

My Prayer Journal

Use this weekly prayer to help you begin your time with God each day.

Prayer of Confession:

Holy God, help us to trust in the power of Your love. Help us to know the power of forgiveness, and to become the kind of people whose faith responds even to the deepest challenges. When we are called upon to bury our pride, to make sacrifices, to defy cultural norms, or to restore broken relationships, we pray for the power of Your Holy Spirit to give us the strength to do so. We pray for the roots of our faith to grow deep, to help us withstand even the strongest storms. We pray in the holy name of Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

My Prayers this Week:

Family Time:

Can you think of a time when doing the right thing was really hard? Sometimes, doing what we know would be right and what we know God would want us to do means we have to give something up. Maybe you have a sick friend who you really want to see, but the only time they say you can visit is during your soccer practice. The Bible calls this “sacrifice,” and Jesus taught us that making sacrifices for other people is a big part of following Him. When Jesus made the biggest sacrifice of all so that we could be with God, by dying on a cross, He taught us that giving up what we want, to help another, honors God!

MONDAY 9.21.20

Luke 9:57-62

Jesus did not hide from his followers, or his potential followers, that following him would involve a cost. In today’s reading, one potential disciple boasts about the fact that he will follow Jesus wherever He goes—until Jesus reminds him that they would often have nowhere to lay their heads. Another would-be follower places his social duty to bury his father ahead of following Jesus, and Jesus insists that the proclamation of the Kingdom comes first. The third candidate simply wants to go back and say good-bye to his family, but Jesus insists that turning back from a permanent and intentional focus on Kingdom-work is an impossibility. While it might be easy to read these accounts and wonder why Jesus would seemingly discourage someone who was at least heading in the right direction, the fact is that Jesus simply wants potential followers to know, up front, that following Him has a cost—rather than find that out later. Within the context of the Gospel story, hostility toward Jesus has been increasing as the Passover approaches, and Jesus wanted His potential followers to truly comprehend the difficulties lying ahead.

- What impact to Jesus’ words have on you, personally?
- Are you prepared for the cost of following Jesus?

TUESDAY 9.22.20

John 3:22-30

Prior to the ministry of Jesus, John the Baptist had quite a large following of disciples himself. His work had immense significance—he was the forerunner of the Son of God! But did you notice in this passage how John’s followers referred to Jesus? “That man who was with you on the other side of the Jordan”! Even though John had previously testified about the Holy Spirit coming down on Jesus, enabling Him to baptize with the Holy Spirit (John 1:32-34), these followers of John only recognize Jesus as “that man who was with you,” completely missing the point of John’s life’s work! John, on the other hand, fully acknowledges the meaning of Jesus’ arrival, and his own identity in relationship to Jesus. Even though Jesus’ arrival means John must fade into the background, John is “full of joy.” Consider how John’s statement, “He must become greater; I must become less” defines the expectation for every Christ-follower in every age to come. Within every one of us, Christ must become greater, and we must become less.

- What all did John give up when Jesus came?
- How does allowing Christ to become greater in your life entail a cost to you?

WEDNESDAY 9.23.20

Acts 7:51-60

When we think about the potential cost of Christian faith, we have to consider the cost paid by Christian martyrs throughout the centuries. Stephen, the central figure in today’s reading, was the very first Christian martyr. Acts chapter 7 contains the lengthy, impassioned, and condemning speech Stephen gave before the Jewish High Council, the Sanhedrin—a speech that ended with a rousing vision of Christ standing at the right hand of God in heaven. This proclamation, that years later became an integral part of the Apostle’s Creed, resulted in Stephen’s stoning. Take a moment to truly consider the fact that this statement that we repeat so casually in our liturgy (“He ascended into heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty”) actually got Stephen killed. The depth of Stephen’s faith is vividly portrayed in his emulation of Jesus at His death—“Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” Luke, the author of Acts also reports that Jesus said, at His death, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34).

- What gave Stephen the courage to die for his faith?
- Do the words of the Apostles’ Creed provide you with a sense of continuity with the martyrs of our faith?

THURSDAY 9.24.20

Acts 21:27-36

Mob violence is nothing new. The gospel message that Paul was preaching was so radical to many of the Jews in Jerusalem, that when Paul arrived there, his mere presence sent the city into a frenzy. False “media reports” about Paul’s desecration of the Temple led to a lynch mob abducting him and attempting to kill him. It took the intervention of the military leader of the Roman troops stationed in Jerusalem, sending soldiers to the scene of the violence, to prevent Paul’s death. When the commander could not get at the truth of the situation while “on location,” he took Paul into custody for his own protection, while the mob continued to call for his indictment. For Paul, as for all of the early Christians, there was an urgency and significance to the message of the gospel that made suffering such treatment worthwhile. Violence against the early Christians was common, and yet it could not quell their proclamation of Jesus’ resurrection. They understood the cost of discipleship.

