

May 15, 2021

**“Living on a Prayer”**  
Sermon by Rev. Susan Drake

*Psalm 1:1-3*

*Happy are those*

*who do not follow the advice of the wicked,  
or take the path that sinners tread,  
or sit in the seat of scoffers;  
but their delight is in the law of the Lord,  
and on his law they meditate day and night.*

*They are like trees*

*planted by streams of water,  
which yield their fruit in its season,  
and their leaves do not wither.*

*In all that they do, they prosper.*

*Acts 1: 21–26*

*So one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us—one of these must become a witness with us to his resurrection.” So they proposed two, Joseph called Barsabbas, who was also known as Justus, and Matthias. Then they prayed and said, “Lord, you know everyone’s heart. Show us which one of these two you have chosen to take the place[a] in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place.” And they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias; and he was added to the eleven apostles.*

*John 17:6–11*

*“I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one.*

## Sermon “Living on a Prayer”

I love the idea of Jesus praying for us. Praying for all of us who try and use our lives to glorify God. When people pray for me I am always deeply touched. Sometimes in the hospital, people in extremely dire situations will take my hands after I have said a prayer and start praying for me. More than once their kindness in the midst of their own suffering has had me fighting back tears.

As we move deeper into the word I want us to take a minute, to gather our people in our minds, the ones that God gave to us like Jesus spoke of. Close your eyes and think about all the people that have ever prayed for you in your life.

Start with your parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles, all of your significant relationships, your children and grandchildren, different faith communities, dear friends and especially those moments when someone’s prayer was exactly what you needed to get you through a rough time. Gather these people in your mind and give God thanks for each of them. For at one time or another, like John described, they were yours and so they are God’s because through God we are all one. Take a minute to picture them in your heart’s eye.

Silence

Did you feel that, that strengthening that comes from pulling our people past and present close. One of the greatest expressions of love is prayer. Prayer connects us to each other and to God. One of the images that came to mind for me was, what I am assuming, one of the first prayers for me. I picture my Great Grandmother Gran Underwood rocking with me on the front porch of my Mom’s house.

She had come to be with my Mom for my birth. My Mom had been left by my biological father with two toddlers and me on the way. She named me Rebecca and Susanna telling my Mom that I would need not one but two strong names from the bible. My very name is a reminder of her prayers.

The other image was my grandmother standing out in her gravel driveway in Oklahoma in her housecoat saying goodbye to me as I drove off with my Army recruiter when he picked me up for my induction. I looked back to see her head bowed and her lips moving in prayer. And of course my parents, praying for me when I lost my way.

This congregation is a prayerful one. You have a constant flow of prayers for one another, and one another’s friends and family and the love of God runs straight through you to others. It’s been remarkable to witness and be a part of.

Even when we pray for strangers or people in far away places we are allowing God’s love to move through us and connect us to everyone through prayer, to make us one with God.

And like the tree by the water in the Psalms read this morning that thrives because it is rooted in both the Earth and the ever flowing streams. We thrive because we are rooted in prayer.

Maybe you think we aren't thriving. But we are thriving in our love for one another, we are in service to our community, and we are in our commitment to remain one with our creator and each other through our loving and our praying.

Jesus claims his friends as his own people that God gave to him and now he is giving them back to God and asking that God protect them by making sure that they are all one with God like Jesus is connected to God and to us.

Jesus is not saying a rote prayer or praying for particular outcomes but rather this is a deep and intimate conversation with God. Jesus is working out his thoughts with God and what he prays for us is that we will feel one with God, connected to God, and that will somehow protect us. This is a perfect model for us not just about prayer but about how to relate to God conversationally and what to pray for.

Of course the reading from Acts gives us a very different illustration of prayer. The accounting of what the disciples reportedly did in order to find a replacement for Judas is much less conversational. Jesus has barely left the earth when this passage purportedly takes place.

They can't make a decision so they pray, which is good, but what they pray for is that God's will be revealed when they throw the dice. So basically, Matthias wins the spot in the apostle club in a crapshoot. Think about how different that is from what Jesus does.

I see this congregation using prayer more like Jesus than Peter. Jesus is consulting God with his heart and asking for guidance when the Apostles are trying to control God by having God reveal the answer through the dice.

We are a praying congregation. We pray before Council, we pray before our annual meetings, because we want God to be a part of every decision we make. That is the whole foundation of the UCC that the spirit of God moves through the whole of our congregation when we invite the Spirit in and make room for God in our hearts and minds, our decisions and policies.

The Wisconsin Conference had it's annual meeting online this week. Rev. Dr. Franz Riegert, our Conference Minister, said something that stuck with me. I'm paraphrasing this but he described how he saw the decline in church membership throughout the pandemic.

He said. 'We are a remnant. The church does this every few hundred years, it has a garage sale of old ideas. It goes through a big change and gets rid of unnecessary things but leaves a remnant of what truly matters and God has a way of building on that remnant to do great things, evolving us to be what God needs to meet the challenges of each generation.'

We have survived many things in our 152 year history and now we can add another global pandemic to the list. We are but a remnant of our former glory but because of faith, hard work, and prayer, we are still here. And I believe we are still here for a reason.

As we move into the season of Pentecost I want you to gather all the strength you can from all the prayers ever said for you, by Jesus and all of those that have cared for you.

And as a church I urge you to feel emboldened by all the prayers said for this church in this very room and in the old church and I want you to continue praying that God helps us to find creative and innovative and inspired ways to make something even more glorious of this remnant that God preserved. May it be So AMEN

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- REV. SUSAN DRAKE

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