

“For This Reason”

Sunday, May 16th, 2021

Sermon by Dawn Jefferson for TriCon Church

Ephesians 1:15-23

Will you pray with me?

“I Really Love the Lord”

Today, Oh God we celebrate our love for you and we honor all that we have come to know about you, and about ourselves inside of prayerful living. Amen.

My meditations lately have been a lot about transition. I'm considering habits and patterns I'd been used to before COVID, before seminary, even before I got married. I'm wondering what I've really changed and what still needs to evolve in me. Given all of the challenges of COVID, I've been reframing my prayer life somewhat. Or that is, I'm returning to some things I used to know and do. You see in COVID, I have become a reactionary intercessor. I pray when someone asks, when I hear sad news of pain, sickness, deep loss. And there ARE ways that practice of prayer can be useful, faithful even. But I'm not sure that posture of praying is all that sustainable. And I would even dare to say I don't believe it's God's intention for me. There is something to be said for routine, but even more so to be said for being proactive. That is the kind of prayer I will talk about with you today.

When I was single, I had a great deal many more single friends. Some desired to be attached in relationships and others not as much. If I knew a friend had been praying for someone dear to their heart or had recently been on a date, I'd check in. One day, I checked in with a close friend. I asked her how she was...And her humorous reply that I shall never forget...When I asked “How are You?”, she said, “You ain't praying! You Ain't praying.” By that she meant to imply that I had not been praying for her enough that she had found love or even a good prospect of late. And that phrase has always tickled me. “You ain't praying.” She was a minister, and her theology in that statement implies some things about prayer. It implies that what I pray for you can actually affect your life.

And the one thing that has really been on my heart since reading this scripture in Ephesians is that when you love people, when you are in community with them (and maybe when you're not distracted by great loss and a global pandemic) you

consider the proactive ways that they can be fulfilled and thrive. Even more, I think it becomes challenging to the integrity of a church or even a family when we sort of wait for bad news in order to initiate our prayers. It presumes that prayer isn't needed because things are fine enough. And things might seem fine. But, I've been in sessions and conversations with people who are barely holding it together even though they ARE experts at seeming as if they are fine.

If we wait for someone to ask for prayer or we react to some difficult news about a friend and then pray, we run the risk of assuming they don't need prayer until something is spoken or "obviously" wrong. I have loved enough people, successful, caring people to know that most people don't really share when they're breaking on the inside. You don't hear about divorces 'til much later, sometimes people don't share their illnesses right away. Our culture has made it shameful to be out of work or to be outwardly struggling. We have great expectations of seeming fine. I would say that is a dangerous spiritual place to be. I would say that there are way more people who need prayer than we think.

Now, what I've experienced within TriCon so far is a welcoming and loving environment. And I don't preach this because I've seen anything wrong. I just sense in my spirit that some reminder is in order. For all of us who have been through a really hard year, such trauma takes its toll on our mental health, or physical health AND our spiritual health.

This scripture in Paul's letter to the Ephesians reminds me that we can be praying for each other even when we seem ok. Because the reality is that most of us are still not ok. Sure, some mask restrictions have been removed and we're getting outside. But there is still real trauma and loss that continues to swirl in some hearts, bodies and imaginations. There are things that take time to heal when you've experienced such collective shock to your system and shifts to your sense of normalcy. And even though it's not March 2020 any longer, I want you to know that it's still ok if you're not quite ok. And we will be praying with you.

In my meditation about the power of prayer, I remembered a scene from one of my favorite movies. Remember I said that I'm a winter baby, so I have all kinds of fondness for Christmas time and Christmas movies. And there's a special place in my heart for *It's a Wonderful Life*, the Frank Capra classic starring Jimmy Stewart

and Donna Reed. It gives me chills just to think of it now. It's the kind of movie that comes on around Christmas Eve or that time of day when you're winding down. I'm counting on the fact that you've heard of this movie; give me a nod if maybe you've seen it 20 times or at least heard of it. OK.

Well the thing about *It's A Wonderful Life* is that it's also the kind of movie that you might stumble upon while flicking through channels (back when we did that sort of thing and every movie wasn't “On Demand”). You might turn the channel, and there it would be. And so, you may not have watched the very first scene of this movie or even remember it. I'm kind of a stickler for beginnings. As an English teacher, I often spent a lot of time with my students reviewing what we call exposition - the way the storyteller sets the stage and in many ways gives us enough context to CARE about the protagonist of the story. And yes, George Bailey is played by Jimmy Stewart -- an actor beloved by most as the caring EveryMan, the Tom Hanks of the 1940s... But George isn't in this scene yet. This first scene of the movie starts with the majestic picture of Bedford Falls and falling snow and you hear several voice-overs of people from Bedford Falls praying for George Bailey. What I recall most are the earnest petitions of George's neighbors. “I owe everything to George Bailey, help him, Dear Father.” “Joseph, Jesus and Mary, help my friend Mr. Bailey.” “Help my son George tonight” “George is a good guy, give him a break God.”

