

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 11, 2024 EPIPHANY 6 Transfiguration

“How to Pray for the World Near and Far”

Psalms 122 Isaiah 52: 7-10 Mark 9:2-9 Matthew 17:1-9

Prayer is talking to God and we believe that God created everyone to be in relationship with him, and that he loves to hear from each one of us as often as possible. Just like you might talk to a close family member, so we have the privilege of talking to God. God created you and loves you for who you are. Is he not worth your time at least a portion of your awake hours?

Throughout this season after Epiphany we have been focusing on “Preparing to Pray”: focusing on what prayer is, how to address God, why we say Amen and In Jesus’ name. And we have been asking the simple question of how- to serve Christ; to pray for oneself; to pray for family and today we focus on the world near and far. God calls us to pray and the best teacher of praying is Jesus. He spent much time in prayer and often questioned God’s actions and what Jesus was going to do and did. Jesus went away from others to pray- inside, outside, in a boat, on a side of the mountain, on the beach, in a garden and even prayed before eating! Jesus prayed a lot because he needed God’s guidance, wisdom and courage. Yes Jesus is God’s Son but while living on earth he faced difficult times like we do. But he also wanted to make sure his disciples knew who he was and what his purpose was.

Many of us pray daily, for personal needs and concerns closest to our hearts- children, grandchildren, marriages, jobs, finances and so on. But there is a whole world out there and that world has never been closer to our lives than it is these days. Because of this closeness- that is knowledge of events occurring around the world being sent to inboxes of all sorts 24 hours a day, we need to pray. And the need to pray for the world has never been greater! So what are we to do? And how does this connect with Jesus’ transfiguration as he revealed himself to Simon Peter, Andrew and James?

Jesus taught us how to pray with the words of the “The Lord’s Prayer” =which we’ll look at more closely next week. Luke writes in Acts 1, “He taught his disciples by saying, “You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth.” (Acts 1:8) By sharing this, we learn of a way to frame our prayers for communities large or small, near or far away. But the key notion to act is for people to do what Jesus has called us to do- pray.

What Jesus teaches is what is known as praying concentrically that is from the inside of the circle and out! We have talked about how essential it is to pray and to begin by asking for prayers for oneself- prayers of concern, forgiveness, healing, guidance and direction. This is what is needed at the core of all prayer. So that you are ready to receive God's blessings, directions and to answer his call. Next you would pray for your family- and we've talked about this as well- who is in your family? Are they close by or distance wise away from you? Do you lift them up when they are in need of your love?

Then as you slowly move out of the circles—it is the community where you live. To the first followers of Jesus, Jerusalem was the centre of the world, their community. So “Jerusalem prayers are prayers for our neighbourhood, church and town. Similar to what we read from Psalm 122 : “May those who love you prosper! May there be peace within your walls, prosperity within your palaces! For the sake of my family and friends I say: “Peace be with you! And for the sake of the house of God, I will seek your good.”

This prayer is worth pray both for modern Jerusalem and for our own city—peace, security and prosperity. We hear the local news and what is happening in our city- fires, homelessness, food bank use, students needing support and we wonder how might our city help? We do so because of love and for the sake of our families, friends and people who are all children of God.

The next circle out is the nation. In Jesus' teaching on where the disciples will be witnesses he states in Judea and Samaria. These are the regions around Jerusalem—villages, outposts, as well as the communities that are connected by roads. The people did not travel far at that time, but those who did shared news of faraway lands and people. This is comparable to our region and provinces. Psalm 69 says “God will save Zion and rebuild cities. People will settle and possess it, children inherit it and those who love God will dwell there.” When we think of our different regions, we might reflect on the provinces of Canada and the concerns being unique to each. What is happening in British Columbia is different than what is in Newfoundland; what occurs in PEI is different from the actions of Alberta.

Jesus then refers to Samaria as well. For the disciples to hear this was quite remarkable because they were different, other people. But Jesus' love didn't exclude those with different ideas and customs and neither should ours. These Samaria Prayers are prayers offered for peace, security, prosperity and blessing. These prayers are also for greater understanding and interaction between us all. Jesus had gone through Samaria into the town of Sychar and this is

where he met the woman at the well. He asked for a drink, but then he offered her living water. Through this teaching, she became both a disciple of Jesus. She also shared who he was as Messiah and told many others about his message of hope. Jesus went to Sychar to meet this woman and as a result many Samaritans came to faith in Jesus.

The outer circle is reflected by Jesus' words "The ends of the earth". Who are on the outer edge today? This is when we think of those in other countries, continents, and cultures. What do we pray? From Psalm 22 we read "The ends of the earth will remember and turn to the Lord". Or Psalm 48 "Your name O God, Your praise reaches to the ends of the earth". But it is the words of the prophet Isaiah 52 which enable us to reflect on what our task is in sharing Jesus' message. Our job is to share with everyone "the message of God's salvation through Christ the Messiah" and to do so to the ends of the earth.

This message that Jesus gave the disciples built upon what three of the disciples experienced when Jesus took them up the side of a mountain. Peter, James and John were walking with Jesus. There Jesus transfigured—changed before them. His clothes became dazzling white. And they were in awe! Peter wanted to capture the moment by building shelters especially when Elijah and Moses joined Jesus and were talking. But it was when God's voice was heard that these disciples took notice. "This is my Son, the Beloved with him I am well pleased; listen to him."

Although these disciples were afraid as well as in shock. They fell on the ground not really understanding what they witnessed. But then Jesus touches them and he has changed back to how they know him. Jesus tells them not tell any no one about this until after his resurrection. They did not fully understand what he meant. They were just learning about Jesus and who he was as God's Son just as we do.

We believe in Jesus and as His faithful followers of we are called to pray. It is not the only thing we can do—it is one of the best things we can do. We may not be able to move as we used to or even do what we once did. But we can pray. When we begin by praying for ourselves and then slowly working through the different circles, towards others who are 'at the end of the earth,' from our perspective, our lives will change. Our faith will be stronger and we will not be afraid when Christ comes to us. We will know the One who transfigured before Peter, James and John in our hearts to be the Saviour. We will know the one who loved, taught and showed us how to love. We believe in the one whom God called his beloved Son.

Let us remember how we may pray for the world near in far using concentric circles as a way of moving from personal prayers to praying for others to hear Jesus' message to the ends of the earth. But mostly let us keep praying from our hearts.

PRAYER

God of love, we praise you and thank you for the gift of prayer. As we pray guide our thoughts and keep us focused on you. Open our hearts to receive your message of love and guide us in our prayers as we pray for ourselves and eventually to the ends of the earth. Hear now the prayers of our hearts in this moment. SILENCE. Amen.