

St. Andrews Lutheran Church, Tallebudgera

17th September 2023

Colossians 4:2

PRAY. KEEP ALERT. BE THANKFUL.

Most people would probably agree that communication is important in any relationship, I guess, in fact, many of us would say that it is vital. It is a part of what makes a relationship what it is because it creates connection, opens sharing, allows appreciation to come out, and enables both the receiving and giving of help and support. When regular communication either becomes less, or it decreases all together, the relationship changes. There are exceptions to that with some family and very close friends, but overall, our relationships are based upon, grown upon, rely upon, the regular sharing of communication between us and others.

When we look at it, this is also what prayer is all about; communication between us and God which both supports and grows our relationship with Him. It is of course a bit different to our other relationships, but to break it right down that's what it is. As we have been going through this *Season of Prayer* series over the last few weeks, the first week we looked at Jesus' teaching in and around the Lord's Prayer, and how that gives us a bit of a 'who?' and a 'how?' of prayer. Last week we looked at Jesus' parable of the hard-hearted judge and what we learn there about being persistent in prayer, and the focus there was more on the 'what?' and the 'why?' of prayer. We know that both in what He did and what He said Jesus showed the importance of prayer, communication with His Father, in His time on earth. But this shouldn't be surprising to us: having a close and personal relationship with His people has always been important to God, from right back to when He walked in the Garden with Adam and Eve, throughout the Bible, and up to us today. As those who are created in His image, we have a relationship with God, based on intimate communication, like no other part of His creation. And that's how He wants it to be.

Prayer is regularly spoken about in all parts of the Bible, including in the letters that Paul, the apostle and great missionary, wrote to Christian communities in the early Church; communities which

were often under persecution and doing their best to follow and grow in their Christian faith with not always a whole lot of knowledge or strong leadership right there with them. And one of the themes that keeps coming through again and again in these letters of Paul is the importance of prayer. In today's reading, part of Paul's letter to the new Christian community in the Greek city of Colossae, Paul writes; 'Never give up praying. And when you pray, keep alert and be thankful.'(v. 2) In the midst of all this church is going through; persecution from the authorities, possibly being alienated from some friends and family because of their Christian faith, having a faith which goes against their culture, Paul tells them what He tells all the other communities He writes to; pray. The most important thing they can do is keep their relationship with God open and strong. Everything else will come from that. As we think about the situation they were in, we can apply what they went through to the struggles we go through in our faith to, both from without and within. The message here is the same one Jesus taught in the parable we looked at last week; stay close to God, be persistent, pray.

And it's interesting the two other things Paul puts here right alongside of prayer. The first is to 'Keep alert'. For me what came into my head here were the words Jesus said to three of His disciples when He was praying in the Garden of Olives on the night before He died. After leaving them while He went away to pray, and then coming back to find them asleep, Jesus said to them, 'Stay awake and pray that you won't be tested. You want to do what is right, but you are weak.' (*Matthew 26:41 CEV*) 'Stay awake'. 'Keep Alert'. Jesus spoke His words to the disciples so that they would pray and be strong in what they were about to face. Paul wrote His command to a Christian community which was undergoing pressures and doubts and struggles about what it meant to live their faith in their lives. Both commands also come to us for those same reasons. Staying awake and being alert through prayer comes out in our faith in many ways: It can be about giving ourselves, our thoughts, our actions, our words, over to God and His will. It is about accepting that we rely on God no matter what happens. It's about through prayer giving everything over to God and trusting Him. And it's also about seeing ourselves sometimes as not just the ones making the prayer, but also as being a part of the answer. Keep alert. In prayer stay close to God, remembering and

relying on His blessings, praying for His will to be done in and through you, trusting in His love and strength for you.

And be thankful. Again, thankfulness is often mentioned as a part of prayer in the Bible. It's often how prayers are started in places like the Psalms, which gives us the pattern and format for our own prayers; thanking and praising God for all He has done for us, before we get on to placing our requests before Him. Be thankful. Having that attitude in which we are focusing on what God has done for us, the blessings we have in our lives, rather than what we feel we are not getting. That's not to downplay the grief, sickness, conflicts, and other losses and struggles we all go through as part of life; they are real and can't just be waved away with a bright and cheery, 'be thankful'; and God wants us to take them to Him and to share and take their burden from us too. But it's about in our regular lives, as we pray, as we think, as we speak, as we do, looking for the blessings God gives to us. Seeing the answers to our prayers not just when God does it our way, but when we can see that the answer to our prayers was done according to His wisdom, not ours. Focusing on what we do have, rather than on what we don't. Some of us are naturally more positive than others, and that's okay. How then can we keep these reasons for thanks in front of us? Perhaps it's by keeping a journal in one way or another; jotting down during the day on a piece of paper or your phone the things you have to be thankful for. It might be in taking the time to listen to the birds, see the trees or the flowers, talk to people who are important to us in our lives. This might seem pretty small, but this week I discovered that on my phone I can set up my lock screen to shuffle through 50 different photos. I now have it set up so every time I pick up my phone I see photos of members of my family, and no matter how I'm feeling at the time it makes me smile and thankful that those people are in my life and for the blessing God has given me in them. And of course, *pray* in thanks. Very often our prayers are based on our needs and the needs of others. Take the time, make the conscious effort, to also make a prayer of thanks when something good happens for you, when things work out well, when you see or experience God's blessings in the world, in your life, in the lives of others. Be thankful in prayer, which will lead to you being thankful in life.

Pray. Keep alert. Be thankful. As we have looked at prayer and its importance in our relationship with God over these last three weeks, I pray this focus has helped lead and enable you to have a renewed focus on your prayer life, and that you have experienced the blessings we receive by having this close and personal relationship in our lives throughout every day. If you haven't been able to do that yet, I encourage you to do so. In prayer we praise God. In prayer we thank God. In prayer we put ourselves under God and His loving will for us. In prayer we hand all our worries, concerns, struggles, sadness, pain, over to God and trust Him to help us through them. In prayer we have a close relationship with our Heavenly Father, the most loving and supportive relationship we can ever have. Amen.

FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION/REFLECTION

Pray:

- Consider the place you give prayer in your life. Does it reflect the relationship you want to have with God, as well as the relationship He wants to have with you?
- If you feel you could be more intentional and focused in your prayer life, are there some things you could do, changes you can make, in order to do this? If needed, have a talk to someone about this, or look again at the first Address in this series, the one based on Luke 11 from the 3rd September, for some ideas about this.
- If you have made some changes in being more intentional and focused in your prayer life, what have you experienced in life and your relationship with God as a result of that?

Keep Alert:

- What do you think that Jesus' command to 'stay awake', and Paul's call to 'be alert', mean for you?
- Are there people, situations, activities, things, which distract you and take you away from having a full and active relationship with God, including affecting your prayer life? How can you have a better balance around this?
- If you need God's strength and guidance in this, bring these struggles to Him praying for His help in giving priority to Him in your life.

Be Thankful:

- Take the time to share with others or reflect on yourself what you have to be thankful for in your life. Try also to remember the people, situations, material blessings, and other things which you can often take for granted.
- Do you find it easy to be thankful, or do you struggle with it? If you struggle with it, are there any things you can do to be more focused on being thankful each day?
- Try to find a way that during the day you not only offer up prayers to God when you need something, but also when you have something to be thankful for.

Pray: thank God for the gift of prayer, which leads us to be able to have an open and intimate relationship with Him. Ask God to help us to keep prayer as an important part of our lives.

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