

“When I Cry Aloud”

Living The Good Life Lenten Series #2

Psalm 27 & Matthew 26:36-46

March 16, 2014 ~ Rev. James Ramsey

Many people are suspicious of prayer and also of those who engage in it.

I was touched by the story of the hungry child who prayed earnestly for an Easter basket, filled not with chocolate eggs and candy, but for simple food to feed her family -- but nothing happened. Easter came and went and she remained unsatisfied. She shared her prayers with a skeptical friend, who asked with a sneer, “What happened to this God of yours? Why didn't he hear and answer your prayers?” To that the child answered simply, “O, I am sure he heard me and told someone to bring me a basket, but I guess they just forgot.”



The ridiculing friend just shrugged and walked away. Perhaps there is more than childish naiveté in the faithful girl's reply. Some in the world are quick to blame God – but how often are the world's challenges not the fault of God, but rather because we, God's

people, do not fulfill our part in partnership with him.

The cynical assume prayer is like a lunch counter. We shout out what we want and God, the short order cook, offers it up pronto. Those of us who pray know it is not like that.

When I Cry Aloud to God it is not so much my placing an order – but rather a reaching out, a connection, a sharing and a walking with. Whether you pray at breakfast with your family or alone in a



favorite secluded spot, at a table in the middle of the day or by candle at night, or maybe when you exercise, it is a joining of the company of Jesus. Prayer really is a getting in line behind Jesus...learning his purposes...becoming his disciple. God cares what we want, God listens, God answers – but we are a part of something bigger, a partner in God's plan, a worker in God's vineyard. And so our own personal needs and wants and desires gradually draw in line with the broader concerns of God.

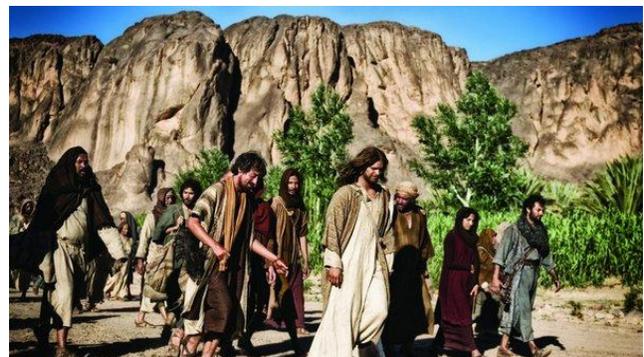


Our Lenten theme is “Living the Good Life,” learning to operate attuned to God's purposes, walking with Jesus and others who follow him.



But not everybody agrees! Living the Good Life has a myriad of definitions – many of them forsaking any mention of God at all. Google “Living the Good Life” and you get all sorts of explanations – from strategies for constructing a wise retirement portfolio – to switching your house over to alternative energy sources, quitting your job and going “off the grid.” None of these definitions have anything to do with God. Jesus – his life, teaching, sacrifice, resurrection, doesn't really enter into it! If you search living the good life on Google Images, you get pictures of people relaxing in beach side hammocks sipping pina colodas OR some unsuitable picture which shouldn't be described from the pulpit.

But we know that living the good life has everything to do with following Christ, with offering up our hopes and fears, our heart to God.



The Psalmist has much to fear – evildoers are out to get him, his adversaries plot against him – so that he feels he has been drawn into a war – his path ahead is crooked and treacherous – his

enemies have hired false witnesses to testify against him and they are breathing out violence.

The Psalmist says, "Hear, O LORD, when I cry aloud... Teach me your way, O LORD, and lead me on a level path...I believe I shall see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living. Wait for the LORD; be strong and let your heart take courage; wait for the LORD."



We learn from Jesus' prayer, too. Look at the scene in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Jesus knelt in the Garden of Gethsemane. He had taken his trusted disciples with him, asked them to remain in prayer

with him. He sensed He had only a few hours left. He knew what was coming. He called out to His Father.

"If you will it, Father, pass this cup from me," No wonder Jesus was fearful, or at least apprehensive. "But not what I want...what You want."

"If you will it....." Jesus repeated later. God was listening. Jesus chose to go with God, to face the suffering for us – because it was His Father's will. He accepted that his own desires were only a part of God's desires for him and for God's overall plan.



And consider the earlier prayer Jesus taught his disciples...the one we know by heart:

"Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done."

What would He say.....? The music reached a climax. The suspense....

"The purpose of the prayer of [request] petition is not to have our own way, but to bring our will into conformity with the will of God." – Donald Bloesch

In Lent, we seek to pray more often and take prayer more seriously. We recognize prayer as a means of God's grace to us, as a way by which – through conversation with God, we find God's will and directions for our lives. (we find our purpose!)

Our various types of prayer – adoration and praise, confession, petition and supplication, thanksgiving – all are ways we express ourselves to God and listen for ways God communicates to us.

Last year we focused a whole year on Prayer and we had a weekly prayer time called *Space for Grace*. Sometimes we met in the evening before dinner in Founders' Chapel. And other times we met early in the morning, either in Founders' Chapel or outside under our Pavilion.



By most standards the program might be judged a failure. Not many people participated. Not much seemed to happen from it. Some maybe thought it a waste of time. I know some could not pray at the scheduled time, but told me they were praying where they were, in solidarity with us. On paper, *Space for Grace* may appear a failure – but that's not what I think. I know that *Space for Grace* is important. Even though all my prayers were not clearly answered last year, some were, others were re-directed, and I was thankful for time to commune with God. During *Space for Grace* God gifted me/us with inroads and inspiration on a variety of topics – programs that are bearing fruit right now. I trust God heard my/our prayers.

The Psalmist knew that God heard prayers. His prayers, and ours, cried aloud, offer to God an expression of the depths of our feelings. The Psalmist sought God to be gracious and to answer his prayers. He could pray in this way, confident that God is a gracious God and that God does answer the prayers of God's people. Yet even when our faith may sputter, we can believe that God continues to be who God is and does what God will do.



When we pray to God asking for something (to get us through some trial, to heal a loved one, to show us guidance) our purpose should not be to get our own way, to dictate to God what **we** want. Our prayers of petition should aim to bring our wills in accordance with God's will for us.

We want, above all else, to be and to do what God desires. When we cry aloud, we lay out for God what we hope, what we want, trusting God to be gracious and answer us. But our greatest request is that what we pray for will unite us with the will of God.