

**YIELD****Message for January 27, 2019****North East United Methodist Church****Rev. Dr. Drew M. Christian**

One day a hunter came face to face with a huge, angry bear. He prayed to God, *“Please make this bear a Christian. If you will do this for me, I will be happy with whatever lot you give me for the rest of my life.”* Suddenly, the bear stopped in its tracks, looked up to heavens, fell to its knees, and spoke, *“Lord bless this food of which I am about to partake. Amen.”*

If we want God to *“make”* us His, we must ask God to help us learn to pray. Our faith, repentance and forgiveness, power and peace, the fruits of the Holy Spirit, intimacy with Jesus Christ, our very identity as a child of God, begins and grows with opening our hearts to God, begins and grows with prayer. As Martin Luther King, Jr. stated, *“To be a Christian without prayer is no more possible than to be alive without breathing.”*

As we set out across 2019, our theme for North East United Methodist Church this year is PRAYER. Our key scripture is from I Chronicles 16:11, *“Look to the Lord and His strength; seek His face always.”*

I need this focus in my life as much, if not more, than many of you as I realize my spiritual life, my prayer life, is not where it should be. I work through my to-do list each day, run to meetings, carve out time with family, find myself overwhelmed by the pressures of the day...finances, ministry, responsibilities, the future’s unknown’s...I often carry these things through the day and they weigh on me...leading me to be depressed, unable to sleep. I find myself worn out.

There were times when Jesus was tired and worn-out from all He had done and perhaps, from thinking about all that was yet to be done...the cross He would one day carry. At times life would hit Him hard. Look at Matthew 14...

Jesus had just been told the news that his cousin and close friend, John the Baptist, had been beheaded, killed by Herod. I am sure Jesus hurt, hurt deeply, when he heard about his cousin. I am sure his heart broke at the untimely and unjust death of this man of God whom he loved.

We are told in the scripture, *“As soon as Jesus heard the news, He left in a boat to a remote area to be alone”* ...to pray...to ask God for comfort, strength...

But people followed Jesus and Jesus saw the crowds and the scripture says, *“had compassion on them.”* Jesus performed a miracle that day...turning five loaves of bread and two fish into enough food to feed over 5,000 people. After the people were fed, the scripture tells us, *“Immediately after this, Jesus insisted that His disciples get back into the boat and cross to the other side of the lake, while He sent the people home. After sending them home, He went up into the hills by Himself to pray. Night fell while He was there alone”* (Matthew 14:22-23).

Like Jesus, we must Yield...we must Refuel...we must Pray.

John Bevere writes, *“There is a call – no, a cry – coming from the heart of God and with each passing day its intensity increases: ‘Why are you satisfied without My presence; why do you remain distant when you could have intimacy with Me?’ All of us have friends of people we admire and want to be closer with. They hold a special place in our hearts, and spending time with them is a treat, especially when it comes at their invitation. Such a request to share their company fills us with anticipation, joy, and excitement. We happily do whatever it takes to clear our calendar and accept their request. Within the book of James, we find the greatest invitation every issued, ‘Draw near to God and He will draw near to you’ (4:8). Stop for a moment and ponder this: The Creator of the universe, the earth, and all its inhabitants, requests your presence.”*

Jesus made sure the disciples understood this truth. In Acts 1, Jesus gave the disciples instruction.

Acts 1:4-5 – ***On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: “Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days, you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.”***

The disciples went back to Jerusalem. There were about 120 of them, followers of Jesus. They met together and they “*all joined constantly together in prayer*” (Acts 1:14).

Then they received.

Acts 2:1-4a – “*When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit...*”

The church was never the same. In that upper room in Jerusalem, 120 disciples, followers of Jesus Christ, sat and waited, in prayer together, for the coming of the promised Holy Spirit. It is unlikely that any of the 120 followers had ever been out of Palestine. In Palestine there were living 4 million Jews, which means that only 1 in every 30,000 were Christians; yet, Jesus had told them to “*Go and make disciples of all nations.*” Out of these small beginnings, the kingdom of God grew to encompass the entire world. Jesus had touched a handful of men and women, and through them, through prayer, and through the power of the Holy Spirit the entire world was touched.

#### Two questions:

- (1) How can you and I, men and women God promises, “*Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God*” (Isaiah 41:10)...men and women God promises, “*When you walk through the waters I will be with you... When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned*” (Isaiah 43:2)...men and women God promises, “*Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest*” (Matthew 11:28)...How can you and I, as children of God, account for feeling like giving up at times...how can we account for our feeling run down, overwhelmed, and depressed?

And...

- (2) How can you and I, the church...the church God promises, “*I will fight for you; you only need to be still*” (Exodus 14:14)...the church God promises, “*No weapon forged against you will prevail*” (Isaiah 54:17)...the church God promises, “*Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours*” (Mark 11:24)...How can you and I, the

church, account for when it fails to live up to the marvelous tenets of its founder, Jesus Christ?

