

WELCOME 16 September 2018 – 17 Pentecost '18 B

Philippians 4:4-7, Colossians 4:2-6, Luke 18:1-8, Isaiah 40:25-26

Good morning! Welcome to worship today! It is great to have you here this morning. Please stay with us for morning tea after worship so we can get a chance to know one another better...

"What if..." can be a loaded question. At times, it expresses regret over a choice made that led to a painful result. Sometimes it reveals our uncertainty or confusion about what lies ahead. But what if, instead of regret or uncertainty, it became an expression of trust in God's power to lead & transform you like never before. What if you responded to Christ's love for you like never before? What if you were filled with & obedient to the Spirit like never before?

Today a new series What if...like never before: 'What if you pray like never before?'

Moses reminds us of the reality of God's presence with us as we gather for worship: *What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the Lord our God is near us whenever we pray to him? Deuteronomy 4:7*

It's with this confidence & joy that we gather for worship & in which we pray. It is that same confidence that reminds us that prayer is not about results but about relationship & is a coming home to the open heart of the Father where in his gracious presence we are invited & enabled to live in him like never before.

We'll explore & experience that together today...

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Gracious Father, teach us to pray without ceasing. Teach us to pray more and more devotedly. Teach us to pray like it really matters for you love us and desire the best for us at all times. Help us to really listen to you, converse with you, and create a space in our lives that leads to a deeper friendship and relationship that we may stand back in awe and wonder at what you are doing in our own lives and in this world every day. We ask this in the name of Jesus. Amen.

17 PENTECOST '18 B – WHAT IF YOU PRAY LIKE NEVER BEFORE?

FAITH CHAT: 1. About what do you most often pray? Why do you think that is?
2. If someone overheard you praying, what would they come to think about God?

Let's talk about this one now...not a faith chat but something to think about...If you're a student & you only talk to the teacher when you need help...If you're an employee & you only talk to the boss when you want a raise...If you're a child & you only talk to Mom when you're in trouble or Dad if you want \$\$\$...What does that say about those relationships? Not relationships but transactions...

If someone overheard you praying...what would they come to think about God? Would they think of God as your therapist, (listen & nod affirmingly & help you help yourself to be your best you) Would they think of God as your Fire Department, (ready response to react quickly to your emergencies & get your cat out of the tree so life can go back to normal until the next time) Would they think of God as your Santa Claus, (the granter of wishes, wants & desires) or Would they think of God as your sweet ol' granny who always has a hug & a plate of honey biscuits (just wants you to be happy) Would they hear a relationship or a transaction?

I ask quite pointedly because I am really asking that of myself...I journal much of my daily praying so we could flip them out & read & check...maybe we'd see some mix of the above...Maybe some of what you shared earlier...But what if we pray like never before? What would that be like?

What if our prayers began from the perspective of *Isaiah 40:25-26* - "To whom then can you compare me? Who is my equal?" asks the Holy One. Look at the sky & see. Who created these things? Who brings out the stars one by one? He calls them all by name. Because of the greatness of his might & the strength of his power, not one of them is missing. What if praying like never b/4 begins in the place of awe before God? Before a word is formed on my lips. Before a thought rises from my heart. Before a plea leaps from my soul...Awe. First. Why do I say that?

Richard Foster in his book Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home writes; "Real prayer comes not from gritting our teeth but from falling in love." I love that...too much of how I often think about prayer is that it is an effort...it is work it is something demanded of me expected of me & when I fail (according to someone's std expectation requirement) then I'm almost scared to try. If I convince myself that there is a right way & a wrong way...if I'm worried about making sure I get it in line with some perfect process & practice so that I get what I pray for...if I pray only thinking about the result...Would that be a relationship or a transaction?

But Love is captivating...love seizes your heart & drives your emotions & guides thought speech & action...Love is only possible in a relationship where honesty vulnerability transparency self-giving & mutuality are the foundation stones & I know where that is... "See how very much our Father loves us, for he calls us his children & that is what we are!...Dear friends we already are God's children, but he has not shown us yet what we will be like when Christ appears. But we do know that we will be like him, for we will see him as he really is." - 1 John 3:1-2 This we already have...The Father who calls all the stars by name also calls you & me by name & that name is "Son" "Daughter" I'll get to praying in a minute but we gotta get this 1st

Whatever we belong to we belong to God more because we are heirs & children of Him who names the stars & holds them in their proper place (not one is missing or out of alignment) The entire universe moves just the way God designed it & just the way his hand sustains it...not a sparrow falls to earth that the Father doesn't know & he's counted the hairs on our head...And He seeks that intimacy w/ us so that not only does he know us but we know him...And to bring our lives into alignment just like that, so that not a stray thought not a misdirected word not a misplaced random deed emerges from us but that we are in full harmony with him – in complete likeness to him – the image in which we were created & which we were created to bear before the world is restored in full...See what love the Father has for us to make all this true...this is real...authentic...genuine...That is the reality of the universe...

