypt,
because they broke my covenant,
though I was a husband to^[a] them,^[b]”
declares the LORD.

³³ “This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel
after that time,” declares the LORD.

“I will put my law in their minds
and write it on their hearts.
I will be their God,
and they will be my people.

³⁴ No longer will they teach their neighbor,
or say to one another, ‘Know the LORD,’
because they will all know me,
from the least of them to the greatest,”
declares the LORD.

“For I will forgive their wickedness
and will remember their sins no more.”

Read the Epistle Lesson: 2 Timothy 3:14-4:5

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it,¹⁵ and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.¹⁶ All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness,¹⁷ so that the servant of God^[a] may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

4 In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: ² Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction. ³ For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what

their itching ears want to hear. ⁴ They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. ⁵ But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry.

Read the Gospel Lesson: Luke 18:1-18

Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. ² He said: "In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared what people thought. ³ And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, 'Grant me justice against my adversary.'

⁴ "For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, 'Even though I don't fear God or care what people think, ⁵ yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won't eventually come and attack me!'"

⁶ And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. ⁷ And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? ⁸ I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?"

Message

The word of God connects today's readings. Jeremiah paints a beautiful image of the word being written on the very hearts of God's people, a foreshadowing of the beginning of John's Gospel, where Jesus is described as the Living Word come to dwell within us. The psalmist declares the importance of the word as the source of understanding, wisdom, and guidance. Paul writes to Timothy about the word as the basis for sound teaching, reproof, and correction. In Luke, Jesus tells the parable of the persistent widow to teach us about patient, persevering prayer. Throughout these readings God's word is revealed as the foundation of our relationship with God.

In this morning's Gospel, Jesus urged his followers to pray and gave them a stunning example of prayer from his own life. Ten times the Gospels record that Jesus prayed. Not only did he teach about prayer but he was also an example of it. In today's text He provides one of the few parables that let us know its focus at the very beginning, "that men are always to pray, and not to faint." Jesus tells the story of a city judge who was hard-hearted. "He feared not God, neither regarded man." He also tells of a widow who was equally as hard-minded. She continues to bring her request to him, "avenge me of mine adversary," in such unrelenting ways that he granted her request just to get rid of her. Jesus gives us this parable as an

encouragement to prayer. The whole life of the Christian should be a life of devotion. To a Christian, to live is to pray. "Pray without ceasing" intends for us to have a life that is, in itself, a prayer. While scripture does not instruct us on when to pray, it does give us every encouragement to pray.

Jesus encourages us to pray and not to lose heart. The woman in the parable prevails, not because of her eloquence, or because of the merits of her case, but because of her insistence. Prayer is like the burning lava of the soul that has a furnace within, a very volcano of power. It is that burning lava of prayer that finds its way to God. No prayer ever reaches God's heart that does not come from our hearts. I know of no better thermometer to our spiritual temperature than this—the measure of the intensity of our prayers.

The intention of this parable is to put focus and fire in our prayers. We have all heard the saying the squeaky wheel gets results. He who prays without fervency does not pray at all. We cannot commune with God who is a consuming fire if there is no fire in our hearts. Jesus tells us to ask, to seek, and to knock. The intention of this parable is to remind us that when we knock at the door of heaven, we are to knock until we are knocking with bloody knuckles and then continue to knock.

Though the parable of the widow and unjust judge is not difficult to hear, Jesus' lessons on the urgency of faith continues as he wonders, "When the Son of Man returns, will he find faith on earth?" That's some kind of question, isn't it? Actually, we might even be tempted to go so far as to call it a loaded question. The disciples have longed for more faith, and Jesus told them all that is required is faith the size of a mustard seed. Out of ten healed lepers, only one returned to be truly saved through his faith lived out in gratitude. And now we have this story of a widow, ceaselessly seeking justice against her adversary, even to the point of pestering. We are to understand that this is the kind of faithful persistence the Son of Man hopes to find when he comes to earth; and so we must ask ourselves, are we so persistent?

This parable is a good example of what could be called the "if this is so, then so much more" story. Jesus is saying, "If the most powerless widow you could imagine, who is at the very bottom of the world's pecking order, can get her case heard—by a crooked judge—then will not our Loving Father willingly listen to every plea and petition of ours?" Jesus asked a lot of God and He never felt as if He were imposing. In our Scripture Lesson, Jesus is telling us to do the same.

The problem, of course, is the identity of the “judge who neither feared God nor cared about [people].” Jesus is speaking here not of God, but of a human judge—and a rather cold and heartless one at that. God is not like the unjust judge. For God listens. For God cares. For God responds.

Our prayers to God do not end up just floating out in space for He hears every prayer, but this is no reason to think we should expect to get whatever we pray for. For example, often a human father has to refuse the request of a child, because he knows that what the child asks for would hurt rather than help. God is like that.

We don’t know what’s going to happen in the next hour, let alone the next week, or month, or year. Only God sees time as a whole, and, therefore, only God knows what is good for us in the long run. That is why Jesus says that we must never be discouraged in prayer. And that is why He asked if human faith will stand the long delays before the Son of Man comes. We will never grow weary in prayer and our faith will never falter if, after we have offered to God our prayers and requests, we add the perfect prayer, “Your will be done.” For prayer is not about changing the mind of God, but opening our hearts to the will of God!!! Prayer is not getting God to see it our way, but getting us to see it God’s way.

So, when we pray, we should ask God to reveal God’s mind to us. “Lord, there is a need. Teach me Your mind. Teach me how to pray about this.” Prayer works like that as well. Prayer brings us closer to God. Prayer is a means of grace, whereby we are brought closer to the mind of God.

Unlike the unjust, ungodly judge, God cares for us far beyond our ability to comprehend. God knows what you and I are in need of and He wisely answers our prayers according to His will what is best for us as the answer to our prayers. God can see things from an all-knowing point of view. God cares about our wellbeing, unlike the sentiments of the unjust judge in this story who cared neither for man nor God. Jesus’ point in this parable is that if this arrogant unjust and ungodly judge can be worn down to answering the prayers of a widow who seemed insignificant to him, then how much more will God who cares for us answer our prayers in accordance with His will as to what is best for us. The unjust judge saw that he was going to have to yield to her in order to have peace. There was nobody that she could bribe, nor did she have the money for a bribe. She did the only thing that she could which was to be persistent. God knows the number of hairs on our heads (Matthew 10:29-31). He even knows us all by name (John 10:3). God even knows what we are in need of even before we pray (Matthew 6:8). What God wants from us is for us to trust Him.

In prayer, we are seeking Christ's mind. We ask God to take our minds and make them God's. We ask the Holy Spirit to pray through us and for us. And when we pray like that, Jesus assures us that we shall find!!! Praise God! Amen.

Benediction:

You have been called to serve the Lord with gladness. Go from this place knowing that God's blessings have been poured on you so that you may be a blessing to others. Be at peace and bring the good news of God's love and peace to all whom you meet. AMEN.