

The Power of Prayer

Luke 7:18-22; Acts 16:25-34

July 24, 2011

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As promised last week, this week we are going to explore some of the ways we experience the power of prayer. Last week we took a look at what our Presbyterian tradition – or some of the great thinkers of our tradition – have said about how and why we pray. Of course, that is based on our interpretation of what the Scriptures – and especially Jesus – says about prayer.

If you missed last week's sermon and want to catch up, it is posted on our website with the July 10th date.

Last week was the more studious, doctrinal kind of info to get our theological minds flowing. This week, I want you to participate with me in, if you will, in sharing how you have experienced prayer.

So – I'd like to take this time to ask if some of you would be willing to share a time when you've experienced the power of prayer.

(Give time to for sharing.)

I had an email from Barb Brown – who shared how the power of prayer has worked in her family recently with someone we have been praying for within this community of faith. Barb wrote:

"My late friend, a nurse, told me that many times she found that very ill people seemed to get a new lease on life when people from their church, or in their family were praying for them. Even though, many times they didn't even know about it, and she was told by the spouse that it was happening.

As 'proof', my cousin Cathy Judd, who is suffering from leukemia, has reported that after her family and friends started regularly praying for her, she started doing much better in her chemo sessions. Her husband said that after we had all 'kicked in' that she was able for the first time in months, to start eating a little bit more each day - starting with his homemade - from a box -, macaroni and cheese. He has reported that they have both felt 'lifted' but didn't know what had caused it, but then, with his daily letters to us all, found that we had all started praying at home and church for the two of them, all about the same time - when she was on her second round of chemotherapy.

So far so good. We send her our notes, our prayers and our love each night in response to her husband's updates and it has been working."

That's power! Our prayers are supporting and lifting up a sister in Christ who is suffering. Our caring eases the burden of family and makes it seem a little more bearable.

You've probably noticed that I have carried this glass of water with me during the sermon. I want you to consider this glass of water. It's filled about half way, isn't it? So, how heavy do you think this glass of water is?

When I first came out here to talk with you it didn't seem to weigh anything at all. It's just a half a glass of water. How heavy could that be?

But I have to tell you, by now, as we are nearing the end of this sermon time, this water is beginning to feel a bit heavier. My hand is getting somewhat tired of holding on to it. I feel a little twitch in my muscle – even though you wouldn't think it weighed much.

If I carried this glass around all day, I promise you it would feel much heavier than it does right now, which is heavier than it was 15 minutes ago.

And if I held it all through the night and tomorrow and all next week – well, you would have to call an ambulance!

It really doesn't matter how much it weighs, does it? What matters is how long I carry it around. In fact, if I give this burden to you, (name), I already have relief! And if you just pass it down the row here, all of you are sharing my burden but it doesn't get unbearable for anyone, does it? But, if you will pass it back to me, I have another great idea.

(Take the glass to the chancel and place it on the Table)

If we give it to God and trust God to take care of it, we know it is in the strongest, most capable hands of all.

Here are the ways I think we experience power in prayer:

By sharing prayer concerns with other spiritual friends, my burden doesn't seem so unbearable. Others are showing compassion, are joining me in praying and trusting that things will be okay.

And by going to my heavenly Father who I believe loves me and created me and has a perfect plan for me – by telling Him my concern – my burden is lightened and I find relief.

There are so many things in our lives that we carry around, that we worry about and wish we could fix, yet so much of it we have no control over. I think it is very good and appropriate to carry one another's burdens and to pray for one another all the time. I think in that prayer has a power to it that shows results. People are healed, a way is

found to make it through a difficult time financially, or through a period of distress in a relationship. God does answer prayer!

Sometimes our answer isn't what we wanted. Sometimes it happens so long after we've prayed that we forget who answered the prayer. Sometimes we never know what the answer is.

But the most powerful part of prayer is in the transformation that happens in me – or in you – when we pray. The more I pray, the closer I feel to God. The closer I feel to God the more I trust him and can let go of my concerns. The more I can let go, the more at peace I am and the more I am able to discern what God wants me to do – very likely in the situation I was praying about. The way seems clear. All is much more positive. Things are okay, even before I see the answer.

It goes back to trusting in God's will for everything. Because our heavenly Father is a God of love – a God who created you for good. A God who wants you to talk to Him and to trust Him completely. Jesus said, "when you pray, say "Thy will be done."

I have one last illustration that was sent to me this week from one of you, which is a powerful testimony of the experience of prayer.

I wanted to share a prayer experience that I had in 2004 on November 29. I got a call from my son telling me that his baby girl to be was about to be born (at 26 weeks!) I rushed to St Joseph Hospital in Pontiac. My son's wife was BiPolar and had been on many drugs. The baby to be was barely viable but she had to be born due to many other complications.

As I sat in the waiting room I spoke to God. I didn't pray for the baby to be born without problems. I didn't pray for everything to be alright. I knew all the risks and possible problems. I trust in the will of the Lord and I told him that It was up to him to bless the baby and I promised him that I would accept the outcome.

Baby Faith Olson was born weighing 1lb 8oz and was 12 inches long. The doctors gave her a 30% chance for survival. She was in the ICU Neonatal unit 3 months! My son took a paternity leave, the mom left the family, I have watched Faith since she was 8 months old and she will be 7 on Nov.29 2011!

It was a miracle. I didn't pray for a miracle. It was God's will that we have been blessed with Faith! She is a survivor.

Sometimes you don't know what to pray for so you have to faithfully put it in God's hands. I will always remember that afternoon in that waiting room talking quietly to God. I wanted to share that with you Sharlyn. Thanks, Fran Olson

The apostle, Paul, tells us in Romans 8

²⁶Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. ²⁷And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. ²⁸We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.”

We don't always know how we should pray. But when we go to God in prayer, we have the promise of the Holy Spirit that helps us, that connects us with the will of God. And I love that last statement – that all things work together for good for those who love God and are called according to his purpose.

That would be you! And me! The power of prayer is the Holy Spirit at work in us, letting us know we are loved, we are listened to, and that God is working out for our good. That's power!

We may not literally see bars fall from prison doors or chains loosened around our wrists and ankles as Paul and Silas did. But we certainly are set free from the invisible chains and burdens that keep us in our own prison and weigh us down in life. That's the power of prayer.

“Go and tell (John) what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have good news brought to them.”