**First...We believe too little in the power of prayer.**

Andrew Murray, in his book, With Christ in the School of Prayer, writes, *“We believe too little in the power of prayer to bring about definite results. We do not live close enough to God to be capable of the confidence that He will answer. We have not surrendered entirely to His service and Kingdom.”*

Murray goes on to say, *“The power to provide for the needs of the world and secure the servants for God’s work has been given to us in prayer. The Lord of the harvest will hear. Christ Who taught us to pray this way will support the prayers offered in His Name and interest.”*

Do you believe? Will you believe in the power of prayer?

**Secondly...We are too quick to focus on the mountain in front of us instead of the “mountain-mover.”**

Bill Hybels writes, *“How do you pray a prayer so filled with faith that it can move a mountain? By shifting the focus from the size of your mountain to the sufficiency of the mountain mover, and by stepping forward in obedience. As you walk with God, your faith will grow, your confidence will increase and your prayer will have power.”*

Hybels goes on to write, *“Israel’s warriors are standing on a hill overlooking a battlefield, and the Philistine champion Goliath swaggers out to frighten them. The warriors say, ‘We’re not going down there to fight him. He’s nine feet tall. Look at his armor! Look at his spear! I don’t want that thing in my ribs.’ The adolescent shepherd David comes out, surveys the field, and says, ‘Look at the size of our God. Let me go!’”*

*“Probably every human being alive is standing in the shadow of at least one mountain that just will not move: a destructive habit, a character flaw, an impossible marriage or work situation, a financial problem, a physical disability. What is your immovable mountain? Have you stood in its shadow for so long that you’ve grown accustomed to the darkness? I challenge you to shift the focus of your prayer. Don’t spend a lot of time*

*describing your mountain to the Lord. He knows what it is. Instead, focus your attention on the mountain mover – his glory, power and faithfulness. Then start walking in faith, following his leading, and watch the mountain step aside.”*

### **Thirdly...We are not yielding to God in our prayers.**

So often in our prayers, we pray for what we want, what we desire, what we think is best for our lives. When the disciples went back to the upper room in Jerusalem to “*wait*” for power from on high, they did not know what to pray for...they were simply told by Jesus to pray. They could not have known to pray specifically for the beginnings of the church, Peter’s speech leading to the conversion of thousands, protection from the persecution that was coming, Stephen’s martyrdom, Peter’s vision and the opening of the Gospel to the Gentiles. They simply poured their hearts and love out to God. They surrendered themselves, as did Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane, to God’s will.

Glenn Clark, in his book, The Soul’s Sincere Desire, writes, “*‘Not my will, but thine, be done.’ ‘Thy will’ – whether the seeker knows it or not – is always the spiritual will, just as ‘my will’ is always the material will. Thus, this simple statement, when uttered from the heart and not from the lips only, is a veritable Aladdin’s lamp for converting a petition for material things into a petition for spiritual things. In other words, it grants to God the privilege of substituting His will for ours...”*

### **Lastly...We are not “slowing-down” to pray.**

Hybels writes, “*You can’t become an authentic Christian on a diet of constant activity, even if the activity is all church related...Strength comes out of solitude. Decisions that change the entire course of your life usually come out of the holy of holies...it’s time to slow down, reflect, and listen.”*

John Ortberg writes, “*Not long after moving to Chicago, I called a wise friend to ask for some spiritual direction. I described the pace at which things tend to move in my current setting. I told him about the rhythms of our family life and about the present condition of my heart, as best I could discern it. What did I need to do, I asked him, to be spiritually healthy? Long pause. ‘You must ruthlessly eliminate hurry from your life,’ he said at last. Another long pause. ‘Okay, I’ve written that one down,’ I told him, a*

*little impatiently. 'That's a good one. Now what else is there?' Another long pause. 'There is nothing else,' he said. Ortberg goes on to say, 'Hurry is the great enemy of spiritual life in our day. Hurry can destroy our souls. Hurry can keep us from living well.' As Carl Jung wrote, 'Hurry is not of the devil; hurry is the devil.'"*

We must slow down. Before doing anything, the disciples were asked to go to Jerusalem and “*wait.*” Wait and listen...wait and pray...wait on God to move in their midst.

A closing story: A tale is told about a small town that had historically been “*dry,*” but then a local businessman decided to build a tavern. A group of Christians from a local church were concerned and planned an all-night prayer meeting to ask God to intervene. It just so happened that shortly thereafter lightning struck the bar and it burned to the ground. The owner of the bar sued the church, claiming that the prayers of the congregation were responsible, but the church hired a lawyer to argue in court that they were not responsible. The presiding judge, after his initial review of the case, stated that “*no matter how this case comes out, one thing is clear. The tavern owner believes in prayer and the Christians do not.*”

May we be a church, a group of Christians, men and women of God, who believe in prayer, and in so believing, are able to witness in our lives and the life of our church, God’s presence, power, and peace.