

Mid-Week Lenten sermon on Prayer

Pr Ruth Ann Loughry

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Ephesians 1: 17-20

¹⁷I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, ¹⁸so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, ¹⁹and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power. ²⁰God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places,

May God's grace and peace be with us this day. Amen.

How is our prayer life? How is our prayer life?

Listen to Richard Foster describe the heart of God in this moment.... (Prayer; Finding the Heart's True Home. Richard Foster. Harper San Francisco. 1992 New York, NY)

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Which is exactly what Paul was writing in the Ephesians text. He prayed that God would give enlighten our hearts; so that through prayer we would know hope and the greatness of his power.

The ancient Hebrew understanding of the heart, is that place where our decisions are made. It's the seat of our understanding and will, not a mushy Hallmark kind of heart. But instead, our heart is where we act from.

Think on that for a moment. May the eyes of our hearts be enlightened. It is there in the quietness of our hearts; we know the heart of God.

Gretchen Ronnevik wrote the book "Ragged: Spiritual Disciplines for the Spiritually Exhausted," as a response to the pandemic. She recognized what the ancient desert fathers and mothers knew long ago. Practicing spiritual disciplines brings light and life and hope and peace back into our spirits. We've just come a long, challenging road through this pandemic and likely will experience its effects for a long, long time.

One of those spiritual disciplines is prayer. How are our prayer lives? Prayer is the gracious gift of God, to simply talk to God. We can speak to God as if we are speaking to our very best friend. God knows our hearts like a friend or spouse would. God longs to hear our deepest thoughts and concerns.

Yet, God is so much more than our friend or spouse. God is the creator of the world. God is the redeemer of the world. God is the sustainer of each and every breath of every person, plant and animal of the whole, wide, world.

Which is why we pause to pray. For the spiritual life to open, we pray. To sustain the spiritual life, we pray. For us to continue learning and growing and delighting in God, we continue day after day to pray. We come to God with words or silence, and we sit together, love gazing at the beloved...and pray.

Then as Paul writes, when the eyes of our hearts are enlightened, we will understand the hope we have in God. That hope of forgiveness and comfort and resurrection. And even the hope as we walk in justice with those who need our advocacy.

Another gift, Paul says, of this ongoing life of prayer, is that we experience God's incredible power. That same power that raised Jesus from the dead, is the power we can experience and live with in our life with God.

Imagine! Through prayer, God comes to us with power to overcome. Power to be sustained. Power to act. Power to be still.

All this, all this, comes when the eyes of our hearts are enlightened through prayer.

You all know what intercessory prayer is. We pray those prayers every weekend with our words. Yet our bodies have wisdom all their own. Therefore, I'm inviting you to pray with me today in perhaps a new way. It is a form of intercessory prayer.

We hold our hands close to our bodies as we think about anything that is hurting us, bothering us, causing us pain. Perhaps we think of Ukraine, or friends and family who are sick.

Hold that close and then when you are ready, push out your arms and release those concerns into God's love. Into God's lap. Into God's care. God can hold them for us.

On your own, we'll take a few moments to pray in this way. If you're not comfortable, simply pray silently. When I say, amen, we will finish.
Amen.