Hang on to this...The God who calls the universe into existence calls us his very own beloved sons/daughters & if in him we find our identity security sustenance & destiny...

- wherever we think we find joy - in the Father we find it to the full
- wherever we think we find security - in the Father we find it unassailable
- wherever we think we find hope – in the Father we find it w/o fail
- wherever we think we find comfort – in the Father we find it everlasting
- wherever we think we find peace – in the Father we find it w/o end
- wherever we think we find satisfaction – in the Father we find it complete
- wherever we think we find healing – in the Father we find it all-encompassing

You see...here's what I believe. I do not believe God created us to be crushed under the oppression of the power of darkness. I don't believe that God came in his fullness in Jesus – came to us in human flesh as the fullest expression of God's glory – came to us as one of us born of Mary to die for us rise for us & make us children of God to rename you son/daughter of the King to see us crushed under the power of darkness...to see you overwhelmed by the circumstance & situations of life – to see you dragged down by depression or despair or trapped in grief or shame... I don't believe Jesus died on the cross rose from the grave & sits at God's side speaking your name into God's ear to see you battered back & forth by confusion about why you're alive...wondering if you really ought to be...doubting your worth your value...I don't believe that.

What I do believe is that God in deep love for you wraps his arms around you & says: *"Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, & thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand."* God offers a relationship...not a transaction.

What I do believe is that Jesus points to what I am convinced was common in his world: a public office holder (judge) who held his role solely for his own gratification & aggrandizement (had no regard for God or anyone else) Have you ever met or heard of a public office holder who was like that? Jesus said, "God's not like that. God seeks to deliver his highest & best...his grandest & most magnificent...to you in your need...your cries are not ignored...you don't have to twist his arm to get his attention. God wants to long to hangs out for bringing his blessing to you." Why? Because he loves you...because he seeks to be in relationship with you...He lives out his unflinching love toward you even before you know it's happening. *Isaiah 65:24 - I will answer them before they even call to me. While they are still talking about their needs, I will go ahead & answer their prayers!* Aine & van

The Father who names the stars & holds them in their proper place (not one is missing or out of alignment) seeks to bring our lives into alignment just like that, so that we are in full harmony with him – in complete likeness to him – our hearts & his are completely in synch...our longings are his longings – our desires are his what brings God pleasure is our delight...

We have to remember...The work of the kingdom is to carry out the agenda of the King & the specifics of that agenda can only be accessed in prayer...*"The primary purpose of prayer is to bring us into such a life of communion with the Father that, by the power of the Spirit, we are increasingly conformed to the image of the Son."* – Richard Foster We know Jesus often withdrew from public ministry to pray & what did he say about that? *Jn 5:19 - "I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself. He does only what he sees the Father doing. Whatever the Father does, the Son also does. For the Father loves the Son & shows him everything he is doing."* The work of the kingdom is to carry out the agenda of the King & the specifics of that agenda can only be accessed in prayer...in that place where our hearts are aligned with the Father's.

Most of us are familiar w/ *Eph 2:8-10 – God saved you by his grace when you believed. You can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it. For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago. All us good Lutherans grab ahold of that & with great gusto declare that we are made right with God/saved/justified by grace alone through faith alone. But we sometimes jump right past vs 10...For we are God's masterpiece; created anew in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, so that we should walk in them.*

When God aligns my heart with his my life with what he has planned for me then I spend every waking moment walking in what God has already prepared OR getting ready for whatever God will put before me next...whatever he will call me to do next. And how will I know what that is...last time from Richard Foster...

God aches over our distance & preoccupation. He mourns that we do not draw near to him. He grieves that we have forgotten him. He weeps over our obsession with muchness & manyness. He longs for our presence. He invites you & me to come home - to come home to where we belong - to come home to that for which we were created. His arms are stretched out wide to receive us. His heart is enlarged to take us in. For too long we have been in a far country: a country of noise, hurry & crowds, a country of climb, push & shove, a country of frustration, fear & intimidation. And he welcomes us home: home to serenity, peace & joy, home to friendship, fellowship & openness, home to acceptance & affirmation. We do not need to be shy...It is the place of deepest intimacy, where we know & are known to the fullest.

Our prayers may be awkward. Our attempts may be feeble. But since the power of prayer is in the one who hears it & not in the one who says it, our prayers do make a difference. Especially when they arise from the place of awe first...& are formed for relationship more than results. -- Lucado

Let's pray with that in mind: **Father prepare me for whatever you require today and lead me in faith wherever you call me to go. In Jesus' Name...Amen.**