

October 27, 2019
Rev. Jane Florence
“Praying with Glad and Generous Hearts”
Text: 1 Tim 2: 1-4



If you've been around any United Methodist Church much, you've heard it a dozen times. People indicate their desire to make a commitment to the community of faith, we pledge our 'prayers, presence, gifts, service and witness.' In September, you were asked to indicate your service area for the coming year. Last week, we consecrated our giving for next year. Now, What does it mean to pledge our 'prayers' ?

Do we promise to say five 'our Father's' if, rather when, we break a commandment? Do we agree to say "God is great, God is good Let us give thanks for our food..." every time pass a cookie jar or drive up to the takeout window? Are we taking a vow to say "Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep..." every time we sit down to watch television just in case we doze off mid-show? Sure, why not. "Pray without ceasing" the scriptures say. Pray about all things at all times. Some folks pray for rain for their garden whiles other folks pray for sunshine for their ball game. Some folks pray for a good parking place. Some folks pray for a life to be spared. Anything you want to have a little talk with God about is a good thing. Any conversation with God is a good conversation. Then, after we are through praying for those things which are upper most on our hearts and conscious, we can settle in for some deeper conversation time with the Divine.

Pray for all things, at all times. It's all good. But, what specifically are we asking of your prayers for this community? What have you vowed in your prayers in church membership?

In the epistle of today's reading, we hear, "I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for everyone." We ask you to hold everyone in your prayers. To lift up into the Light of God's Love- all those you know by name and those you don't. (God knows their names.) We ask you to pray for ALL in the community. Pray for one another, pray for our children, pray for our youth, pray for our elderly, pray for those working and those needing work, pray for the people in your pew, pray for the ones not in your pew, pray for the musicians, and please pray for your pastors and staff. Pray for our mission and our ministries.

The text goes on to remind us to pray, "for kings and all who are in high positions." Pray for our bishop. Pray for our Governor. Pray for our senators and representatives. Pray for our President. Pray for world leaders. Pray for all who hold power to start wars and to make peace. The text says pray for all in power, "so that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity." Pray for peace.

Several times over in this scripture passage there is a universality about it. Pray for all. You see, if there is only One God, one Divine Spirit of Life Energy in the Universe, then the One God must be the God of all. So in prayer, supplication, intercessions and thanksgivings, pray for all. For the One God, must be the Same God of the Democrats and Republicans, of the Catholics and the Protestants, of the Israelites and Palestinians, of the Americans and Mexicans and Canadians, of the Muslims and the Hindus, of the rich and the poor, of the Progressive and Conservatives, of Syrians, Kurdish and Turks, of the friends and the foes. Pray. Pray for God's people to become God's people- honoring the way of all.

Once upon a time, there was a pastor who challenged a new movement sweeping through the church. This pastor preached that the gospel of Jesus Christ was broader and more inclusive than the view maintained by many at the time. When this pastor went against tradition, his opponents in the church asked the denomination to discipline the pastor.

Okay, so it's wasn't just 'once' upon a time. It's happens 'a lot' upon a times. It happens here; it happens there. It happened to a rabbi about 2,000 years ago. It's part of culture DNA, so it is in faith communities, churches, synagogues, parishes, mosques. Folks disagreee in the name of God. Folks persecute those who differ in their understandings of God's ways. Folks crucify leaders who challenge their way.

But, the 'once upon a time,' I had in mind was actually about a preacher in the early 1920s at Old First Presbyterian Church in New York City. At the time the church was embroiled in something known as the Fundamentalist Controversy. There were some in the church who drew a line in the sand. They said there were five core beliefs that true Christians had to avow or they weren't Christian. In response, the preacher Harry Emerson Fosdick preached a sermon titled, "Shall the Fundamentalists Win?" The sermon was broadly published and Fosdick didn't beat around the bush in denouncing exclusivity of Fundamentalism. Church folks got pretty angry. Controversy raged for years.

Have you ever been caught up in a controversy that raged for years? I guess so. People can get pretty beat up, worn down, chewed up and spit out. Fosdick ended up resigning from Old First Presbyterian Church in New York City. He was asked to be pastor at a different church, Park Avenue Baptist. He declined. John D. Rockefeller was a leader in that church, and they wanted to relocate, and they wanted Harry Emerson Fosdick to lead them. Eventually, Fosdick agreed that he would be their pastor, but the new church would not belong to a denomination. There would be no denominational limitations on membership and The church they would build would be not only for worship, but also for community service. So, they built Riverside Church in New York City.

As the magnificent church was under construction, people from the church kept saying, "Oh , this is going to be a wonderful church." They watched the building take shape and repeated often, "oh, this is going to be a wonderful church." Fosdick addressed the congregation,

"My friends, it is not yet settled yet whether or not the new church will be wonderful. That depends on what we do with it. If we should gather [only for ourselves] - though the walls bulged every Sunday- that would not be wonderful.... But if in this city, this glorious, wretched city, where so many live in houses that human beings ought not to live in, where children play upon streets that out not to be the children's playground, where unemployment haunts families like the fear of hell- if we could lift some burdens and lighten some dark spots and help to solve the problems of some communities- that would be wonderful."

For the dedication service of the new church, Fosdick wrote a hymn. Later he said, "it was more than a hymn to me when we sang it that day - it was a very urgent personal prayer." And so they sang his hymn of prayer:

God of Grace and God of Glory on thy people pour thy power
Crown thine ancient church's story bring her bud to glorious flower.
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage, for the facing of this hour.

Fosdick wrote in all honesty of the tension of our living, for his hymn includes both the warnings against war and the warnings against lack of action.

Cure thy children's warring madness, bend our pride to thy control;
Save us from weak resignation to the evils we deplore

We live that tension on an international scene as a nation constantly. We know the tension between warring madness and weak resignation. The tension between intervening on behalf of an oppressed

people, and the risk of creating greater injury and even igniting war. It's true in the global political world as much as it's true in the church. When do we step up and wrestle free of weak resignation in the face of evil? How do we step up without launching wars madness? How do we take action without causing greater harm? How do we oppose those within the church without doing damage?

From the international scene of a global perspective, to our own national political power plays, to God's church at odds with one another, how do we find salvation from human fears and doubts that bring out the worst in us? We pray. Pray, my friends, pray daily:

God of Grace and God of Glory,

Pray that God

Grant us Wisdom, Grant us Courage, for the living of these days.

Pray for wisdom and courage for the nation, for this church, for the living out of God's grace this day and always. Pray not only with words of desperation whispered into the universe to the God within and beyond all. Pray also with words of invitation. Pray by listening to your neighbors, friends and co-workers. Listen for the wounds of the world- celebrations of life and hearts open to respond. Pray by inviting others you know to join us here- so that we might be a wonderful church - in downtown Lincoln - offering hope and change to those bearing difficult burdens in our city. Invite others to come to worship with you - offer to give them a ride - that this might be a glorious, vibrant church still budding into glorious flower in her 152nd year. Pray for others who may be seeking a place to connect to the Divine, a place to join in serving, a place to find wisdom and courage to face this hour. Pray for your church to be all we can be as expressions of God's grace and glory, now and always.

May we be a people of prayer.

Sources:

* "Sing a New Song; "God of Grace and God of Glory" First Presbyterian Church of San Anselmo, Rev. Scott Clark, August 12, 2012.

**Harry Emerson Fosdick, *The Living of These Days*. New York: Harper & Bros. 1956.