

Weekend of Sunday, October 6, 2018
20th Sunday after Pentecost/Lectionary 27/Proper 22/Year B
Primary Text: Mark 10:2-16
Sermon Title: “The Seven Faith Practices - Pray”

Theme

Jesus announced and enacted in history the new reality of God’s surprising activity. These two stories demonstrate this new reality: Women and children are accepted and valued, not dismissed as inferior to adult men.

Text

²Some Pharisees came, and to test [Jesus] they asked, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?” ³He answered them, “What did Moses command you?” ⁴They said, “Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of dismissal and to divorce her.” ⁵But Jesus said to them, “Because of your hardness of heart he wrote this commandment for you. ⁶But from the beginning of creation, ‘God made them male and female.’ ⁷‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, ⁸and the two shall become one flesh.’ So they are no longer two, but one flesh. ⁹Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.”

¹⁰Then in the house the disciples asked him again about this matter. ¹¹He said to them, “Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her; ¹²and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery.”

¹³People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them. ¹⁴But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, “Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. ¹⁵Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.” ¹⁶And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.

Sermon

As I told you, I am not selecting special readings for this sermon series on the Seven Faith Practices. Rather, I am just taking what I am given. But why did this text have to show up? No one wants to hear this text! Ever!

Well, as you heard, the Pharisees tried to trap Jesus with a question about divorce. Ugh! I can hear that grown coming from the congregation. As I said, no one wants to hear this text.

Many members of this congregation are divorced and you don't want to be reminded of it. Before we move on to the subject of the day, allow me just a few moments to address this issue presented in the text.

We are a sinners. Just because some of us have been able to survive marriage doesn't mean that we are better than those who haven't. All of us are sinners, and just because some of us are divorced, doesn't mean that we are farther from God or more damaged. Jesus couldn't be clearer. Divorce is not part of God's plan for us, but then none of go into marriage keeping divorce as a contingency plan. I hope we all go into marriage knowing that marriage is hard work. And when it can't be saved and divorce is the only answer, then we need to seek God's forgiveness knowing we will receive it, and then FORGIVE OURSELVES. Did you all hear me?

And here comes another one of my axioms: "You are not that special!" We are all sinners. Forgive yourself. Get over it and move on.

Can I move on now?

Welcome once again to this sermon series on the Seven Faith Practices, today focusing on the Faith Practice of Pray. As you know, the Seven Faith Practices are these seven verbs, these seven action words illustrated on those colorful banners behind me. And as I have said before, the faithful disciple doesn't get the opportunity to pick and choose which ones of the seven to practice. All are equally important, though we naturally tend to practice one or two more than another. That's fine, but none of us can afford to skip even one single one.

My spiritual director Fr. Anthony Esposito explained it to me like this. He asked, “If you were a diabetic and were required to take insulin every day to live, would you take it?” “Of course” I said. “Prayer is the insulin of the faithful disciple. We simply cannot live without it.”

Martin Luther made the practice of prayer a part of daily life. He said that he prayed for an hour every morning, unless he had a particularly busy or difficult day ahead of him. Then he prayed two hours.

Prayer is the way disciples enjoy an intimate relationship with God. Prayer can be private or public, ritualized or conversational, silent or out loud, spoken or sung, words or actions, simple or profound. Through prayer God’s will is discerned and greater clarity is gained for our faith journeys. Prayer is powerful. God’s creative, redeeming and healing power is often directed through prayer.

I myself use the pattern shaped by the acronym ACTS, which stands for Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication. It puts the four essentials in the right priority too. We should not make prayer a one direction conversation of listing our wants and needs. Rather, we should begin with **Adoration** – praise of God, followed by period of **Confession**, acknowledging how far we have once again fallen short of the model of Jesus Christ. And then take the time to offer **Thanksgiving** for all the blessings we have received; for prayers answered, even those we don’t realize God is answering. Then, having taken care of those three essential elements, Adoration, Confession, and Thanksgiving, then we are ready to bring our **Supplications** to God. Supplications are our wants and needs, all the while acknowledging that God’s will may be another direction, which requires our trust in God.

