

TREASURES OF THE TRANSFORMED LIFE

“Drawing Water”

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1/24/2010

(Luke 18:9-14 NRSV) He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt: {10} "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. {11} The Pharisee, standing by himself, was praying thus, 'God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. {12} I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income.' {13} But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even look up to heaven, but was beating his breast and saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!' {14} I tell you, this man went down to his home justified rather than the other; for all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted."

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN LIFE AND DEATH

If Haiti hasn't suffered enough, they were rattled by another earthquake this week. We've all seen the images of collapsed buildings and suffering humanity. Doctors and health officials are doing the best they can with limited supplies and medications. To make matters worse, those who are suffering from injuries or are trying to recover from surgery don't have enough food or water to aid in the recovery process. Without proper hydration, many more will die or become sick. Clean water could mean the difference between life and death for many.

Those of us in water rich places like North Carolina where we take long daily showers water the lawn in summer and maybe lie around the pool, tend to forget that fresh water is a life-or-death issue in many parts of the world. In a world population of 6.1 billion, more than 1 billion of earth's citizens lack access to potable water. The World Health Organization says that at any time, up to half of humanity has diseases like diarrhea, trachoma, or infestations of guinea worm or hookworm. The result in too many of these diseases is death. The main reason for these easily curable health problems is poor drinking water and inadequate sanitation. About 5 million people die each year from poor drinking water, poor sanitation,

or a dirty home environment resulting from water shortage. It goes without saying; water is the “*Stuff*” of life.

Last week we started our church-wide study called the *Treasures of the Transformed Life*. I hope all of you are reading the book and enjoying the material. As you probably realize at this point, the main metaphor for the study is water. We started last week with the image of the old pump and priming it in order to get the water out—the message being that you have to put something in if you expect to get something out. It takes commitment.

PRAY

This week we are going to talk about what happens once the water starts to flow. How do we draw the water that will sustain our spirit? We draw from the well that is Alpha and Omega—that has no beginning and no end—by prayer. Prayer increases and replenishes that which nourishes and refreshes us.

Saint Teresa says, at the beginning of our prayer life, we have to draw the living water out of the well. It is hard work. We can't leave it to chance. God requires our communion with Him to be an act, an effort, and to COST something. Think of the trouble we give ourselves to get time to be with those whom we love. Is it not ever so much more important to make a way to commune with God?

We are spiritual creatures with the power of communion with God, breathing the air of eternity. We can't keep this power unless we exercise it. Nor can we fully get it unless we train ourselves to it . . . Such deliberate attention to God is the beginning of real prayer.¹

¹Saint Teresa, Taken from an article by Evelyn Underhill in Weavings, “*Breathing the Air of Eternity*” (Nashville, TN: The Upper Room Ministries, May/June, 2002), 8.

So, prayer is paying attention to God. It is paying attention to him in everything we do.

Perhaps you've heard the story of the man who took his six-year-old son fishing. They put down a trotline and went up to the cabin where they were staying. After an hour, they went back down to the river to see if they had caught anything. Sure enough, there were several fish on the line. The son said, ***"I knew there would be, Daddy."***

The father asked, ***"How did you know?"***

The boy replied, ***"Because I prayed about it."***

So they baited the hooks again, put out the line and went back to the cabin for supper. Afterwards they went back to the river; again there were fish on the line.

The boy said, ***"I knew it."***

The father asked, ***"How?"***

"I prayed again," the young boy answered.

So, again, they put the line back into the river and went to the cabin. Before bedtime, they went down to the river once more. This time there were no fish.

The son said, ***"I knew there wouldn't be any fish."***

His father asked him, ***"How did you know?"***

The son replied, ***"Because I didn't pray this time."***

The father commented, ***"And why didn't you pray?"***

The young boy answered, ***“Because I remembered that we forgot to bait the hooks.”***²

At least the young boy was paying attention.

TO PRAY IS TO CARE FOR OTHERS

When we pay attention to God, we realize that to pray is to care for others. Richard Foster says, ***“If we truly love people we will desire for them far more than it is within our power to give them, and this will lead us to prayer.”***

There’s a hymn in the Old Cokesbury Hymnal on page 177 entitled ***“Others.”*** The first stanza goes like this:

***Lord, help me live from day to day,
In such a self-forgetful way,
That even when I kneel to pray
My prayer shall be for others.***

As we watch our TV’s and see the suffering in Haiti, terrorist assassins blowing themselves up murdering innocent victims, and the local news of rapes, robberies and murders we are concerned. These concerns are a call to prayer— prayer for others.

The gospels contain a wonderful story of a father who brings his epileptic son to Jesus for healing. The kid has suffered all of his life. The father is not overly optimistic that Jesus can help. Nevertheless, he says to Jesus, ***“if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us.”*** The father’s prayer request is more meek than mighty and more timid than towering. There is no pretense, no boasting, not even much belief. But Jesus responds and the boy is healed. You, see, the power of prayer is in the one who hears, not in the one who says it.

²As told by Donald J. Shelby, *“Prayer Power”* (Santa Monica Sermons, July 30, 1995), 1.

We pray not because we have the right formulas or faith enough to move mountains. We pray because we are needy and helpless and because we understand that the world is filled with people in the same situation. We pray because there is nowhere to go but to the Lord.

TO PRAY IS TO COOPERATE WITH CHRIST

Someone once said, “*The beginning of prayer power is not ‘LORD GIVE SOMETHING TO ME.’ It is rather, ‘LORD GIVE ME TO SOMETHING.’*” To pray is to cooperate with Christ to make the world and Jesus’ bride the church a better place in which to live, worship and serve.

Cooperating with Christ is praying for others. We call it intercession. It is to represent another in the hour of need. It is to stand in the gap in the time of need and the moment of despair.

Christ is the ultimate intercessor. He is the living bridge between humanity and God. Because Jesus is both fully human and divine, He is our mediator. We cannot cross the breach between God and us. Jesus is God on our side. He is united forever to us. When we speak to Jesus, especially in prayer, it is God there.

Many years ago, I used to sail. Many years ago I was motoring up the lake to eat lunch at a local restaurant. I was planning on sailing after I had eaten. Suddenly, my rudder struck an old tree trunk damaging my rudder. I could no longer guide the boat and the accident ruined my day of sailing.

Trying to navigate life without cooperating with Jesus is like trying to pilot a boat without its rudder. It can’t be done successfully.

TO PRAY IS TO SURRENDER

That brings us to a very important point; to pray is to surrender. Henri Nouwen says we come to God with tightly clenched fists. At first prayer is difficult because we do not want to let go of the things that hold us and

bind us. We cling to our hurts and prejudices, our anger and rejection. But we must let go and let God. We have treasures and positions we have staked out that we don't want to let go of.

To pray is to open our hands. It is opening our hands to God's promised and presence. We need to address God with prayer like the man who asked, ***"please, God, make me the kind of person my dog thinks I am."***

At the beginning of Martin Luther King's ministry when he and his family were being threatened with death, King said he was ready to give up. Finally, one night with his head in his hands, he bowed over the kitchen table and prayed aloud. Later he would say that the words he prayed were still vivid in his memory.

"I am here taking a stand for what I believe is right. But now I am afraid. The people are looking to me for leadership and if I stand before them without strength and courage, they too will falter. I am at the end of my powers. I have nothing left. I've come to the point where I can't face it alone."

"At that moment," he later wrote, ***"I experienced the presence of the Divine as I had never before experienced him. It seemed as though I could hear the quiet assurance of an inner voice saying, 'Stand up for righteousness, stand up for the truth. God will be at your side forever.' Almost at once my fears began to pass from me. My uncertainty disappeared. I was ready to face anything. The outer situation remained the same, but God had given me an inner calm."***³

The threats never stopped until his assassination on April 4, 1968. But Martin Luther always took comfort in knowing God presence would be with him in the storm and fires of an extraordinary ministry.

³From an article by James Melvin Washington, "Prayer in the midst of Crisis" (The Living Pulpit, July-September, 1993), 8.

TO PRAY IS TO KNOW GOD

As Martin Luther King learned, to pray is to know God. To pray is to involve God in your life. We know that when the tires on our car are out of alignment, you've got a problem. The car doesn't steer properly and you will wear out your tires prematurely. Tires work better when they are in alignment and work together. The same is true for the will. When our wills are in union with God's will, life flows more smoothly.

Prayer is what aligns our wills. Prayer makes for a better life. Life is just healthier when you pray. When we look at our Scripture passage for this morning, at first blush it would seem that the Pharisee was the one with the capacity to align his will with God's will. The Pharisees actually had a lot of things in common with Jesus. Both Jesus and the Pharisees sought after the will of God; they sought it in the Law of Moses and in the Old Testament Prophets. In the day when many groups were calling for a violent overthrow of the Roman Government, both Jesus and the Pharisees rejected armed revolt. Quite remarkably, the Pharisees and Jesus made for great partners in dialog, and they did it often.

The story that Jesus tells, is about a Pharisee who really practiced what he believed. He rejected extortion, injustice, and adultery; he would not dream of being employed by the pagan Roman Government because his allegiance was to God alone. He gave ten percent of everything he earned back to God and he practiced the ancient discipline of fasting. Most churches today would love to have this guy on their prospective members list. His time and talent sheet would be impressive!

The problem was that in spite of his perfect religious practice, he didn't know God. He wasn't speaking from the heart. It was the Tax Collector who saw himself as being needy, who pleaded for God to help him. The Pharisee didn't want any help. He had it all figured out and for that reason there was no room for God.

Dwight Moody and Charles Spurgeon were great preachers in the 19th century. One was from the United States and the other from England.

Moody had always admired Spurgeon and looked forward to the day when he would have the opportunity to meet him. Finally the day arrived. Moody stood at Spurgeon's door and knocked. We Spurgeon answered the door he had a cigar in his mouth. Moody was shocked. ***"How could you, a man of God, smoke that?"*** Spurgeon took the cigar from his mouth, put his finger on Moody's inflated stomach, smiled and said, ***"The same way you, a man of God, could be that fat."***

The point is that we are all too ready sometimes to confess another's sin rather than our own. C.S. Lewis was right when he said, ***"We must lay before God what is really inside of us, not what ought to be in us."*** The Psalmist reminds us, ***"The Lord is near to all who call upon him in truth."***⁴

God heard the prayer of the tax collector because it was honest. The Pharisee talked at God, not with God. The Pharisee was not honest in confessing his need. The Pharisee was too busy singing his own praises and therefore could not acknowledge the real source of his blessing. The tax collector stood at a distance and could not even lift his eyes to heaven, but he emptied his cup, thus allowing God to pour fresh new living water into it. Is there room in our lives? In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

⁴Psalm 145:18, NRSV.