

Sunday, June 13, 2021 Psalm 141, 1 Chronicles 4:9-10 Mark 14:3-9, 22-24

Dangerous Prayers: Break Me

We continue to explore what it means to push ourselves to a deeper prayer life as we continue to read Craig Groeschel's book Dangerous Prayers. Even though we may not like being put into another level of praying because it is not comfortable or easy, we are still called to pray to God for others as well as ourselves. The subtitle states: "Because following Jesus was never meant to be safe". This might even call us to think that we need to be challenged in new ways because God knows that the life we have been living for these last 15-16 months has been challenging yes but what is God preparing us for in the months to come?

A second 'dangerous' prayer offered by Groeschel is 'Break Me,'. Why would anyone ask God to break them? What good would it do? Wouldn't it be easier and more profitable for individuals to just ask God, "Bless me- even more?" Isn't this what we all want—more blessings, less stress, more good things in life no problems or anything that causes us pain, hurt or suffering? The prayer of Jabez as we heard it read from 1 Chronicles 4:9-10 is just this- bless me. But who is Jabez? We do not know a lot about him except that he is a descendant of Judah and at the time of his birth, he caused his mother so much pain that this is what she named him. Jabez== born in pain. This baby's name was a constant reminder to his mother of the pain which she had endured to give him life. How difficult it must have been for Jabez as he grew up!

Maybe this is why Jabez offered these words to God; knowing the pain his mother had endured for his sake. He asks, "O that you would bless me and enlarge my territory. Let your hand be with me, and keep me from harm so that I will be free from pain." We then read, "And God granted what he asked." This is a simple prayer—he asks God to 1) bless him, 2) enlarge his territory, 3) God's hand be with him, 4) protect him from harm- so not to endure pain.

Isn't this the kind of prayer we want to ask or even do ask God? bless- give me more land/possessions, be with me, protect me and take the pain away. But who is the focus of this prayer? It certainly is not God! It is focused on what we want, not necessarily what God wants. It is safe, comfortable, profitable and even selfish. We know we don't want hardship or struggles in our life but if we are to pray these words, what are we really asking? "God, don't let me grow or become stronger, don't allow me to trust you more." But God uses all of these for his purposes, so that we will endure. Is the prayer of Jabez too safe?

It is fine to pray for safety and blessings but what if you want more? That is if you want power from the Holy Spirit, strength from heaven unshakable faith, and a genuine close relationship with God the Creator-Father? Maybe we need to ask God for more even to break us and cause us to see who we are as we look into the mirror again.

Have you ever been pushed to the limits in your work or home or social life? That is a co-worker has pushed you to do something you felt was not ethical or right? Or maybe a child or relative of some connection remembered something about your past and pushed your

buttons to bring you to hurt-filled tears? What about a friend who crossed the line of trust and broke a promise by sharing something in confidence? All these are examples of being pushed to the limit? That is, to break your spirit from within your heart and cause you much grief and hurt?

These past months of lockdowns, zoom meetings, staying at home and indoors have been tough on many people. Limits have been met as families have had to be together with parents acting as teacher, parent, and entertainer all the time. There have been incidents when mental health concerns have arisen to the point where the caregiver just needs to get out for a few minutes because being on all the time has been stressful. Most people have learned their limitations and deal with it, but there are many who are close to a breaking point. This is not a healthy breaking point, but one that is needed for people to reach out and assist. Break me has both positive and negative meanings so when we ask God to do this, we need to be careful of what we mean.

IF someone is at the breaking point we know that there is a weakness that needs to be strengthened. Or they have come to the conclusion that they must change choose a different kind of life and begin again. This is much like a fragile object just before it hits a hard surface. There is a breaking point! Do you have such a breaking point?