When it comes to prayer, there is always a need to be attentive to both the individual’s personal prayer life and the prayer life of the congregation. Despite the simplicity of the discipline of prayer, many of us find it difficult and confusing and frustrating to pray. Even when we do pray regularly, we still have many questions about it. The church is here to help. We offer many opportunities for you to practice the spiritual discipline of prayer – both publicly and privately. Janet Hartman is the leader of the Pray Table. I would like to invite her up to tell us about the many ways she and her team does and can facilitate your faith practice of pray.

Janet Hartman – Leader of the Pray Table

As the Pastor said, I am the ministry team leader for the Pray Table. Today I would like to share a few of our ministries and some ways that you can participate.

If you were ever wondering, how our homebound members receive communion, you've come to the right place. A team of trained members form our Eucharistic Ministry and are responsible for taking communion to those members, monthly and as needed. If this sounds like something you could do, just ask.

You also might be wondering how you can share a prayer request or find out about those who might be in need of prayer. The church has an email system to notify members of such prayer requests, and for those who do not have access to email a phone call system is in place to keep you informed. If you are not receiving notifications of prayer requests or church announcements please call the church office. Also available through email is The Daily Word-a place where you can spend part of your day in prayer by reading the scripture and the devotion prepared each day by our own pastor. If you would like to receive emails and the Daily Word you can call the office or sign up on the web site, ZionOhio.org.

Pastor - Hey Janet what if someone is crafty or handy with a crochet hook or knitting needles? Is there a way for them to participate?

Yes Pastor. I'm so glad you asked. The Pray Table has an ongoing ministry to provide prayer shawls to anyone in need of special prayers during a rough time or illness. It is our hope that as we are making these shawls that the crafter is praying for the one who will receive it. We can always use more shawls. Please let me know if you are willing to help.

Throughout the year, we also spend time on some special events and projects. These include collecting for and packing college care boxes, hosting a reception for our graduates in May, as well as, special services such as a prayer vigil, prayer breakfast and a healing service. These are opportunities for us as a congregation to come together and lift up concerns that may be personal, local, or global.

Maybe you enjoy being a part of worship leadership. Leading the congregation in the Prayers of Intercession is a great way to participate in the Faith Practice of Pray.

Not an up-front kind of person? The prayer list of concerns of the congregation is always in the Weekly Edition of Eye on Zion. It is the responsibility of every member to be in prayer for the expressed concerns of our fellowship. They are counting on us.

These are just some of the many ways you can involve yourself in the Faith Practice of Pray.

Pastor – Janet, you really do have a big responsibility. Could you give us just a few takeaways?

Why, yes, Pastor, I could. In fact, I have crafted some key takeaways into the acronym, PRAY.

P-Pray for each other

The church and its leaders.

Pray for your Pastor.

Pray for our country, our military and the nations of the world.

And the list goes on and on. There are always reasons to thank and praise God.

R- Reach out to those in need of prayer.

Let them know you are praying for them. Send a card or a note or visit them. You could even attend a Healing Service or Prayer Breakfast to pray with fellow believers.

A- Then wait for an answer.

God always answers, but it is in His time. It is not about us or our will, but rather what God has planned for us. In the meantime, give thanks and praise to God for all that He has done and all that He is about to do.

Y- And finally you.

The pray table needs you. There are many ways to participate that only take a little of your time. If you are willing to lead Prayers of Intercession in worship, plan an event such as a prayer vigil or a prayer breakfast, knit a prayer shawl, pack a college care box or take communion to our homebound, please come and see me after worship or on Tuesday the 9th at the Ministry Team Night.

Conclusion

So I'm just curious. Has anyone given away a band yet?

Maybe this will help. Next time you meet up with a friend, relative, associate or neighbor, and you ask them, "How you doin'?" and they actually answer you with some element of their life, tell them you will pray for them. That may just surprise them. They may thank you. They may ask, "Why would you do that." You have an answer already, but in as much as I am trying to teach and train you a little throughout this series, you might just include something like, "Because I am a person of faith, and I believe that it is our responsibility to lift up the concerns of others, especially friends, relatives, associates, and neighbors. After all, we are all the creation of the same creator. We are family. At our church we have this expression, "You belong here. We belong together." And it doesn't necessarily mean you belong in our church, but it's a great church. However, it does mean you belong with God and other godly people. So if you don't have a church, I invite you to mine. And I will introduce you to some of my friends, and we will all join in prayer for you about that situation. By the way, here is one of our bands with that expression on it. "You belong here. We belong together.""