

## Pastor Roy's Sermon from February 5, 2012

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

What does it mean to pray? How do we pray? Do we pray when we need help? Should we pray when we think we've got it all figured out?

In today's Gospel reading, Jesus prays. Isaiah also prayed. Once he had a vision of being with God and God called him to be a messenger to Israel. An angel touched his lips with a burning coal from the altar. Evidently, Isaiah listened to God when he prayed. Perhaps Isaiah's prophecies tell us what he heard when he prayed, when he sat in the presence of God and listened.

In today's reading from Isaiah's prophecies, we are reminded that the greatest human powers and all their strength are not so strong nor powerful as they seem. There are those who take advantage of the vulnerable. Isaiah says that these are like newly sprouted grass that withers and dies because of heat and drought. . .then is carried away by the wind after invincible power has crumbled into dust. This sprouting grass which withers can sometimes be our plans for success and what it means to serve God. Jesus spoke of the reign of God which invites all to the creator's justice which is faithfulness. The reign of God comes near in the words of the prophets and in the words and deeds of Jesus Christ and I would suggest flows from time spent in prayer listening and then speaking.

Isaiah proclaims God's faithfulness. God is not faint or weary. When we embrace the reign of God, we receive strength, not that we become strong and intimidating, or wildly successful; but the reign of God begins with the human common ground of our need for mercy and hope and that we are all incomplete—we need help. We need God's help, we need the help of our sisters and brothers.

The Reign of God begins right where we are now and draws in our own needfulness (the fact that we cannot pull it off on our own) and leads us to walk alongside others who also know they need help.

The Kingdom of God is not successful people (who have it all figured out) sharing their success story with weaklings who have failed. The Reign of God is the God-life of those who *know* they are weak and find strength in God's faithfulness. Here is faithfulness which never disappoints. For if we are ever disappointed with God, I believe it is because we need to dig deeper, further confess our own brokenness, and wait for the healing to come as it comes—not as we feel we need it to come.

Isaiah is crying out against those who have created their own God and violently defend that God to the injustice of those around them. In the end they and their neighbors will be sorely disappointed.

As I said, the Kingdom is not a celebration of the strong, so we can be just like them—or so that others can be just like us, but its an invitation to seek and accept reality for what it is. To love ourselves as God has created us to be—weakness and peculiarness and all—so that we may also love others in their amazing complexity.

The reign of God is strength to the weak in their weakness—life to the poor in their poverty. Isaiah reminds us that those who wait for the Lord will be renewed. They will run and not be weary, they will walk and not faint. God is good. Of course, the waiting part is a challenge to all of us, but those who wait will receive emotional and spiritual strength for the journey. Without fail.

An example of this comes from the Gospel reading. Let's look at a contrast between Peter and his mother in law.

For Peter's mother in law, the reign of God comes near—she is healed and is so grateful, that she cannot help but to get up and serve everyone in the house. Peter's mother in law has been touched by God in her weakness and now she is free.

Then there is Peter. Poor Peter. It takes Peter and the other disciples a while to get the Kingdom. Peter has a mission. He serves as director of Gospel ministries. He thinks its his job to figure out what works and then make sure Jesus does it. His mother in law is healed and then word gets out that the Doctor is in. So all the people who needed healing of all kinds of conditions, these came to Jesus and were healed. Finally everyone goes home and it is quiet.

Peter thinks, how convenient, we'll make my home the center of operations and it will all be wildly popular. This must be the Kingdom! When he awakens in the morning, lo and behold, Jesus has wandered off somewhere. Better go find him before the people lose interest and forget what a good thing we have going here. Where would Jesus go and why? Everything we need is right here. This is it! Jesus definitely needs me, Simon Peter to organize things.

How confused Peter must have been that Jesus did not buy into his assumptions and plans. In essence, Jesus is saying, “No, we are not setting up a permanent health clinic, as valuable as that would be. Let us go proclaim the message in the whole area, for that is what I came out to do.” The healings are the Reign of God coming near, but the message is the most important thing. The message of God coming near—that God cares about the people and calls everyone to live in the freedom of God's justice, in God's reign.

So we have a contrast between Peter's mother in law and Peter. She responded humbly with joy to God' mercy. Peter tried to control, market, and define the Reign of God. Peter's mother in law got it. Peter didn't.

But at the center of this narrative is Jesus, the proclaimer of the message of God's love. He proclaims it in word and deed. But the only reason he knows what he knows, that he does what he does—is that he goes out into the stillness, into the darkness, into the desertedness, and he waits for God.

Remember Isaiah's words? “Those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.”

Jesus learned how to wait for God in the midst of temptations, distractions, and even success. He tosses it all aside and waits in the physical and spiritual darkness, in the solitude...and there he learns what the will of his father is so he can do it. Here Jesus found his sanity. Here Jesus learned who he was and how to serve and love God's children—both Peter's mother in law and Peter and those who were willing to listen.

I believe God is calling us to the same—to listen for the Reign of God—to see where the Spirit is moving within and around us. To do so by quietness and rest. To resist the urge to control and pursue success and our own impulses at all cost. Instead to prayerfully open yourself to that creative, amazing person that you are, your own essence in the image of God which has perhaps been covered up by many things for many reasons. To prayerfully open ourselves to our neighbors, to friends and strangers alike. God is at work in us and around us. This is the Reign of God. This is the Kingdom of God. May God's Spirit make us more mindful of this reality all around us. The Good News does not push itself around. It will only be heard if we make room for it. Let us pray and so make room for the Good News of God's faithfulness in our hearts and souls. Amen.