

New Testament: Colossians 3: 12 - 17

Gospel Readings: Matthew 14: 22 - 23a; Matthew 26:36; Luke 5: 15 - 16;
Luke 6: 12 - 13; Luke 9: 28 - 29; Luke 22: 41 - 42

Please pray with me. And now Lord God may the words of my mouth, and the meditations of all our hearts, be pleasing and acceptable in Thy sight our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

The foundation upon which living in rhythm with God, with one another, and the greater community, is built upon, is prayer. This is not a particularly controversial statement. It seems obvious, especially in light of the gospel passages read just moments ago, that prayer is essential.

In the first Matthean passage we read, Jesus prays in between feeding the five thousand men (plus women and children) and walking on water out to the disciples at sea. This water walking incident also coincides with Peter's short walk and near drowning. Prayer fosters, equips, and enables the might and power of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit to feed the people and to calm the turbulent, chaotic waters.

In the second Matthean passage we read, Jesus prays to verify the will of God. Prayer calls upon the remembrance work of the Holy Spirit as she fulfills her role in calling to our attention all that the Son has taught and said. It can be difficult to accept the will of God. Prayer equips and enables that acceptance as the Holy Spirit works to help us remember and understand Jesus' words and teaching. Matthew tells us earlier that Jesus himself told his disciples that he must suffer. "From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised." (Matt. 16:21) Just because he knew it was coming, doesn't make it any easier to accept. Prayer enabled Jesus to discern God's will, remember his own words, and steeled his resolve to do the will of God despite its difficulty.

In the first Lukan passage we read, Jesus prays to re-energize and re-focus. His popularity was growing. Great crowds gathered. Jesus prayed to orient himself towards God and not believe his own hype. Jesus' ministry, our ministry is about God and God alone. Prayer focuses us on that. In the second Lukan passage we read, Jesus prays, once again, to discern God's will. In this situation he is praying *before* the selection of the 12 apostles from amongst his growing group of disciples. I know that it is a struggle every year when it comes time for the nominating committee to do its work. Are we, the church community, praying to God, asking God every year who our next class of elders and deacons will be before we start asking people?

In the third Lukan passage we read, Jesus prays and has a direct encounter with the Father and the Holy Spirit in which physical changes are manifested. Jesus prays to the Father and the result of his prayer is physical change. Jesus is transfigured and Peter, James and John bear witness. Prayer changes us. Prayer has the potential and power to make us more whole, complete versions of ourselves than we were before. As we seek to learn something new while we yet draw breath, are we praying that God continue to refine us, continue to complete us, continue to make us whole? Are we praying to God that we would be *willing* to change?

In the fourth Lukan passage, we again see the importance of discerning, and doing, God's will. Both Matthew and Luke are adamant that the will of God be done even when it defies human understanding. Why? God is far wiser than I am; God is far wiser than any of you are. And sometimes, we need to pray for God's will to be done *even when we might be hesitant to enact it*. God's will be done, and not our own. The only way that happens is through prayer.

And so if we, as a church community, are going to discern God's will and see it done, as I pray every week in response to our offering, then we need to be praying specifically for what God's will is in the community of Lexington. Once we come to a *consensus* (tip of the hat to Dennis Rickertsen for using that terminology) on what we believe God's will for the community to be, through prayer and the leading of the Holy Spirit, she is God, *then* we can find the rhythm for seeing it through.

Living in rhythm means that we are all playing the same tune even as we each, individually, occupy different rolls and notes within the larger structure of the tune. Prayer is like the melody. Everything that is in rhythm, that is harmonic, that is resonant, everything that accentuates and beautifies the melody is dependent upon prayer; the melody itself. In short we need *more* prayer, not less, and we need specific prayer, not just generalized, catch-all prayer.

I've named several specific things we can be praying for through this sermon to this juncture and Holly is working on an even more exhaustive list! If you struggle to pray or don't know specifically how to pray or what to pray for, we will have you covered! From a sermon perspective, to maintain the theme of Living in Rhythm throughout the entire 2024 year, I will be using our passage from Colossians as a template. We read the same passage last week and I counted in real-time at least 11 different characteristics that encompass love that we can be praying for and working on, and I undercounted. Including love, there are actually 14 that I was able to identify. "Putting on", as Paul puts it, these 14 characteristics, I contend, will enable us to live in rhythm undergirded by the prayer work I've already spoken about. Alongside our prayer work in 2024 we will work on developing compassionate hearts, one; kindness,

two; humility, three; meekness, four; patience, five; forbearance, six; forgiveness; seven; harmony, eight; peace, nine; thankfulness, ten; teaching, eleven; singing, twelve; doing everything in the name of God and not blaspheming, thirteen; and all of these make love, fourteen a reality.

It's going to be a good year. I am excited to move ahead and I am excited to invite you all along with me. God is moving and working. May we see beyond ourselves. May we put away anger, wrath, malice, slander, obscene talk, and lying and pray for eyes to see our glorious, majestic God and how He loves us, forms us, and shapes us all; both individually and as a church community. May we choose to be in this together and live in rhythm. Amen.