

October 24, 2010

Prayer as the Foundation

Acts 1:12-14

Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a sabbath day's journey away.

13. When they had entered the city, they went to the room upstairs where they were staying, Peter, and John, and James, and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James.

14. All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers.

Acts 4:23-31

After they were released, they went to their friends and reported what the chief priests and the elders had said to them.

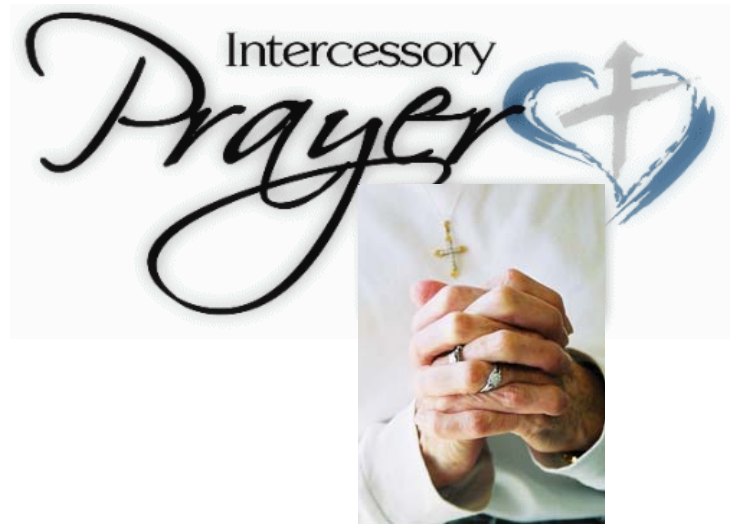
24. When they heard it, they raised their voices together to God and said, *Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth, the sea, and everything in them,*

25. *it is you who said by the Holy Spirit through our ancestor David, your servant: 'Why did the Gentiles rage, and the peoples imagine vain things?*

26. *The kings of the earth took their stand, and the rulers have gathered together against the Lord and against his Messiah.'*

27. *For in this city, in fact, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed,*

28. *to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place.*



29. *And now, Lord, look at their threats, and grant to your servants to speak your word with all boldness,*
30. *while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus.*

31. When they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God with boldness.

Acts 12:1-17

About that time King Herod laid violent hands upon some who belonged to the church.

2. He had James, the brother of John, killed with the sword.

3. After he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also. (This was during the festival of Unleavened Bread.)

4. When he had seized him, he put him in prison and handed him over to four squads of soldiers to guard him, intending to bring him out to the people after the Passover.

5. While Peter was kept in prison, the church prayed fervently to God for him....

The Church Born, The Church Afire, The Church Still Alive



August 22 – November 21, 2010

Acts Sermon Series Study Guide: Rethinking Church – Prayer as the Foundation

Prayer was central to the practice and fellowship of the early church. They did not view prayer as a work of the faithful few, rather, prayer was the mainstay of the whole Body's spiritual lives...They made up the infancy of Christianity, yet they were not infants in their praying. They gave themselves to prayer! They did not excuse their prayerlessness or simply discuss prayer. They prayed...and God answered. ~ Rev. Phil Newton

There is no duty in Christianity, the practice of which Christ and the Apostles press upon us more frequently than prayer. ~ Rev. Asahel Nettleton

Tricia McCary Rhodes says this about the foundational role of intercession in the life of a Christian: *If you are a Christian, you are, by your very nature, an intercessor. When God saved you, He filled you with the life of Christ, who is always interceding. And though our propensity to identify with another's pain or cry out on their behalf out of love and compassion may be buried beneath a load of guilt and a pound of flesh, intercession is every believer's call and destiny, joy and crown...there are no chosen few. Intercession is not a spiritual gift bestowed on selected saints...If you are a Christian, you are an intercessor...* How do her comments help clarify or expand your notions of intercessory prayer? _____

Rev. Lloyd Olgilvie who served as Chaplain to the U.S. Senate and who has spoken and written extensively on the practice of prayer speaks of the importance of expectation in effective prayer: *Expectation is a crucial part of dynamic prayer. But it must be built on the insight and guidance of prolonged prayer to know how to pray. Bridling our prayers on unguided, negative expectations is disastrous. We except far too little, we ask for it, and then are disappointed that the Lord didn't do better for us. The formula for creative intercessory prayer is: listen carefully, ask boldly, trust completely, and know that the answer is part of the tapestry of God's greater plan. He uses everything for his glory and our growth, if we allow Him.* What did the early church understand about expectation in effective prayer? What does Olgilvie help you understand about the importance of expectation in your prayer life? _____

The early church believed in and practiced prayer. Their biggest focus in their requests to God was not for protection or help with day to day life, but boldness in their prayers, in their witness. Where do you need to be bolder in your prayer life? Would you consider making a plea for boldness as a part of your daily prayers? _____

Intercessory prayer reaches out to the pain and suffering of our world, but it also changes the one who prays. Dietrich Bonhoeffer said this about the effects of intercessory prayer on the one who prays: *A Christian community either lives by the intercessory prayers of its members for one another, or the community will be destroyed. I can no longer condemn or hate other Christians for whom I pray...In intercessory prayer the face that may have been strange and intolerable to me is transformed into the Face of one for whom Christ died, the face of a pardoned sinner...Intercessory prayer is the purifying bath into which the individual and the community must enter every day...Christians bringing one another into the presence of God, seeing each other under the cross of Jesus as poor human beings and sinners in need of grace.* Have you witnessed this change in yourself or in others? How would you describe the change in you as you pray for others, especially for those who are different or who have been in conflict with you? _____

The early church believed in heartfelt, spontaneous prayers, but often those prayers were shaped by their deep understanding of and knowledge of scripture. What prayers or prayer language in the Bible are precious to you? What prayers or prayer language do you carry with you in your memory, in your heart? _____

Pray this prayer each day this week in your daily meditation:

Lord, bring us to our knees that we might call us you. Teach us to pray without ceasing. Make us a people who come to the foot of your throne of grace with expectation, boldness and deep trust. May we unafraid to name our needs, our yearnings, our shortcomings, our concerns before you. Lord, lead us to your throne of grace. Amen.