

Rev. Dr. David Holyan

“Rooted In Christ”

First Presbyterian Church of Kirkwood

Sunday, July 28, 2019

Luke 11:1-13

He was praying in a certain place, and after he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, ‘Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.’ He said to them, ‘When you pray, say:

Father, hallowed be your name.

Your kingdom come.

Give us each day our daily bread.

And forgive us our sins,

for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us.

And do not bring us to the time of trial.’

And he said to them, ‘Suppose one of you has a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say to him, “Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; for a friend of mine has arrived, and I have nothing to set before him.” And he answers from within, “Do not bother me; the door has already been locked, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.” I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, at least because of his persistence he will get up and give him whatever he needs.

‘So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for a fish, will give a snake instead of a fish? Or if the child asks for an egg, will give a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!’

Colossians 2:6-19

As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.

See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the universe, and not according to Christ. For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have come to fullness in him, who is the head of every ruler and authority. In him also you were circumcised with a spiritual circumcision, by putting off the body of the flesh in the circumcision of Christ; when you were buried with him in baptism, you were also raised with him through faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead. And when you were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive together with him, when he forgave us all our trespasses, erasing the record that stood against us with its legal demands. He set this aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in it.

Therefore do not let anyone condemn you in matters of food and drink or of observing festivals, new moons, or sabbaths. These are only a shadow of what is to come, but the substance belongs to Christ. Do not let anyone disqualify you, insisting on self-abasement and worship of angels, dwelling on visions, puffed up without cause by a human way of thinking, and not holding fast to the head, from whom the whole body, nourished and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows with a growth that is from God.

Let us pray. Gracious and loving God, we open our hearts, our minds, our imaginations, and our faith to you and to the power and workings of your spirit. I pray that you would take whatever words we have within, the words we offer in song and in prayer, words from the Gospel and the Epistle, and the words that you've laid upon my heart this morning to share. Touch, bless, and transform all of these words into the word of Christ and let that word minister to each of us. Let it feed us and guide us, comfort and strengthen us. Let it challenge us and call us forth into the world to serve our neighbors and our God. We pray this in Christ's name. Amen.

So last Sunday after church, I found myself over at that door and I was talking to Robert Trottman, and he complimented me on a good sermon and I said to him, "Well, you know, Robert, I just preach to myself every Sunday." And he said, "Well, I don't know if you do that or not, but thank you for what you said." And I thought, "I do often just preach to myself on Sunday." And I hope that somehow, what I preach, is of comfort or challenge or encouragement to you. And that the prayer of the spirit using my words in order to have the word of Christ go to you is-- that happens. And what I was thinking about for this sermon, was all about staying strong in Christ. Being rooted and built up in Christ, and the strength and the power that comes from that. And I was all set to preach that, but then my addiction to the Tour de France bicycle race kind of took over and I found myself, instead of praying every morning, getting up early, making coffee, and watching over 150 bicycle riders make their way through, what I could only describe as someone who's got a really sick imagination, tortured, as they ride through hundreds of miles day after day, through rain and crashes, up mountains and down into the valley's, going as fast as they can, and sometimes, going as slow as they can. For over 13 days, a Frenchman was in the lead of Le Tour de France. Julian Alaphilippe. The French people were going crazy. It had been 35 years since a Frenchman had won the Tour, and he was getting closer and closer. In fact, the race concludes today, this afternoon on television, as the riders ride into Paris and race around the center of town. Two days ago, they were on what, arguably, was the hardest stage. They had to climb three different mountains. I want to say it was 8,000 feet in elevation. Just up and down and up and down, and the Frenchman was great on the flat. He is the best at descending down a hill. He goes faster than anybody, but climbing, he's a little suspect. And so on the second to the last mountain, as he's going along, two riders who were second and third, and better climbers than him, took off up the mountain. And here's poor Julian, pedaling as hard as he can, and they're just pulling away from him. He had a minute and 20-second lead, give or take. And he knew if he could just get to the top of the mountain in about two minutes behind them when he goes down over the other side, he would catch up and he would still be in the lead of the Tour de France. He gets to the top about two minutes behind. The first place rider goes over a couple others. The third-place rider goes over and then finally, old Julian is pedaling up to the top of the mountain and over he goes. And I'm thinking to myself, "Oh. It's going to be so close. He might actually catch up." As they're racing down the mountain at 50, 60 miles an hour on two wheels, all of a sudden there's an announcement. "I'm sorry, but this stage has been canceled due to inclement weather and unsafe conditions for the riders. Please stop." What? "We will take the times at the top of the mountain." No!

Julienne is going to be behind now because at the end of July, up in the Alps where they were climbing, there was a hail storm that completely covered the road and caused mudslides that washed out some of the road where they were going. So someone who, for 13 days, was carrying the hopes of his country literally on his back, doing the best he could and knowing where he wasn't good enough, but knowing that he could make it up was, by a fluke of nature, literally almost like the road, washed out. He wasn't the leader. And then yesterday in another shortened segment, because more road had been washed out, finally his inability to climb caught up with him and he went from first to fifth in the Tour de France, partly because of nature intervening. Nothing of his own doing. Partly because the others were in fact, better. And so I thought to myself, "What do we do when we are frustrated or discouraged? When life throws us a curveball or a hailstorm at the end of July?"

Now to remind ourselves, Colossians is affirmative about continuing to live in Christ, rooted and built up in Him, established in the faith, abounding in thanksgiving. And my question is, "What do we do when we feel our lives are unhinged from God's goodness? When we feel blown about by our worries or concerns." Colossians says, "See to it that you're not distracted." That through philosophy or tradition or the hungering spirits of the world, don't let anybody distract you from Christ's goodness. And I wonder, what do we do when we're frustrated and distracted and afraid? Colossians says, "Do not let anyone condemn you in anything." But often, we are the ones who condemn ourselves. The voices within deriding and demeaning who we are, created in God's image. And then finally, Colossians says, "Do not let anyone disqualify you." And the question I have is, "well, what happens when the circumstances of the world disqualify us or make us feel that we couldn't possibly belong in a place of God's blessing?" And as I was thinking about Julian, and then in the passage in Colossians, what came to me was one of the comments that the commentator gave about how Alaphilippe could theoretically hang on to the lead. The comment was that someone who's not good at climbing, but arguably the best at descending, simply needs to find their tempo and do their best and tap it out as they climb the mountain. So in a sense, this sermon is a grand reflection on what it means for us to find our tempo and tap it out. And I thought as Christians, where do we find our tempo? We could find it in scripture? Do we find it in reading some book of classic theology or understanding?

And then it dawned on me that our order of worship is our tempo. Our order of worship is what we can do when we feel frustrated or discouraged by life's circumstances when we find ourselves adrift or worried, concerned when we think that life is unfair. For in worship, what do we do? The first thing we do is, we confess our sins and accept our forgiveness. We're honest about what our problems are, and we accept that these problems in the end our not eternal. The problems that we face are of this

world and, for that, we can offer those sins to God and we can accept that we're forgiven. And then we open ourselves to the word of God, in scripture, in sermon, and in song. And we allow that word to speak to each of us, as we have need for ourselves. We offer who we are into the service of God and neighbor through our tithes and offerings, through the prayers of the people, we pray for the needs of ourselves, this world, and others. And maybe, most importantly, we go into the week after the benediction, remembering that we are blessed and loved and empowered by God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

So what does that look like on a Tuesday over coffee or maybe after dinner when you're struggling? You sit. You examine the problem, you name it, acknowledge it, and offer it to God. You remind yourself that God through Christ loves you. You offer yourself back into the service of God and neighbor and realize that while you can spend a lifetime trying to resolve your issues, what's more, important is that you love and serve God and neighbor. And that in doing that, your issues just might be resolved. You pray for the needs of others and you reclaim that blessing and that love that God offers to each of us through Jesus Christ. And today in worship, we're reminded of yet another step. The step of celebrating The Lord's Supper, where we know, that a prodigal God welcomes us back when we have failed and created problems and done things that we're ashamed of. We're reminded that God welcomes us home, embraces us, loves us, and celebrates us for who we are, sinners saved by grace.

And if worship in the order of worship, doesn't do it for you, I hope this does from Psalm 25. "To you oh, Lord. I lift up my soul. Oh, my God in you I trust. Do not let me be put to shame. Do not let my enemies exalt over me. Do not let those who wait for you be put to shame. Let them be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous. Make me to know your ways, oh Lord. Teach me your paths. Lead me in your truth and teach me. For you are the God of my salvation. For you, I wait all day long. Be mindful of your mercy, O Lord, and of your steadfast love for they have been from of old. Do not remember the sins of my youth. Do not remember my transgressions. According to your steadfast love, remember me, for your goodness sake, O Lord." Amen.