

September 3, 2006

Prayer

Matthew 14:23

At our last meeting we discussed the feeding of the 5,000 as the basis for the rule “*multiplication of the little.*” After preaching, healing and finally feeding the crowd we read that Jesus went up into the hills alone to pray. Finished with his preaching for the day Jesus set aside a quite moment for prayer.

In his work on prayer Richard J. Foster writes, “*Prayer ushers us into the Holy of Holies where we bow before the deepest mysteries of faith and one fears to touch the Ark.*”

While a lot has been written and said about prayer it remains the most personal and private of one’s religious experience. Too often we think of prayer as an attempt to open life to some miraculous experience. I know that as a high school student I spent a lot of time begging God to intercede in my behalf in one test or another. Time that could have been better spent in preparation.

I read a letter from a fellow in our outfit about a miraculous result that came out of prayer. I wasn't present; I know nothing of the battle so I can only repeat what he wrote.

There was some dense forest in Germany's Rhineland. The forest is broken up by firebreaks and plots of open ground. Parts of the regiment were given the task of taking the industrial town of Ossenburg. Their approach to this town was through the forest.

Working their way through the trees they came to a clearing that bordered on a large stone house. Finally the going would be a little easier. When they got there behind the house they found a handful of soldiers that had been wounded trying to cross that clearing. As Spencer January and his group got to the edge of the clearing they were met with fire from three well placed machine gun nests. Volleys from these machine guns tore up the ground that made up the clearing. Once out of the woods there was no protection for Spencer and his group.

To cross that clearing was tantamount to suicide. But like

the valiant 600, cross they must. ***“Theirs is not to reason why, theirs is but to do and die.”***

Crouched behind the safety of a tree Spencer thought of his wife and five month old son. He dropped to his knees, ***“God you have got to do something, please do something!”***

Just before Spencer stepped from behind the protective tree line a ***“long, fluffy, white cloud”*** that seemed to appear out of no where settled over the area. Spencer and his companions dashed across the 200 foot clearing to the safety of the trees on the other side. When the last man reached safety the mist which had shielded the machine gunners eyes vanished. Spencer thought, ***“This has to be God’s doing.”*** And, about that time the enemy artillery zeroed in on the stone house.

A couple of weeks later Spencer received an amazing letter from home. His mother wrote that Mrs. Tankersly, known as the ***“prayer lady”*** called one morning from the defense plant where she worked. Mrs. Tankersly said that she had been awoken about 1:00 a.m. to words, ***“Spencer January is in***

serious trouble, get up and pray for him.” And pray she did she prayed until she had to go to work. Her last words as she rose from her knees, *“Lord, whatever danger Spencer is in, just cover him with a cloud.”*

With the information in the letter Spencer determined that while worlds apart that cloud came up at the same time that Mrs. Tankersly was praying. Needless to say Spencer is a firm believer in the power of prayer. Every morning since receiving that letter from his mother Spencer has gotten up early to pray for others.

Hearing of an experience like this it would seem that all of us would tend to try and improve our prayer life. But, too often we are prone to say *“I don’t know what to say, what words to use.”* Not to worry, more than not it is more important to listen than to talk.

Back in the opening pages of the Bible we have God’s thoughts when he created man, *“Let us make man in our own image and after our own likeness.”* We were created for

fellowship with God. Fellowship is a two way street. A street for saying but better still a street for listening.

On our side of this street by which we reach up to God and God reaches down to us is a speed breaker called humanity. It is a part of our humanity to want to have our own way and to follow after that way. That humanity impedes our desire to find God's will in our life for us.

The first requirement of one seeking a meaningful fellowship with God is to get out of the way. We must do our best to eliminate ourselves from our own selfish purpose. We must seek God's way over our way. We must move away from all the distractions with which we have surrounded ourselves and listen. The example Jesus gives us is to get away from the crowds, go alone unto the hills, and let the Spirit that is God come into the spirit that is within us. We must give God a chance.

The sad thing about our humanity is that like Spencer January, some terrible upset has to come our way before we are

prepared to hear the Word of God. Following 9/11 the churches were packed by people seeking answers, seeking God.

Churches that are now empty.

Back in the Old Testament we read of a man named Ezekiel. Ezekiel was swept up in the Babylonian invasion. He along with others were driven out of Judea to be transplanted in a strange land among strange people. He sat down beside a river in this strange land overwhelmed by the disaster that he was caught up in. Broken hearted and alone he reached up in a effort to find the reality of God. How typical. Things go along well and we take the good life for granted. We don't ask for God's guidance until the lightening strikes. When that happens we need not be ashamed to turn to God. When we are in over our head, God is there. Let's give God the opportunity to get into our lives, something that he may not have been able to do when we were living high on the hog.

Out of Ezekiel's loneliness and despair God came to him with these words, "*stand upon thy feet, and I will speak to*

thee.” Stand with the little strength you have, stand in your humanity, stand just as you are and I will speak to you. Stand and listen. Now there is a prayer. Take what you are, who you are, the troubles you face and listen.

I doubt we will hear the booming voice of God speaking to Moses through the thunder. God will speak to our thoughts through his thoughts. We reach a fellowship with God through that part of our being that was created in his image. We hit the brick wall and our humanity steps aside allowing us to call to God for help, for direction. *“Be still and know that I am God.”* *“Stand on your feet.”* Listen. God thinks and we think. We place our mind, our thinker if you will, in God’s hands. God speaks to us by putting thoughts in our mind. That’s prayer.

Immanuel Kant, a philosopher, said that the two greatest things in all the universe was the starry heavens above and the moral law within and that feeling, *“I ought.”*

It is strange how this feeling of right or wrong seems to well up inside us. It is the yellow line that runs down the road

we travel. A choice presents itself. As we try to be objective and listen God will speak to us and we will have the feeling that, ***“I ought”*** or ***“I ought not to.”*** There is nothing strange about this, that feeling is the voice of God.

It is here that prayer kicks in to overcome our human nature that is both selfish and willful. We want to do it our way. We want to escape the discipline, the hard, the difficult and the painful. Until we hit that brick wall we run along on our own with little thought for God’s way. We hit that wall and turn to prayer. It is through his prayer that we reach out and find God’s will for our life; God’s will to put our life in its proper perspective. In prayer we reach that stage in life when we can say, ***“your will, not mine.”***

To find God’s will we have to do our best to eliminate ourselves from our selfish purpose. The best way to do this is to pray with the purpose of raising one’s self as high as our humanity will take us while seeking objectively the will of God. It is in earnest and sincere prayer that we find the objectivity

that will free us from the bonds of self and ego. A freedom that allows us to stand on our feet and listen.

As I read of Jesus leaving the crowds, leaving his disciples and going away to pray I come face to face with the spiritual *“Just a Closer walk With Thee.”* I see Jesus sitting down with God to discuss the highs, the lows, the successes, the failures and of course the tomorrows. A perfect fellowship as God enters the mind and feeling of Jesus. We don't have to talk to God but we do have to think with God.

Following this moment of solitude with man reaching up and God reaching down we find another step to the more abundant life here and now.

Pastor's Message

The voyage of a ship is a many-sided parable of our life. The path of a ship is upon the surface of unchartered waters. The direction is ultimately determined from above by the heavenly bodies. Its position and course must be checked with relation to the sun and stars.

It is even so with the journey of our mortal life. Our path lies upon the uncertain and changing seas of material circumstances and conditions. If a man is to reach any worthwhile harbor in the end he must seek the guidance for his course in the fixed moral principles which come to us from God above.

The main reason most lives are vain and futile is that men allow the vagaries of material circumstances to determine their courses rather than to set them by the fixed principles of eternal moral truth.

Periodically the navigator of a vessel at sea lays aside all accessory calculations and checks his course by sun and stars. It is important for every man who would set the course of his life aright to lay aside as far as possible his individual feelings and purely human institutions and opinions and lay bare his heart to the directions of the Divine Spirit who will guide him unerringly toward the final harbor of safety and peace.

PRAYER

Try me and show me, O God, and lead me in the way everlasting. Amen.