

Worship at home
February 28, 2021
Second Sunday in Lent



<https://encourageandteach.files.wordpress.com/2014/07/angelus.jpeg>

Call to worship:

Surely, he has borne our infirmities
and carried our diseases;
yet we accounted him stricken,
struck down by God, and afflicted.
But he was wounded for our transgressions,
crushed for our iniquities;
upon him was the punishment that made us whole,
and by his bruises we are healed.

All we like sheep have gone astray;
we have all turned to our own way,
and the LORD has laid on him
the iniquity of us all.

He poured out himself to death,
and was numbered with the transgressors;
yet he bore the sin of many,
and made intercession for the transgressors.¹

¹ Isaiah 52: 13; 53:4-6, 12b.

Hymn #209 “O love that wilt not let me go”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nt69WDtYNLo>

(The Celebration Choir)

Prayers of Adoration, Confession, and Assurance:²

Loving and holy God,
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit;
In you we find our hearts' desire;
by your grace we are saved.
When the way forward is unclear, you shed light.
When we are troubled, you give peace.
When times are difficult, you stir courage and hope.
Our deepest longing is to know you,
and to be known by you.
In these difficult days, we praise you for your faithfulness to us.
Draw near to us in our time of worship, O God,
and open the way before us,
so that we may follow Jesus without wavering,
trusting him to lead us.

Although following you brings joy, O God,
we confess the way is sometimes hard for us.
There are times we get tired and would eagerly settle for an easier road.
Some days we find the task of loving others hard.
Sometimes we choose anger over forgiveness,
or ignore the needs of our neighbours.
Forgive us when our commitment to you wavers.
Forgive us when we take that easier path.
Stir the embers of our devotion and kindle a brighter flame.
Strengthen our determination to follow where you lead
and renew our energy to serve in Jesus' name. Amen.

Assurance of Pardon

Friends, believe the good news of the gospel. We are justified by God's grace which has come to us through Jesus Christ. By grace, we are forgiven and set free to find new life in Christ. Thanks be to God!

² Adapted from worship resource for February 28, 2021 available at: <https://presbyterian.ca/worship>

Embracing the necessary season: Work with Prayer

READ MARK 9:14-29

1. After Jesus was transfigured and Peter, James, and John witnessed him talking with Moses and Elijah, they descended the mountain and met a crowd in heated conversation. At the center was this father, his son, and the other disciples. The disciples had tried to drive an unclean spirit out of the boy, yet they failed. Moved by the father's honesty and openness, Jesus cast out the demon. Later, behind the closed door of the house, with some shame, the disciples asked the reason for their failure.

And Jesus responded: "This kind can come out only through prayer."

As was the case two sermons ago in our reflection on the Transfiguration, it helps to note the similarities with the story of Moses on Mt. Sinai.

Moses	Jesus, Peter, James, and John
Went up mountain, encountered God	Went up mountain, God revealed God's self
Received the Words; the law; the polity	Jesus affirmed as the living manifestation of the law; the Law made flesh
People who remained below made and worshiped golden calf	Disciples who remained below forsook prayer

Does it make sense to draw a parallel between the disciples' lack of prayer (as implied by Jesus' statement in verse 29) and the golden calf?

Moses was the Israelite's symbolic connection with Yahweh. It was he to whom Yahweh spoke. By his intercessions the people were set free and fed. He was their beacon.

When Moses ascended Mt. Sinai and disappeared into the cloud of God's presence, the people, seeing not with the eyes of faith but of flesh, lost sight of him and so lost sight of God. They then relied on their own creativity and craftsmanship to create their own symbol. They then worshipped their own creativity and ability.

In the situation described in our reading, Jesus had gone up a mountain and disappeared into the cloud of God's presence. The disciples left behind lost sight of Jesus. And so lost sight of God. They then relied on their own creativity and ability.

Now, Jesus had cast out demons before and had granted his apostles the authority to do the same. When the twelve apostles went on their ministry tour in chapter 6, they witnessed people healed when they ministered in Jesus' name. They had the *authority* to invoke Jesus' name, yet the healing was done not by their ability but by Jesus ministering through them. In the book of Acts we see followers of Jesus doing the same after his ascension. Yet, Jesus wasn't present with any of them any more than he was with the disciples at the base of the mountain. It would seem as though here the disciples had confused *authority* (which they had) with *ability* (which they had not.) Presuming they had magic power, they attempted a very public spectacle of healing. As might be predicted, with no success.

The disciples' golden calf was themselves.

2. A lack of prayer suggests eyes that are focused not on the mystery of God but on a technical manual promising that we can fix the world, without an external saviour, without the ways and means of the kingdom of God, without the cross. A lack of prayer suggests eyes focused on a technical manual for the ways and means of the kingdoms of Self.

A lack of prayer suggests we are relying solely our own abilities to row against the wind. We're trying to do the work without Jesus. Rather than denying ourselves to be filled with Christ, we're insisting on being full of ourselves.

A lack of prayer suggests that one is ashamed of Jesus; of his words, of his gospel.

A lack of prayer is a hallmark of a faithless generation.

3. It's also worth recognizing that this faithless generation is precisely the generation Jesus came to save!

One can detect frustration in Jesus' exclamation in verse 19: "You faithless generation, how much longer must I be among you? How much longer must I put up with you?" And yet, he healed the boy. And yet, he continued trying to teach his disciples the ways and means of the kingdom which has now come near.

4. As the Israelite people did centuries before, the disciples made a significant mistake. When they could no longer see Jesus; when they no longer sensed the nearness of God with their physical senses, they stopped praying.

They continued working.

Yet, they worked without prayer.

Without Jesus.

And, consequently without bringing his grace to bear on the lives of those around them.

Without the symbols that remind us of the reality of Jesus and the nearness of the kingdom of God; without the church, the gathering, the choir, the sacraments, we too are at risk of losing sight of God in the business of life and ministry.

Nevertheless, Jesus has given us a means of communication that doesn't depend entirely on our symbols.

Prayer is the means of communication with our Father and our Saviour that will help us do the necessary work of the kingdom of God in the necessary way.

For many of us, prayer is a secondary language. Maybe even a tertiary language.

If someone wishes to communicate in a different language, one must learn the language. Learn the alphabet. Learn the vocabulary. Learn the sentence structure. Learn how to read it. Write it. Speak it.

So, too, with prayer.

To learn prayer you need a tutor, books, and practice.

We have the tutors. We have elders, pastors, spiritual counsellors, parents, grandparents, and friends. And in the Book we have the witness of those who have gone before us. In the apostles, in the gospel writers, in David, in the leaders of the Israelites we have the witness of those who have lived lives of prayer in all kinds of circumstances; who have known first-hand the difference between working with prayer and working without.

We have examples that give us words when we don't know what to say and also give us patterns for faithful prayer.

We have the Lord's Prayer. We have the prayers of Advent/Christmas in Luke 1 and Luke 2. We have the Psalms. And we can now add to our repertoire the prayer of the unnamed father: "I believe; help my unbelief!"

To learn the language, we need to read the Book. We need to internalize the prayers so that they can shape our prayers. And we need to practice.

I've included a couple of links on the resource page of our congregational website that will take you to some short 5-day devotionals to help you in your prayers this week.

One of the guiding questions for this season of Lent is: *If you are willing to believe that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah on his terms; and, if you are willing to trust that the ways and means of his kingdom are ultimately good; are you prepared to hear and obey his words regardless of the cost in this age?*

Jesus sends us into the world to proclaim the nearness of the kingdom of God, to teach the implications thereof, and to heal in his name.

That is our work.

Will you do it with Jesus or try to do it on your own?

Are you prepared to pray?

To learn to pray?

To re-learn to pray?

For the sake of Christ and of his gospel?

Amen.

Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession:³

Lord, we believe; help our unbelief!

Today we remember with gratitude:

The ways our lives are held secure in uncertain times by our trust in you;

(Hold a silence)

Moments in these months of pandemic that made us laugh or smile;

(Hold a silence)

Moments when we felt your gifts of courage and patience;

(Hold a silence)

³ Adapted from worship resource for February 28, 2021 available at: <https://presbyterian.ca/worship>

Times when you helped us overcome temptation;

(Hold a silence)

The people who love us and give us encouragement;

(Hold a silence)

Gracious God, we are grateful for all these signs of your love in our lives.

Thank you for the hope they bring us.

Faithful God, we pray for healing and restoration in the world that is our home.

Hear us as we name in silence the needs and concerns we carry today:

We pray for people, places and situations deeply in need of your grace,
especially as they face the fears and frustrations of coping with COVID-19;

(Hold a silence)

We pray for those who struggle to feed, clothe or house themselves and their families,
and all those who worry about their economic future;

(Hold a silence)

We pray for those who are weak or vulnerable for any reason, and for all who lack
dignity and respect in our community;

(Hold a silence)

We pray for the earth and its well-being, that areas and species under threat will be
cared for;

(Hold a silence)

We pray for peace with justice in regions of the world facing turmoil *(Here, you may
name relevant places in recent news);*

(Hold a silence)

And we pray for all those offering leadership and service in these times of hope and
anxiety, for those planning how to offer vaccines in our community, and for those
uncertain about vaccination;

(Hold a silence)

By the power of your Spirit, O God, work in us and through us. May we bring the
light and love of your kingdom into our relationships and our community in all we do
and say.

Receive our prayers in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord who taught us to pray in
these words:

The Lord's Prayer

Hymn #663 “God, whose giving knows no ending”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OAzLapUKoQo>

(St. David’s Anglican Church, Edmonton)

Benediction:

The Lord bless you and keep you,
The Lord be kind and gracious to you,
The Lord make his face to shine upon you,
and grant you peace.

Amen.