In our reading from Mark, a woman breaks the jar of perfumed ointment in Simon's house. Jesus was in Bethany and sitting down at the table. There are many people present in the house where Jesus is when a woman comes in with her jar of expensive perfumed ointment. She proceeds to go near Jesus and breaks it enabling the perfume to penetrate throughout the house. Immediately those present recognized the significance of this gift on multiple levels. The value of the perfume was noted to be about a year's worth of wages. And this woman took the ointment, with one single display of worship and gave it all to Jesus. How long had she saved money to get the perfume? What do we know about this woman and just how did she make the money to purchase this extravagance? Why did she break the jar? Was it an act of worship and sacrifice or was she showing the others what she believed and who she believed Jesus to be? And was this an act of faith?

The gift was seen as a waste of perfume as it could have been sold and the money given to the poor. The perfume was rare and so everyday women would not use it- so who was this woman who could afford it? To understand this woman, one must realize that she was a woman of the street and in this giving act of breaking the jar of something she thought was valuable, she broke and was parting with her old way of life. She poured it on Jesus symbolizing that she would give him all of her life. She turned to him for life. And Jesus stated, "you will not always have me. She has done what she could, she has anointed my body before hand for its burial. What she has done will be told in remembrance of her." But those seeing and listening were not really hearing Jesus' words only criticizing what could have been.

A few verses later in Mark 14 we have another scene altogether. Jesus and his disciples are in the Upper Room and experiencing the Passover meal. Jesus has told them that one amongst them would betray him. And as they were eating it is then that Jesus does something that we as Christians are called to do in remembrance of him. What does he do? He takes a loaf of bread, he blesses it and then he breaks it, and gives it to them. Jesus takes the bread- prays, and then breaks it. HE then takes the cup and prays and pours it out. What does this mean for us? Jesus body would be broken and his blood would be poured out- not for himself, but out of love for all who would believe. Jesus instruction to 'do this' provides us a way to remember honour and celebrate his death and resurrection. But it also refers to how we are to live. Not just when we celebrate this sacrament, but how we live our daily lives. Because Jesus' body was broken we too should live for him.

But why? This is not appealing nor does it sound pleasant? IT is however in the giving of our lives that we will find true joy. Rather than pursuing our will we seek God's will for us. Instead of trying to fill our lives with possessions we need to empty our lives to make a difference in the lives of others.

Have you ever felt broken? When the hurt and pain was so deep that you just were not sure of life? It could be through the loss of many things- loved ones, work, self identity or need to live. You are not alone in your brokenness. Others watching this right now- are broken because they are struggling like you are. But you are also not alone because after Jesus died he rose again to new life. After his brokenness came in death, he lives again. As we share these precious moments together we are also sharing in our weaknesses. We are broken people. And as broken people we need to see where we are looking for hope. This pandemic has brought people to their knees for many reasons- hurt, pain loss and exhaustion. But one of the most important things is that we can pray for God to see our pain, our brokenness and look beyond it. But we need to embrace it and look to what God has in store. In our brokenness we often experience God's blessings. Blessings like never before: new insights, new thoughts, new relationships and a closer bond with Christ himself.

However, being broken is not just a once in a life time event, it is daily decision to turn to God and let his Spirit touch your hearts. We are to become dependent on God's Spirit, to rely on him for our comfort, our guidance, our source of power. Rather than living a life of ease as Jabez so desired, it is a choice to live a life of faith.

You might experience it when you do what is right and are criticized for it. Or when you respond with love instead of anger when verbally attacked. Or when you do something that is in response to the Spirit and you are just not sure. You may not want to pray this dangerous prayer but if you have the courage to do so, God will reveal himself in new way and you will be known by God in a way you never thought possible.

But if you are experiencing difficulties- don't run from God- Run to him! Live broken and poured out and grow in faith.

Let us pray:

Lord, break us as you see our needs in this moment. Remind us of how Jesus broke the bread and how he too was broken in death only to rise again with new hope and faith. Help us to run to you in times when we are facing problems and reveal yourself to us as we seek to be healed. Patch our wounds and embrace us with your caring arms. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen.