

Devotions for the Week of February 24, 2019

LARGE-PRINT

North East United Methodist Church

Rev. Dr. Drew M. Christian

2019 Theme: PRAYER

2019 Key Scripture: *“Look to the Lord and his strength; seek his face always.”*

- I Chronicles 16:11

Sunday, February 24, 2019

Read Matthew 6:9-13.

Last Sunday, February 17th, we took a look at *The Lord's Prayer* and went through the first few phrases Jesus taught us and what each of them means. We spent time reflecting on what we are saying and committing to when we lift these words to heaven. We do not want these words Jesus taught us, this prayer we lift to God, to be rote and mechanical.

Remember, Don Underwood, in his book, Pray Like Jesus, writes, *“Most Christians know [this prayer] by heart and can easily recite it. In fact, that might be part of the problem: it is so well known and easily recited that most of us never even think about the words as we rattle them off silently or in a corporate worship setting.”*

Once again, on this Sunday night, spend time reading through *The Lord's Prayer*. Read it slowly. Read each line and STOP, reflect, ask God to speak to you through the prayer His Son taught us.

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven,
Hallowed by thy name.
Thy kingdom come,
Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.
 And forgive us our trespasses,
 As we forgive those who trespass against us.
 And lead us not into temptation,
 but deliver us from evil.
 For thine is the kingdom, and the power,
 and the glory forever.
 Amen.

Monday, February 25, 2019

Read I John 1:9; Romans 5:8.

The Lord's Prayer continues, "*And forgive us our trespasses.*"

There were many years I spent living with guilt and heartache for the things I had done, the ways I had hurt others. The guilt would weigh on me and I would often ask the question many people find themselves asking, "How can God forgive me knowing what I've done?" I would work harder and harder to try and make up for my mistakes, to show God my contrition and love.

There came the day that I finally understood what Christ had done for me, that God loved "even me," that I could do nothing to earn this love. Underwood writes, "*Sola fide is how Martin Luther put it: we are saved by grace through faith alone! We cannot be redeemed by our good works. That has been a cornerstone of our Christian theology for centuries. Yet, it is a concept that is difficult for us to grasp...at some basic level most of us wonder how God can really forgive all our sins. Reciting the Lord's Prayer on a daily basis is a powerful way of reminding us that not only are we sinners, but that God's forgiveness and grace is freely available to us every single day.*"

What transgressions are you carrying? What burdens from the past weigh you down? What sins have you committed that you find yourself reliving each day, overwhelmed by the guilt of what you did or failed to do? Lift your transgressions, your sins, your mistakes, your failures up to God and pray, "*And forgive us our trespasses.*"

Believe in the grace of God, that God loves “even you,” warts and all. May you know what the psalmist discovered when he confessed and cried out to God, “*Then I confessed my sins to you; I did not conceal my wrongdoings. I decided to confess them to you, and you forgave all my sins*” (Psalm 32:5).

Tuesday, February 26, 2019

Read Hebrews 8:10-12; Psalm 103:10-14.

Underwood writes, “*The most remarkable aspect of our grace-filled theology is that God not only forgives our sins but forgets them as well...*” Underwood continues, “*We humans have the ability to remember forever the slightest insult or smallest betrayal...one of the biggest obstacles to living freely in the kingdom of God is not what God remembers about us, but what we remember about ourselves. The memories we carry with us are so powerful that they can keep us chained to the past...sometimes we carry around painful or scary memories that will not turn us loose...*”

Read slowly and reflect on the words of the psalmist, “[God] *does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His love for those who fear Him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us*” (Psalm 103:10-12). God says, “*For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins **NO MORE***” (Hebrews 8:12).

Take a moment and read over the lyrics to the song, “East to West,” by Casting Crowns, and whatever you are carrying, whatever “*chains of yesterday surround you,*” let God have all of it and know that He will not only “*remove*” your transgressions but “*remember*” them “*no more.*” Picture Jesus on the cross, carrying your sin upon His back, taking it all from you, showing you how deep His love goes. Give God thanks for such sacrifice, such love, such grace!

East to West
Casting Crowns

*Here I am Lord and I'm drowning
In your sea of forgetfulness
The chains of yesterday surround me
I yearn for peace and rest
I don't want to end up where you found me
And it echoes in my mind
Keeps me awake tonight*

*I know you've cast my sin as far
As the east is from the west
And I stand before you now
As though I've never sinned
But today I feel like I'm just one mistake away
From you leaving me this way*

*Jesus, Can you show me just how far the east is from the west?
Cause I can't bear to see the man I've been
Rising up in me again
In the arms of your mercy I find rest
You know just how far the east is from the west
From one scarred hand to the other*

Wednesday, February 27, 2019

Read Philippians 3:13-14.

Paul writes in Philippians 3:13-14, “Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.”

Underwood asks, “Do you suppose [Paul] was haunted by the memory of those days when he was a pure legalist, following the law to the minutest detail and yet still unhappy and frustrated? Did he keep seeing himself as the arrogant, pompous, self-righteous Pharisee he had been before he met Christ? Was it that moment when he held the coats of those who stoned Stephen? Paul brought a lot of baggage to his

relationship with Christ, and in this remarkable moment of self-revelation we glimpse his struggles to stop playing those old reruns in his head.”

Underwood continues, *“When we pray ‘forgive us our trespasses’ in the Lord’s Prayer, we are trusting God not only to forgive us but also to provide us with the spiritual power to accept that forgiveness. We are giving our sins to God, but we are also asking for God’s power and grace to help us stop playing the reruns in our heads. Many people know and understand that God forgives, but they are still not liberated by grace. The reason is the demonic power of memory.”*

Have you ever had the experience where you go to the altar, you fall to your knees beside your bed, you confess your sin and thank God for forgiveness, and then you pick your sin up again and carry it home or to bed with you? We must walk through the final stage of forgiveness.

Underwood explains the stages of forgiveness. He writes, *“The first stage of the sequence is trusting that God does indeed forgive us. It means accepting that God’s forgiveness is not superficial or temporary but sincere and lasting. The second stage is trusting that God forgets, that God remembers our sins no more. This stage is difficult because of our human tendency to remember the smallest of infractions, our compulsive desire to hold on to painful memories. How can we understand that what is unnatural for us is natural for God? The final and most difficult stage is the forgetting that we ourselves must do. The glory of a full relationship with Christ is found when believers become so confident about God’s love that they are liberated from dwelling on all that has gone wrong.”*

If there are still things that you are carrying, guilt for actions and inaction that you have already lifted up in heartfelt confession to God, pray that God would give you the *“power and grace to help [you] stop playing the reruns in your head.”* If you have confessed your sin before God, trust that God has forgiven your sins, as *“far as the east is from the west,”* and remembers them no more. Whenever your mistakes resurface in your mind, quickly lift up Psalm 103:10-12, Psalm 32:5, or pray The Lord’s Prayer, and ask God to help you *“strain forward to what’s ahead.”*

Thursday, February 28, 2019

Read Ephesians 4:32; Mark 11:25; Matthew 5:23-24.

Jesus continues to teach His disciples and us to pray, “...*as we forgive those who trespass against us.*”

Underwood writes, “*Jesus didn’t just say, ‘Forgive us our trespasses.’ The full statement is ‘Forgive us our trespasses, **AS** we forgive those who trespass against us.’ I intentionally place emphasis on the word **AS** to demonstrate what I think Jesus intended: our liberation from the sins we have committed goes hand-in-hand with our own graciousness towards those who have hurt us...Jesus is making the point that we really are unable to fully receive the grace God offers freely unless we are willing to offer it as well.*”

Is there anyone in your life who you need to forgive? Anyone you are holding a grudge against or are angry with? As God for the strength to forgive them for how they hurt or angered you, and let the bitterness you are carrying go, remembering how Christ died so that you could be forgiven for the times you have failed, fallen, and hurt others. Pray for the person you are having trouble forgiving, asking God to touch their hearts and bless them.

Friday, March 1, 2019

Read Psalm 23.

“*And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.*”

Underwood asks us to look at the 23rd Psalm when reflecting on these words in The Lord’s Prayer. Where are we asking God to lead us? Underwood writes, “*When I ask God to ‘lead us not into temptation,’ I often think of the Twenty-third Psalm...This is an extraordinary image of the Lord **leading us** beside still waters, **leading us** in the paths of righteousness, **leading us** through times when we are surrounded by enemies, **leading us** gracefully to our final moments on earth.*”

Pray that God would lead you not into temptation but keep you on a path that will help you steer clear of the things that would tempt you away from what is right and good and just and lovely and pure. Pray that God would lead you beside “*still waters,*” on “*paths of righteousness,*” through difficult times, and most of all, God would lead you to a deeper and more intimate relationship with Him and His will for your life.

Saturday, March 2, 2019

Read Psalm 96:8-13; Revelation 4:11.

“For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever.”

This final phrase of The Lord’s Prayer is not found in most translations of Matthew’s Gospel and was not part of the original text. It was added to the prayer by some of the early Christian community. Known as the Doxology, it is first found in the Didache (known as *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*), an early Christian treatise.

Underwood writes, *“I have come to the conclusion that, for those who pray it, the doxology is a perfect way of concluding the prayer. It effectively closes the circle begun with the opening phrase. Recall that ‘Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name’ begins the prayer by acknowledging the transcendence of God. It places us on our knees as supplicants before a creator God who is bigger than we can imagine, and we take our rightful place as those who make humble entreaty to God. This tone sets the relationship that characterizes the rest of the prayer, and the doxology reinforces it...it reinforces the fact that the prayer isn’t about me but about God. It’s not **my** kingdom but **God’s** kingdom, not **my** power but **God’s** power, not **my** glory but **God’s** glory. It all belongs to God.”*

He continues, *“It is the perfect antidote for our ongoing temptation to be prideful or to make it all about us. And it is a final reminder that we live always in the powerful presence of God’s overwhelming grace: the grace that makes us whole in spite of everything that makes us broken.”*

Take time tonight to simply give God thanks and praise for who He is, for His creation, for His Son, Jesus Christ. Ask God to help you honor Him with your life. And don’t forget to invite someone to church tomorrow so they can hear the message of God’s grace and amazing love.