

## **Practising Christianity ~ Pray Each Day!**

Sermon on

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Trinity United, Ottawa

Rev. Ellie Barrington, M.Div.

The Emerging Christian Way, this new paradigm Christianity we are part of, insists on regular spiritual practice, as does the writer of the Epistle James:

Reading of James 5:13-18

***“He prayed fervently...then he prayed again.”***

Have you ever prayed to stop the rain? We do it reflexively, don't we? 'Please God, let it be sunny for the wedding Saturday.' Or 'God, let it rain on my garden before it withers - but not on weekends, OK?' Whether fervent or facetious, human prayers really don't control the weather. And thank God! Who do you know who is wise enough to be given control of the weather?!

Today's Epistle is an appeal to Christian community to practise prayer - to address ourselves to God and express ourselves, to 'share' and listen in a regular, intentional way with our 'Universal Witness.' That's how we open up to engage with God's healing power. We are to do this when we are suffering and when we are glad, when we are sick and when we feel remorse, when we are alone or when we gather. The writer of this letter promises that "the prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective...and will save the sick."

When it is our loved one who is sick - or our self in danger - we almost all default to 'deal prayers' or 'miracle prayers.' "God if only you will...then I will....". We hope against hope that God could or would swoop in to save us. But 'deal prayers' don't usually work. I don't think a loving God 'answers' prayers selectively like that!

In this 21<sup>st</sup> century, we know again through scientific research what the biblical ancients knew experientially - that healing prayers do often work, but they don't

work predictably or according to our individual plans. (Any more than the weather does.) Prayer isn't about us getting control of life's outcomes. It's about letting go of our illusion of control and opening up our awareness so we can channel the Creator's healing love.

Clearly, the universe does not take direction from even our most fervent prayers for control. And yet, our own experience and our community of wisdom provide us with plenty of assurance that our regular prayer practises do change our lives and effect our world. You've heard the stories. Maybe you've known the Spirit working in you?

Do you pray in some way with regular intention? Meditate, walk mindfully, sing praise, read scripture, journal, contemplate the Holy in Creation? Some people play the piano as a way of inviting God's presence. When you succeed in making time for the Sacred in your everyday life, expressing yourself and attending to the Spirit's direction - does it make a real difference? I've no doubt we have dozens of testimonials to the power of our spiritual practises, amongst us here. I'd be happy to hear yours.

In "A People's History of Christianity" Diana Butler Bass characterizes 'devotion' in this era of Christianity, as regular practices that "enable us to step into the River of Life with God, moving with the love of Christ." She offers the testimony of a classmate who committed himself to spiritual practise through a 12 step program. Through the AA discipline of coming before a Higher Power one day at a time, "in self awareness, honesty, forgiveness and reconciliation," he said: "I learned that God is wildly at work in healing, redemptive, saving ways."

In our relationship with the Holy, as with any other primary relationship, there is no substitute for spending time together in everyday ways. Sharing the day's joys and troubles and really listening. Maybe reading aloud together? Snuggling in for 'your time.' So too, by focussing loving attention and caring intentions in our God time,

we deepen our experience of an energetic relationship with our Creator.

Like building relational muscles, spiritual practises that engage our bodies, our thoughts and feelings gradually strengthen our capacity to receive God's love, to self-love, to love others as our self. And just as we think of our human beloved during our workday, so too we more often remember our Holy Companion amidst our daily stresses. Whatever we are up to, we find ourselves more often remembering to don our God glasses, the rainbow consciousness that enables us to see ourselves more clearly and others more compassionately. This is the 'effectiveness' of prayer.

Prayer does not work instantaneously, except in the occasional unexplainable miracle. Our silent sitting or soulful kneeling or heartfelt singing only gradually steadies us into peace, amidst the fray of the everyday. Our elders who learned to pray at their grandmothers' knee can attest to the great benefits of years of prayer practise. At Scripture Circle on Wednesday, Connie said, "I find prayer very relaxing." Her lifelong bedtime litany of love, naming each member of her family - and others who need help - to God's care, shifts her body and mind toward a good sleep. Peace! She told us: "I pray before I settle in for the night, and that takes away a lot of the things that have happened in the day."

I think prayer, in all its Christian forms - and the ways of other faiths - is where God meets our intentions for positive change, with Creation's grace. Gradually, our attitude to life, our perspective on our self, our relationships with others, our energy for action and our hunger for justice expand. Our thoughts and feelings, our bodies and behaviours do shift, like the weather always does.

If you've had a spiritual practise for years, you know that spiritual shifts are more often inchingly invisible than seismic. But as we open ourselves to God's all-embracing love, healing happens. When, day after day, we spend even a few minutes looking into the loving eyes of God, we find we can eventually bring all our

hurting truths into the healing Light - and find meaning and healing.

So whether you are joyful or fearful - wherever you are at - give heart to your personal spiritual practises. Sing praise, meditate, walk in the woods, open up a few minutes with God every day. Pray...and live into the miracle and the mystery - healing happens!

You can pray openly, knowing, as Jesus showed us, that there is nothing that we can't bring to the Lord in prayer. VU# 664 What A Friend We Have In Jesus

Offer UCC bookmarks on how to practise 'Centring Prayer' and 'Lectio Divina.'