

PRAYER

Disciplines of Sabbath, hospitality... now prayer
Gracious God may these words, be your words of life.

Amen

WAKE UP... COME ON, sleepy head , it is time to get up... alarm clocks planted all over the room... a Homer Simpson Alarm Clock- “ HMMM ...donuts” , flinging the covers off the bed.... Set a radio clock to the gospel station- “O Happy Day”nice... classical station... nice... rock and roll? How about the heavy metal station as loud as it will go... yep wakes up the whole household...but not a pleasant way to wake up in the morning. Do any of these sound familiar to you? Getting kids up in the morning is a major task... When one is sleeping so hard that drool in coming out of their mouth, it is hard to wake them up.

When Jesus took the disciples to the Mt of Olives to pray, he wanted them to stay awake with him. But, they had just had a whole evening of celebrating Passover. They were also emotionally drained by the events of the day. If you have ever been to a Passover meal, you will remember that you drink A LOT of wine and eat a lot. After such a meal it is almost impossible to stay away. All you want to do is roll yourself into bed or slide yourself into a recliner. I imagine the disciples wanting with all their might to stay awake, but they just could not help themselves. Barbara Brown Taylor talks about prayer in her book “An Altar of The World” She admits that she is not very good at prayer. She realizes that trying to have a relationship with God without prayer, is like trying to live without breathing. It is impossible. She has struggled and struggled with her prayer life. Then one of her friends mentioned to her that prayer is NOT about the prayers you say, it is about awakening to God. This fascinates me. I wonder often, what causes us to fall asleep to God in the first place. What causes us to close our eyes and slip off to never, never land when it comes to God? Is it busyness? All the conflicting voices in our lives? Distractions like TV or our desires to have perfection in our lives? The need to be right? The want for life to pain free...free of struggle? Is it all those things we do to keep us from the harsh reality of a life fully lived? To be honest , it is hard to imagine communicating with the Creator of the universe. And yet, in our communion liturgy, we hear the words,” God is farther than the farthest star and as close as our breath.”

Jesus in this scripture teaches about prayer.

- He went to a separate place to pray to God. It was an honest prayer, full of his whole being. ...full of emotion and grief. Just like the Psalms we read earlier, our prayers can be full of anger, angst, joy, silliness. There are no special words... no one position we must be frozen in... Our conversation with God becomes real. It is a stripping ourselves from all our masks and protection... and being naked before God. Our prayers are a connection with God. There is an intimacy in the way we experience God. We need space and time to grow into that kind of intimacy.
- Sometimes we feel as if God isn't quite there. We want to yell, “Wake up” BANG PANS...set Homer Simpson alarms to get God's attention. But, God calls us to listen and wait. God calls us to walk in the world aware of God's presence... trusting always in the future. Who knew that Jesus' death would lead to a resurrection? Who knows the many deaths we experience in life that might bring about soil for new life? Often when we pray, we have an agenda. We want something. Jesus wanted God to say that he would be spared from the cross. Oh, my gosh, we all want our prayers to be answered the way we want them to. But God isn't a slot machine with prizes. God loves us and listens to us and grieves with us. And God strengthens us, during the most impossible times, just as the

angel strengthened Jesus that night... And we listen...and listen and hope. We surrender to the moment and we allow God to stir inside of us.

- When Jesus returned to his disciples asleep, totally oblivious to his pain .. he was furious. Why could they not stay awake?! God wants us to wake up as well.

Barbara Brown Taylor reflects that she has come to realize that when she bakes bread, when she stews tomatoes, when she feeds the chickens, when she looks at the full moon or celebrates the morning sky... she is praying. Like she, as we walk through life, if we are awake to God, we experience transformation, grace, strengthening. Our whole lives are a prayer to God.

This week, I myself was awakened to the power, absurdity and transformative love of grace in a new way. Fred Phelps died this week. He was the man who led Westboro Baptist Church to protest at war veteran's funerals and churches that were GLBTQ friendly... at the drop of a hat, he would espouse hatred. His web site was disgusting... it would make you sick. He carried with him a theology of judgment. His signs would say, " God hates..." fill in the blank- as he would name groups of people. . This week I found myself struggling. For there was a part of me who at first wondered if there will be protests at his funeral.... A protest at any funeral is sad... Then I heard that there was not going to be a funeral. One of my friends had this to say "God loves Fred" Period. To get from a place of true frustration and distain to a place where we can say with true faith – God loves.... No matter what—is to understand grace. Our understanding of grace comes to us through relationship... and relationship comes to us through, yes, PRAYER. . Prayer is a dialogue. We get to know who God is and how God works in our lives by taking time to talk AND listen. Grace is not earned. It isn't something we deserve. It just is. It is a wonderful mystery that we are called to live into. God loves Fred. So today, I pray for Fred and his family. I pray for healing and new life... I also pray for the end of hatred. Let us wake up to God unending love and live a life of prayer.