IN response, there is a dark night sky full of stars and the Milky Way Galaxy. a heavenly team begins to send out an angel to offer George support through his really dark time. You likely never thought of this movie as Christian or even spiritual, but there's a lot of good messages inside of it. It's on Amazon Prime.

George Bailey from *It's a Wonderful Life* is a helpful example to think about prayer. George is a good guy. A smart guy who wants to travel the world. He stays home to take care of his dad's business. He puts his brother through college. George falls hard for Mary and they get married. They have several kids but live in a drafty old house. He has a decent enough job but wants more. Still, he holds the building and loan together to resist the money hungry capitalist manipulation of Mr. Potter. You can even say that George is a community activist. He makes sure that people have houses in a bad economy. He attends to the financial and tangible needs of the impoverished, the naturalized citizens of Bedford Falls. And EVEN George, didn't have it all together. His life fell apart around him.

And what really makes the tears flow is before the end of the movie. This is George's prayer, seated at Martinis, the local Bar after having lost everything meaningful to him and literally crying into his glass, George prays," "God, Dear Father in heaven, I'm not a praying man, but if you're up there and you can hear me, show me the way, I'm at the end of my rope. Show me the way."

And this is where I feel like the prayer in Paul's letter is so profound. Stay with me here.

The very first 14 verses of Ephesians Chapter ONE really talks about who I am because of Christ, but this section after verse 15, is really about directing me towards CHRIST!

In the midst of others praying for him, GEORGE BAILEY prayed for himself. In the midst of others working to help George, George went to God on his own behalf too.

And I realized that prayer is critical and important and that my praying for your sister's surgery and your neighbor's mom is absolutely rational and responsible. My praying FOR others is good, but MY praying for THEM to know GOD is a much more spiritually practical and long-term investment.

Sure, my praying could help your dad get a good report from the doctor. **But my praying for YOU that you get a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know God for yourself!!!** My praying that your spiritual eyes will truly begin to discern God in God's power and glory -- My praying for you that you come to understand the hopeful state and future that God is even calling you to RIGHT NOW as I preach this sermon. Friends, that is the prayer that you want! That is the prayer that you NEED! IT is deeper, more critical, and more everlasting for YOU to know GOD for yourself so that YOU CAN Pray to God for yourself and so that NO MATTER WHAT HAPPENS, if your child still gets a troubling diagnosis, or your neighbor's mother doesn't make it through chemo, what will have been developed is YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD! You need that just as much as you need me to just pray for your loved one.

What am I saying? - keep praying. We all need prayer. But pray in the "normal times as much as high holy seasons." This month is Mental Health Awareness Month And

the thing is there are way more people experiencing depression and anxiety than you likely know about. Why, because we don't share that kind of thing, especially at our jobs or even in churches where we want to be seen as efficient, and "put together." Still, if you think that I'm fine, and you don't pray for me, that diminishes my spiritual wholeness. I don't have the same access to the ear of God...

The concert of prayers IN LOVE makes a difference. And surely, we should all rush to our knees when we hear of some tough news or lose someone close to us. So, too should we be praying in the **meantime** for those who just have some faith that God hears them. Pray for those who demonstrated love to the Body of Christ. **Pray for THIS REASON - that people who need the spirit to give them wisdom and revelation to come to KNOW GOD will get it - And that is a prayer for EVERYONE!!!**

In the midst of others praying for him, GEORGE BAILEY prayed for himself. And while we can celebrate at the end when the town all comes to bring money to help George Bailey pay off the debt of the Building and Loan, George Bailey can see all that's happening is in relationship to God. For it was God who intervened.

What's different is that George knows that for himself. And maybe the same has happened for you. Maybe you have ever overcome something that you knew would have been impossible in your own strength. And at the end of that day as you put yourself to sleep, perhaps you knelt down and thanked God for having been God enough to respond to the desperate prayer from your lips and on the lips of every other believer who trusted that God would respond. Friends, I think that both prayers are necessary. Both prayers matter.

This week on the spiritual calendar, we celebrate the Ascension of Christ toward heaven. IT is significant not because of how far off and exalted Christ is during ascension. But Ascension is important because of the relationship established that lets us sit with Christ in heavenly places. Especially when we pray, we access Christ's authority and dominion.

This Sunday, I am calling on the church to pray for each other. To pray - not only in the spirit of reactionary prayer in light of tragedy or tough news, and all the

challenges we live with. But to pray proactively for people who even 'seem' fine. We should find a reason...

I am praying for you **JUST BECAUSE** you believe. Even when I don't know the Reason for your challenges, I am praying for you. Even when I think you are fine, I am praying for you.

There is a confidence in knowing that on your best day or your worst day, someone else is praying for your wholeness and your thriving too. And that your testimony will be that you still know the God of fullness who is your **ALL IN ALL**. Let such prayer begin in you. In Jesus Name, and for your sake. Amen!

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