

WORSHIP for March 21, 2021

Call to Worship: Psalm 51:15-17 *Responsively*

Open my lips, Lord, and my mouth will declare your praise.

**You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it,
you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings.**

My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit;

a broken and contrite heart you, God, will not despise.

Opening Hymn: **“For the Beauty of the Earth”**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zy7t2Uasqe8>

Prayer of Confession: Ephesians 2:1-3 *Responsively*

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.

All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath.

(Pause now for a time of silent confession.)

Assurance of Forgiveness: Ephesians 2:4-10 *Responsively*

But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgression – it is by grace you have been saved.

And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus.

In order that in the coming he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.

For it is by grace you have been saved through faith – and this is not from yourselves.

It is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast.

For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

“The Gloria Patri”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-uMeiUtOSVM>

Hymn of Preparation: “Be Thou My Vision”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Optrm7IF16s>

“Scripture cannot be set aside... What does Scripture say?” John 10:35 & Romans 4:3.

Prayer for Illumination: *Unison*

Lord, through your Spirit enable us to consider your Word, and to enact it in our lives to bring

you glory and praise. Amen.

Scripture Readings: Ephesians 5:13-20

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ephesians+5%3A13-20&version=NIV>

Scripture Readings: Ephesians 6:18-20

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ephesians+6%3A18-20&version=NIV>

Scripture Readings: Colossians 3:16-17

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Colossians+3%3A16-17&version=NIV>

Scripture Readings: Colossians 4:2-6

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Colossians+4%3A2-6&version=NIV>

Anthem played & sung by Brent Miller, “The Prayer”

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https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2YKxclvVRNQ&list=PLAdy2hvW6PL8_1itXDbTRrCel331DmVVU&index=2&t=0s

SERMON: “Pray in the Spirit” by The Reverend Dr. Janet Hufford

Watch sermon on: <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLAdy2hvW6PL93B6hbgswTxf93Evs575yd>

Paul exhorts the Ephesians and Colossians to make the most of every opportunity. He also tells the Ephesians, to wake up from sleep, and to be filled with the Spirit.

New York City is sometimes referred to as the city that never sleeps. (Ephesus was similar.) There is truth in the expression for although as a young woman I arrived in NY late in the night at my 1st visit there, roads from the airport were still congested with traffic. Headlights, traffic lights, & street lights caused night to be almost as bright as day. Horns blared & motors hummed. My face was pressed up against the window of the taxicab not wanting to miss anything on my first trip to the big apple. I thought to myself that I should stay awake all night, which I pretty much did in a day when I was much younger and more able. I wanted to make the most of the opportunity to visit this bustling city.

But I admit that I was filled with very human excitement rather than seeking to be filled with the Spirit. I marveled at things made by man rather than giving thanks to God with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. In the city that never sleeps, there are many asleep spiritually, participating in acts of debauchery that could be visibly seen in full sight under lampposts.

Though we may be tempted to dismiss such behavior to urban life, the truth is that these sins abound also in sleepy suburban bedroom communities, remote rural country sides, & perfect looking Norman Rockwell like small towns. The pastor of one of the first Presbyterian churches that I attended when I was under care in pursuing potential ordination, once said that his mentoring pastor said to him of the upper middle class large church, , “What goes on behind the closed doors in this well-to-do suburb is the same as anywhere.” As Paul says, “Wake up, sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.”

So what is the answer for Ephesus, for NY, for Columbus, for Pataskala, and for this world filled with debauchery and sin? In Chapter 5 of Ephesians being filled with the Spirit means never ceasing to give praise and thanks to God in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. To not look to things of the world, marveling at the works of man, but to keep our eyes on and to stay in worship of Jesus. No matter what tries to distract us, we are to make the most of every opportunity by keeping our eyes on Jesus.

Besides sin, sorrow and hardship can throw us into a darkness from which we need to awake as well. For example, the sorrow and hardship of a worldwide pandemic, of financial strain, of strain in relationships with individuals, groups of people, and within the nation, of the death of loved ones, of chronic or life threatening illness, of addictions, of mental illness or cognitive impairment, and more. When these show up, we tend to focus on them rather than turning our eyes to Jesus. Our focus becomes one of darkness than rather than light. We talk about bad things happening on Wall Street or at Polaris or in places in Pataskala. Rather than lifting the good news of Jesus, we dwell on the latest breaking bad news on TV or in our communities.

However, sometimes we hear of events that may seem hopeless, but are really opportunities to pray “in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests.”

For me one such event occurred just before this past Thanksgiving, when I received news that a test revealed a likelihood of my having cancer. Therefore, doctors needed to take a closer look. For the procedure, however, I was aware of my high risk due to asthma and the potential exposure to COVID when cases were at record highs. Simultaneously I was also consciously aware of the weariness among medical personnel. I along with all of you had all been praying for them, pressing in even more when COVID cases increased. So as is my habit when going under anesthesia, being literally put to sleep and medically plunged into darkness, I made the most of the opportunity to pray. Then while not yet knowing the results, but knowing Scripture’s call for us to pray all kinds of prayers “in the Spirit on all occasions, I came out of unconscious sleep and into consciousness automatically praying aloud thanking Jesus & blessing every doctor & nurse by name. Perhaps I was even talking in my sleep, which I have been known to do, praying aloud while under anesthesia! Glad I was saying something good, glorifying Jesus and blessing everyone around. Point is that in the Spirit, I made the most of the opportunity to pray out loud and unashamedly giving thanks to Jesus for the medical staff, who I hope felt supported & blessed. A few days later I think I received validation that they did feel the support and blessings, for on the day before Thanksgiving, I received a compassionate call directly from the surgeon announcing favorable results that there was no sign of cancer. I believe that call came because of my in the Spirit taking an opportunity for prayer, which became a blessing for all, both medical staff and me! Thank you, Jesus.

