

Sunday, October 15, 2017

Exodus 32:1-15

Philippians 4:1-9

Matthew 22:1-14

Wishing and Hoping and Praying to God

In these next few weeks we will be discovering and learning about what it means to serve God faithfully with hope and praise. With the children we shared what it means to pray and in this we open up dialogue with God as a church family and as individuals. We will also be exploring what social justice issues we want to work with, and how we may reach out to others with love and caring and with the knowledge that we do these things with God's guidance and strength.

Turning to our story from Exodus 32, one can imagine how angry Moses and God were when Moses went back down the mountain after his extensive visit with God. When Moses had left the people and went up the mountain to be with God, they were living in the laws of God. But with Moses away, they didn't experience God's Spirit around them so decided to do something about this. They made their own god in the form of a golden idol. Yes, Moses had to have been up the mountain for a while in order for this to occur—just melting the gold would have taken a long time! But when Moses was out of sight, they turned away from God who had saved them from slavery. They forgot God's laws and stopped talking with God. They turned away from the life God wanted them to know and experience. And what was Moses doing? He was getting the 10 commandments- that is the top 10 laws written down by God. But they could not wait and so built and worshiped another god.

How often do we do something similar? Maybe not so drastic as to build a golden calf, but look for something else to put in time with or do instead of God's will for your life to help others and be helped by others? How often do we say we want something to do and then end up doing nothing to help another?

When Moses goes down the mountain both God and he are angry for what the people have done. God is ready to kill them all—after he took them from slavery, after providing food and water every day, after teaching them how to live His way and what do they do? Turn away. But Moses calms God's heart by reminding God of his promise to Abraham, Isaac and Israel of the many descendants they would have- like the stars in the sky and the land upon which they would live. God had made this promise and kept it. He did not kill the people but would strike

them with a plague for their sins later on. God's desire was for these people to live in the Promised Land and follow his teachings. He wished they would listen, not grumble or complain. But they did and they also turned away from Him. But God remembered his promise.

God loves us and even when we go against his teachings he will help us, forgive us and encourage us to do something different for him. We need only to keep in dialogue, communicate with him and talk with him on a regular basis. We need to pray. This is what Paul wrote to the Philippians. Pray- rejoice, be gentle so that others will notice this. Don't be anxious but pray with thanksgiving as you offer to God your requests. God's peace will be with you and will guard your hearts and minds.

Paul also writes- that whatever is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable—excellent or praiseworthy- think about these things. Put into practise what you have learned and God's peace will be with you. Paul states that need to pray in order to grow faithfully.

There is a story about a farmer who had welcomed one of his city relatives to the farm. Before the meal the farmer gave thanks for the food. When he finished the visitor remarked, "This is old fashioned; nobody prays at the table anymore." The farmer admitted that the practice was old and even allowed that there were some on his farm who did not pray before their meals. Justified, the city visitor remarked, "So enlightenment has finally reached the home farm? Who are these wise ones?" As the farmer was drinking some milk he answered, "The cows."

Prayer is essential for spiritual growth. And it does not matter how or in what form you do pray- just pray. Talk to God. Listen for God's Spirit. Talk to God about everything- Don't worry about what you say, just say it; don't think God grades you on prayers. But think about your prayers and what do you say to God? What are you asking God to do? What are you doing in response?

There are different kinds of prayers- praise, confession, petition, thanksgiving, silent, boisterous, loud, joyful, quiet, each with a specific purpose and reflective of one's mood and circumstance. It doesn't matter where you are or what you are feeling- just pray—open up the dialogue with God. And talk but also listen and patiently wait for God to respond. God will hear your prayers and will respond in time but not necessarily will it be what you want to experience. God will answer- yes, no, not yet, when you are ready depending upon your request. But you must also be patient while praying for God needs to know your heart and mind in able to respond.

What does it mean to pray today? For some people it is necessary to be by themselves in their room—kneeling; some people like to sit in one chair and pretend Jesus is physically present sitting in another chair; some like to just quiet focus on one or two words to keep their minds from wandering as they let the Spirit move them. And others will pray with joy in their hearts as they lift up praises to God in song—for when we sing we are really praying twice! The words and the melody make it so that we are praising God in different ways at the same time.

How are you praying? Regularly, sporadic or even wondering what to say? In the moments of silent prayer we share as a church, what are you offering to God in words and thoughts? Are you waiting for time to pass or are you saying names of people you care about? Maybe you are offering to God concerns for yourself- all this is great! Because Paul says pray and do so from your heart and mind. The prayers we share are in the actions of conversing with God. It is in talking, hoping and asking as you listen, act and live every day. Prayer is also telling God your thoughts, ideas, hopes and dreams and letting God figure out what is best for you and your life. Praying calls you to invite God in to your life and letting God help you as you share with others in those moments of praise, thanksgiving and celebration. It is also sharing those moments when healing wholeness and wondering of what is to come is discussed and talked about. It is talking with God and enabling God to respond. It is listening for God's answer knowing that prayer changes everything. As we read from Philippians 4: "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. And as a result, the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."

God calls us to pray to share with Him our thoughts, concerns and joys. In order to continue to grow faithfully, we are to pray and to have hope in our hearts as we praise God. Are we willing to pray? Let us pray:

Holy God we praise you and are so glad that you call us to pray to you. Help us to do so on a regular basis and enable us to feel open and loved as we share our thoughts and cares with you. Help us O God as we offer these our prayers to you at this time. SILENCE Amen.