



*“Prepare to be amazed. I am doing something
in your lifetime that you won’t believe”*

~ Habakkuk 1:5

It’s Not the End of the World

“Look to the Lord and his strength; seek his face always”
1 Chronicles 16:11

READ: Luke 21:25-28,34-36

One day my nephew Kyler was sitting at the table enjoying his dessert. It suddenly slipped from his fingers and landed on the floor. All was lost! His head hit the table and he began to wail. My sister looked at him unsympathetically and said, “it’s not the end of the world.” But aren’t we all a little like Kyler some days? Life’s difficulties make it seem like the world’s ending. What can we do?

In the gospel Jesus comes along and says, “There are going to be moments in your life when everything goes wrong and it will seem like the end of the world. You may become afraid, anxious, stressed and lose sight of what’s really important. But you know what? I have a solution: prayer! It can guide you through life.”

The way you talk with God about your circumstances will determine such things as your ability to let go of hurt, the eyes of faith through which to look to the future with hope, and the wisdom to make decisions. Yet prayer is not always seen as a powerful tool. The experience may seem boring and routine, an exercise reserved for bad times. But in the gospel Jesus tells us that prayer is important *before* the bad times arrive. Prayer prepares us.

Prayer is like driving. Everyone thinks they are good at it until they are in the presence of an expert. Jesus is an expert at prayer and he models it for us. He got up early to pray when faced with the busiest of days (Mark 1:35). He prayed before meals (Mark 6:41). He prayed for others (Luke 22:32). He prayed when he was stressed (Matthew 26:36). He even prayed for those who hurt him (Luke 23:34). But ultimately Jesus treated prayer as a relationship.

When it comes to prayer we need to be “alert at all times”. Some people treat prayer as a magic wand, a last resort or cosmic tug of war. But Jesus teaches us that prayer is an ongoing conversation with God. There are three principles that mark the tone of our relationship with God: confidence, persistence and reverence. We will see how each is depicted in the gospel. Each principle will give us “strength” as we face our daily struggles. Prayer is not a silver bullet to life’s problems, but it will make a significant difference. Prepare to be amazed!

Grow: Each day this week spend five minutes in prayer.

Confidence and Unanswered Prayer

“This is the confidence which we have before him, that,
if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us”
1 John 5:14

READ: Luke 1:9-45

In today’s gospel we hear the story of John the Baptist emerging from the desert and proclaiming the coming of the messiah. He boldly exhorts the people to repent and return to God. This is a man who assuredly trusts in the fulfilment of God’s promise. This is a man who embodies what it means to have confidence in God.

Jesus taught that part of prayer is having confidence in God. “Ask,” Jesus says, “ and it will be given to you” (Matt 7:7). Our challenge is to pray with the expectation that something will happen. But many people don’t feel confident when they pray. The Israelites waited a long time for the messiah. Years of prayer that seemed to go unanswered. I am sure many of us have felt the same way. Our prayers appear to fall on deaf ears. Our friends aren’t healed, our loved ones lose their faith and our personal struggles continue and even increase. Where is God? Why won’t he answer?

Having confidence can be complicated. After all, there is only so much of God’s inaction we can take. But Jesus teaches us that our job is to “ask” and pray with confidence. I once heard a story about a four-year-old girl who asked her mother if she could go to college. This struggling single mother had no idea how that would ever happen. But she began to save a little each day. Although the four-year-old couldn’t understand it, her request was slowly being answered. Likewise, God is answering many of our prayer in ways we can’t see. In ways we may never see until we get to heaven. To acknowledge this doesn’t provide God with an excuse, rather, it recognizes our limitations and expresses our confidence in God’s perfect plan and power. We place our trust in God’s promise.

We must also remember that God isn’t a genie who grants our every wish, nor is he a superhero who swoops in and saves the day whenever we get ourselves into trouble. In reality, God is a loving father who only wants what’s best for us, and, as any parent knows, sometimes that means denying a child’s request. But that shouldn’t stop us from asking. In fact, the better you know the will of God revealed in the Bible, the more confidently you can pray. Then, like John the Baptist, you “shall see the salvation of God.”

