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**Pentecost 09, July 30, 2023**

**“When You Don’t Know What to Pray”**

**Read: Romans 8: 26 – 27; Memorize: Romans 8: 26**

We touched on this in last week’s sermon, but apparently the folks who fashioned the lectionary, our readings each week, felt we needed to spend more time on it in these two verses

Have you ever found yourself in the situation where you didn’t know what to pray? Or perhaps you prayed for something and the exact opposite happened? God says He’s going to listen. I know He’s pretty old. Perhaps, He has a hearing problem.

Perhaps, you have found yourself in a situation where you felt like you want to pray but you just can’t even get the words out; your mind can’t focus on them, the situation is so horrific that you don’t know where to begin, let alone end You might wonder why God allows such things to happen.

Many times, when we are in such a situation we try to explain God to people. Why did this child die? Why did I get cancer? Why did the person I love die? We want to come up with rational explanations, as if that would take the pain away. When we’re at a loss for words for those seeking answers, we default to say, “We should pray, but then find the words won’t come.

It is in just such situations that the verses for today were given to us. When we don’t know, when we’re not sure what to ask for or how it’s going to turn out, we pray. When life seems so totally unfair, we can turn our prayers over to the Holy Spirit. He will do our praying for us.

He will do the one thing that we can’t do at that point. He will bring the prayer that aligns with God’s will because He and the Father are in total agreement about what should happen, how it should happen and when it should happen.

Last week’s lesson began, “I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed to us.” We tend to focus on

suffering. We don't like suffering. Why should we? It isn't fun yet suffering has a place in our lives. Suffering brings us to the cross, the sign of God's greatest love, so that we don't have to suffer eternally.

It always intrigues me when people talk about suffering. If we were to measure the amount of suffering in our lives we would likely find that it is pretty small in comparison to our entire life. I have to think about myself. When I had my brain hemorrhage in 2013, that was the first time I had ever been a patient in a hospital.

My mother gave birth to me at home. I had lived for 65 years and never been a patient in a hospital. Yet, I woke up on that Saturday morning with Roxann and Mary Allhusen sitting by my bed talking and me, wondering where I was.

I was the only person on my unit which had to do with strokes and brain hemorrhages that was not on a ventilator. I was able to speak, and had they let me, I could have gotten up and walked around. But I have to tell you I learned so many things about being a patient in a hospital for the first time in my life.

I had a new appreciation for being a hospital patient; didn't like it. Later, I could look back and understand. It was because I was no longer in control. I was under the power of others and I didn't like it.

I know many people were praying for me. I know God was working in this because the doctor told me I would be in the hospital for twenty-one days. I came home nine days later. But it changed my life. It changed my appreciation for Roxann who, as the doctor said, "Saved my life," when she told the doc to treat me.

Personally, I was glad we had been out to a dinner dance that evening, rather than having some disagreement. I know her answer would always been the same, but I just felt better. God was working in this big time. He was being glorified by my healing and the actions of our Board of Elders and many others as they stepped up. They learned at about 5:30 AM on Saturday that I was not going to be doing anything that weekend.

For years we had not just talked about everyone being a minister, but empowered them to do so. That's what happened that weekend. Elders led worship; others stepped in with a sermon. Communion was even celebrated thanks to Lisa, who called Pastor Brian from Mendon to consecrate elements so that the people of God could gather around this table and give thanks to God for the healing that was

occurring in my life and their joy of worshiping Him. You might say we were living out our mission: “Everyday Disciples, Sharing Christ, Changing Lives!”

Sometimes, we don't know what to pray for because our vision is limited. We see only a tiny bit and only from our perspective, while God sees all. Our sinfulness gets in the way of us doing God's will. God has put the Holy Spirit into us so that He has a direct line into our lives and we have a direct connection to Him.

God knew we would have struggles where we don't know exactly how to pray, so He took care of that problem by providing the Spirit to us. When we are tired, distressed, fettered with the problems of the world that we think we can solve, but can't, the Spirit is there to guide us and encourage us. He knows our hearts. The Spirit speaks for us, encouraging God in turn to send others to encourage us.

So now the question becomes how can we be confident that God is hearing those things from the Spirit? Paul helps us in verse 27. He reminds us that God knows exactly what is in our hearts. He knows what the Spirit is thinking because there is perfect harmony and intimacy between them. There can be no contradiction between the Spirit in our hearts and the Father in heaven.

The Spirit always intercedes according to God's will so He helps to interpret the Father to us. He helps us to know and understand what the will of God is. God is wanting us to continue on in faith, waiting to have whatever needs to be revealed, revealed to us. What that does is make us more alert to God's movement and action in our lives.

Now, here's something you may not have considered. So often we see suffering as bad. We do all we can to avoid it. Yet, if we consider it, our suffering, our uncertainty, our struggle with prayer, our doubt and confusion reveals something that is really important for us to understand. It reveals our weakness. Suffering strips away the mask of self-sufficiency and reveals our utter helplessness as we confront the reality that we are not God.

How often do you find yourself putting on a strong front, while quaking inside because of fear. You don't know how it's all going to work out and you would really like to. So, the Spirit comes alongside of you. In that moment of weakness, He reveals that He is praying on your behalf.

**In that, we have the whole Trinity praying for us. Along with them we have that great cloud of witnesses that we hear about in Hebrews, who are cheering us on also. In our weakness, we can rely on the strength of the Holy Spirit, who is part of the Godhead itself.**

**Perhaps this will help us to understand when it seems that our prayers go awry. Martin Luther said some 450 years ago: “That’s it’s a good thing if we occasionally receive the opposite of what we pray for because that’s a sign the Holy Spirit is at work in our lives.” We may be praying directions for God, such as, “Lord, do this and this and this and everything will be fine.” When in truth rather than telling God what to do we should be listening to what God wants us to know and do.**

**So, the Holy Spirit meanwhile says, “Lord, what He means is this. Don’t pay any attention to that. He said thus and so but if he saw the bigger picture, he’d really ask for such and such.” As we pray from our weak and limited perspective, the Holy Spirit takes some divine way out and erases the crazy things we’re asking and replaces them with exactly what God wants for us, in us and through us. It is in our moments of submission that we truly see beyond ourselves to the presence and power of the Holy Spirit in us. In the working of the Holy Spirit, we come to understand and trust the Lordship of Jesus.**

**Count me in: Will you change your perspective on the difficulties you face, as you listen for the Spirit’s direction**