So how thankful are we? How is our prayer life? How often do we pray? We’ve had a lot of prayers needs here in FPCP this week. Further on what occasions do we pray? What kinds of prayers? Do we pray first thing upon waking asking for God’s guidance for the day? Or do we stumble out of bed, blaming our grouchiness on our need for coffee? Coffee or not, are we alert waiting for God’s answer to our prayers? Staying awake to not miss God’s answer, do we anticipate an answer to come?

Now to answer the aforementioned questions, there is a sense that all the Lord's people do not pray as much as we should, that we do not make the most of every opportunity, that we fall short of Paul's urging to pray, otherwise he would not have written about it in the letter. Further, some people hesitate to pray in groups, afraid of the potential of being asked to contribute aloud, arguing that prayer is not their gift. However, prayer is not a gift of the Spirit. Prayer is our means of being in communication in the context of our relationship with God and each other. Prayer is a given. Prayer is the language of the family of God. If a family refuses to be in communication with each other and with the family head, what will happen to that family? What will happen to those relationships?

The early NT church was founded on prayer. Following the Spirit poured out on believers at Pentecost, which occurred as a result of prayer, the people were devoted to the Apostles' teaching, communion, and prayer. But somewhere along the way, prayer in unity by the Spirit has diminished. Prayers now may be led by the sole voice of the pastor and are primarily concerning bodily ailments of individuals, but prayers for the common good with the Lord adding daily to the number of those saved as described in Acts 2 are seldom spoken. Seems we are not making the most of every opportunity to pray.

We may recall that on Founder's Day we heard how group prayer was instrumental in the founding of FPCP. Prayer meetings continued through much of the early years of the church, until 1924 when the session voted to discontinue prayer meetings. It was after 1924 that the church went in periods of sharp decline.

However, there is an awakening of prayer meetings. Since the fall of 2020 an intercessory prayer team has been active at FPCP. The team prays each week for the message to be heard and put into practice and to hear along with the session specific assignments and tasks for FPCP, such as handicapped accessibility and recording of services. As a result the width of the doorway into the front of the sanctuary is expanded to accommodate all size wheelchairs. In addition, this spring handicapped accessible spaces are being added to the gravel lot for easy access to the level entrance for those who need it. Further, there are plans for the sound system to be improved & live streaming from the sanctuary for those whose health or circumstances does not allow them to attend. Please pray as we are awaiting details and session's decision on those coming bids.

I pray that this message on prayer will be taken to heart! Can you hear the call for us to pray? If so, talk to Kathy Wallace about joining the prayer team. If the call seems scary to you, at least ask as the disciples did of Jesus, "Lord, teach us how to pray." Make the most of every opportunity to pray. This is not a request from your pastor. This a call from God. "Wake up sleeper" and answer the call.

But before we finish, there is one more inspiring example to share. Last month through an email from Judy Baird, I also of a seemingly hopeless, but even more inspiring account. In the summer of 2014 in the publication "Wisconsin People and Ideas" the story of Leslie Lemke appeared. Leslie was born prematurely in 1952 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. He was literally plunged into a state of darkness as an infant, since he had to have both of his eyes surgically removed. He was severely ill in numerous others way too, not expected to live beyond a few months. Further, Leslie was given up for adoption, and put into hospice care with May Lemke,

his nurse governess, a devout believer, who prayed and was determined that Leslie would live, which he did. Not only was Leslie blind, he was also severely cognitively impaired, measuring a verbal IQ of only 58. All seemed hopeless for Leslie and May, but through them Jesus presented opportunity for praise and prayer. For Leslie in time was discovered to have savant syndrome, affording him musical skill at prodigy level. Following our prayers of joy and concern this morning, we will join Leslie and his late mother May in prayer and praise as they sing and Leslie plays the Our Father.

Hymn of Response: “What a Friend We Have in Jesus”

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vlv0zzKs_rY

PRAYERS of Joy and Concern, followed by:

“Our Father” sung by Leslie & his mother May and played by Leslie Lemke

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d4fYJFcMN4>

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be 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 debts, as we forgive our debtors;
and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.**

For thine is the kingdom and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

Please Continue to Give in Dedication to Our Lord and Savior, Jesus

Prayer Of Dedication: Unison

Jesus, Our Savior. In view of your mercy, we offer up our thanks thru giving. Amen.

Doxology

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wSshNIuVPbA>

Closing Hymn: “Lord, Listen to Your Children Praying”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qp5Ck6BsWJQ>

Benediction: Ephesian 6:23-24 *Responsively*

Peace to the brothers and sisters, and love with faith from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love,... in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**