- How do you think you might have responded to the scene in Jerusalem that day? Who would you have identified with, or who would you have blamed for the uproar?
- Does the message of the gospel have the same kind of urgency and significance for you as it had for Paul?

FRIDAY 9.25.20

Colossians 4:2-18

Even though Paul escaped the mob violence we read about yesterday, he still eventually ended up imprisoned in Rome for his faith. He wrote many of the letters we have in the New Testament during his Roman imprisonment, including the letter of Philemon that our current sermon series focuses on, and the letter of Colossians from today's reading. In fact, Philemon was a member of the church in Colossae—Onesimus, the runaway slave who the letter to Philemon is concerned with, Epaphras, and Archippus are all mentioned in both Philemon and this closing part of Colossians. But notice all the other names who Paul says have either suffered imprisonment or have helped in the cause of the gospel and risked imprisonment themselves—Tychicus, Aristarchus, Mark, Justus, Luke, Demas, and Nympha. These personal names remind us that very real people took very real risks to ensure the good news of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection was spread throughout the region, and to call people to the new life in Jesus' name that was the subject of Paul's preaching.

- What does it mean to you that even when Paul was in prison, he was more concerned that the gospel was still being shared than about his own situation? What is most important to you?

SATURDAY 9.26.20

1 Peter 4:12-19

Peter had been with Jesus, and knew the cost of discipleship personally. Not only had he abandoned his life as a fisherman, he also knew personally the hostility *all* the disciples had experienced during their travels with Jesus. Acts 12 explains how King Herod had the apostle James killed, and how Peter himself was thrown into prison. In today's reading, Peter is writing many years later—but he has still witnessed followers of Christ suffering for their faith. Just as Jesus had been up front about the cost of discipleship, Peter reminds his readers that they should “not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering.” We may find it hard to imagine rejoicing over participating in the suffering of Christ, but for the earliest disciples, suffering was a sign that their lives were truly aligned with Christ. They rejoiced that they had been formed into the image of Christ to the extent that the world punished them just as it had punished Jesus, and considered themselves blessed. Peter encourages people of faith to persevere in faith when they suffer, rather than give up on their faith.

- Do you view people suffering for their faith as, in Peter's words, “something strange happening to them”? Or do you *expect* the world to treat Christian faith with hostility? Will Peter's words affect your view of the cost of discipleship?



Daily Study Guide

September 20-26, 2020

Sermon Series: Phaith of Phil

Week Two: “The Depth of Faith” - Rev. Gregory P. Finfrock

Scripture for Sunday, September 20: Philemon 8-18

“Therefore, though I have enough confidence in Christ to command you to do the right thing, I would rather appeal to you through love. I, Paul—an old man, and now also a prisoner for Christ Jesus—appeal to you for my child Onesimus. I became his father in the faith during my time in prison. He was useless to you before, but now he is useful to both of us. I’m sending him back to you, which is like sending you my own heart. I considered keeping him with me so that he might serve me in your place during my time in prison because of the gospel. However, I didn’t want to do anything without your consent so that your act of kindness would occur willingly and not under pressure. Maybe this is the reason that Onesimus was separated from you for a while so that you might have him back forever—no longer as a slave but more than a slave—that is, as a dearly loved brother. He is especially a dearly loved brother to me. How much more can he become a brother to you, personally and spiritually in the Lord! So, if you really consider me a partner, welcome Onesimus as if you were welcoming me. If he has harmed you in any way or owes you money, charge it to my account.” (CEB)

Things that really impacted me from today's sermon:

Prayer Requests

Mary Jo Cornelius
 Vivian Rye
 Daryl Hoefler
 Amanda McKee
 Bruce Bottermuller
 George Crow
 Charlotte Ottley
 Delaney Digman
 Bill Reichter
 Bob Vincent
 Peggy Cruse
 Bill Cruse
 Sophia Miller
 Judy Hoffman
 Nini Schneider

Everyone affected by the COVID-19 outbreak

Our community, country and world

The Miquelon family on the loss of Penny Miquelon's husband, Paul Miquelon

The Ashton family on the loss of Mary Jane Ashton's husband, Frank Ashton

The Robinson and Noyes families on the loss of Vicki Robinson

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