Grow: Confidently give God one good, honest prayer request.

“Come and See”

John 1:39



Persistence Matters

“Be persistent in prayer”
Colossians 4:2

READ: Luke 3:10-18

In the gospel John continues to instruct the people by preaching the “good news” to them. The people are intrigued and want to know what they should do. John informs the crowds that they must change their behaviour and start acting with a deeper sense of justice and love for God. The same is true for us, but a change in our behaviour requires constant persistence.

Yet this change in behaviour does not come about through our own efforts. That’s exactly John’s point. When we accept the good news of Jesus Christ, as the people did, then God will baptize us “with the holy spirit and fire”. God’s fire purges and unclutters our lives so that he can take up residence in our hearts (1 Corinthians 3:16).

The best way to unclutter our lives and change our behaviour is through prayer. Prayer is a first hand encounter with God where we “receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need” (Hebrews 4:16). Our change in behaviour is dependent upon being “persistent in prayer” (Colossians 4:2).

But there’s a catch. God loves to give willingly and freely to those who ask. He doesn’t need to be coaxed or pressured and you certainly don’t have to nag him. But if that’s the case, why bother praying at all? Simple. Your persistence in prayer is an indicator of your desire and dependence on God. The more we depend on God and go to him in prayer, the more open we become to letting him transform our behaviour. It’s like a tap. You know the water is there but you can’t get it unless you open the valve. God supplies the water; our part is to accept that gift and to drink from the “well of salvation” (Isaiah 12:3). Persistence in prayer is born of knowing that the answer is only with God. Prayer changes us.

John teaches the people that a change in behaviour is necessary. We must leave behind the things that keep us from God and focus on his will. By doing so we will receive the power of the Holy Spirit and begin to witness personal change. “What then should we do?” Be persistent in prayer because that’s the only way to let God change our behaviour.

Grow: This week, persistently ask God to help you change one negative behaviour.

The Gift of Joy

“Believe in him and be filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy” 1 Peter 1:8

READ: Luke 1:39-45

In the gospel we hear about Mary’s visit to her cousin Elizabeth. Upon Mary’s arrival, Elizabeth reveals that John, the child in her womb, has leapt for joy. Elizabeth’s exclamation is a true expression of reverence and awe. She discovers that God has come to her in a personal way. The result is joy.

We have been talking about the three components of prayer: confidence, persistence, and reverence. Partaking in prayer ultimately leads us into a deeper relationship with God, the end result of which is joy. Joy is a gift from God. It is the by-product of a sincere prayer life. But the discovery must begin with reverence.

True reverence and awe is not found in considering God as distant and untouchable. True awe is about discovering that God comes to be in relationship with us. He comes to us as a tiny child, “Emmanuel...God with us” (Matthew 1:23). We encounter the personal reality of God in our own lives when we pray.

Reverence in prayer is not about methods and forms; it is about relationship. Prayer is about entering into a “personal relationship with the true and living God” (Catechism 2558). The fact that God became one of us should cause us to stand in awe and reverence. But being in awe of God should not cause us to be afraid. When the angel came to Mary he said, “do not be afraid” (Luke 1:30). God is not to be feared nor does he require blind obedience. Rather, God wants to be in relationship with us because he loves us. Our loving reciprocity, fuelled by a relationship built on prayer, produces joy.

For Jesus, prayer was simply a conversation with his Father in heaven. He taught us to have the same kind of conversation – a conversation marked by confidence, persistence and reverence. By following Jesus’ example, and praying at all times throughout life’s up and downs, we will grow in relationship with God. If we do this, Jesus promises us that we will come to know God as a friend. The discovery of this gift should cause us to be filled with reverence, awe and “inexpressible and glorious joy” (1 Peter 1:8).

Grow: Each day this week, take time to consider how you have personally encountered God throughout the day.