

Prayer for Life from the Good Shepherd  
John 10:1-21  
CMCC 7 March 2010

**Read scripture: John 10:1-21**

**Pray**

**Intro:**

I work at Payap University overseeing our chapel with a small staff of Christians who try to share the good news of God's love with our mostly Buddhist staff and students in a variety of ways-- through cell groups, clubs, worship, work camps, parties, and so on. This week something happened at work that deeply disappointed me. The next morning I was talking it over with Rob and Jesus during our morning prayers and I was totally focused on the foibles and weaknesses of my staff, and I burst out in my frustration, "they are all a bunch of bozos! My staff is a bunch of bozos!" (For those not familiar with this term, bozos means clowns—foolish, weak, incompetents!)

As soon as I said it I realized, yes, and there is me – the leader of those bozos and the biggest bozo of them all! And Rob and I laughed. We had been talking about Jesus and his sheep. Sheep are pretty much the bozos of the animal kingdom—they are so weak, vulnerable, and needy—prone to injury and disease, when they fall over, they can't get up, they panic easily, and wander foolishly--

What good news it is for us today that Jesus is the Good Shepherd who loves us, his bozo sheep. We are beloved bozos whom Jesus invites into the closest intimacy, and to whom he gives abundant life through his own life, death, and resurrection.

This is the best news ever. So how do we actually live it?  
Jesus tells us to follow him—to believe in him and become his disciples.

I think it is wonderful that as a church we are focusing on discipleship during this season of Lent—and that we are trying to follow Jesus not just as individuals but as a community --using this Lenten devotional together. This week the focus of our walk as disciples has been on prayer.

For all of us I'd like to say thank you to the contributors who helped us think about prayer during the week. One way they helped us was by sharing honestly some of the barriers to prayer we find in our hearts:

Harry Paul spoke of the "homework" approach to prayer he grew up with (and many of us have)—coming to prayer as a duty and not a joy; Karen Chase wrote of being weary and wary of the effort of going deeper with God, and Hella Goschnick disclosed the difficulty we all have known, to choose the best—time with God—over the entertaining distractions that are so appealing but leave us tired and empty. Nick Cole shared the struggle it can be to bring an "impossible" situation before the Lord and not see any answer for a long long time.

Today I believe Jesus is offering us three great motivators to help us overcome these barriers to prayer. These motivators are the reality that: Jesus is good. Jesus loves us. Jesus gives real life. The more we experience and deeply grasp these realities, the more easily and constantly we will pray.

First, Jesus is good.  
In our scripture today, Jesus is saying, trust me, I'm good.

Jesus' words are spoken in the context of growing tension between him and the Jewish authorities that was sparked by an astonishing miracle. Jesus healed a man blind from birth by making a mudpack for his eyes on a Sabbath—which was against the Sabbath regulations. The healed man was ecstatic, and emboldened to openly challenge the thinking and actions of the religious leaders and worship Jesus.

John 9:24-34 read  
He had experienced the goodness of Jesus—and it set him free from fear of the religious authorities and moved him to openly worship Jesus right in front of them.

Have we known the goodness of Jesus in ways that have freed us from fear of foolish authorities and moved us to worship Jesus with all our hearts?

Allan Eubank addressed this in his contribution to the Lenten devotional. He challenged us to trust that God is good and ask God for what we really need. Allan has had the joy of watching God bring hundreds of Thai people to himself by answering their prayers for help and healing in all kinds of ways.

He shares many of the stories in his book, "God, if you are really God, ..."

But the first story is his wife Joan's story. Here's what Allan writes:

Whenever my wife, Joan, is called upon to give her testimony she begins with her experience in Houston, Texas, when she was twelve years old. At that time her father had become an alcoholic, and was dangerous to the three children when he came home drunk. When he was sober he was a loving supportive father, but his behavior changed radically when under the influence of alcohol.

One evening, Joan's mother told her that she would have to get a divorce, and Joan's world was shattered. She stumbled out into the World War II victory garden in the back yard. It was just dusk, and the huge Texas sky was filling with stars. Joan said, "I felt so small and the universe was so big. I thought, 'Why was I born? What's the meaning of my life?' I cried out in the dark, 'God, if you're really God, let me know it.' I didn't see anything or hear anything, but it was as if someone put loving arms around me. I felt relief and peace."

Joan went back into the house and somehow turned to Psalm 139:7, "Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?" She knew she was not alone and never would be. This experience has become a benchmark in her life. Joan's mother and father divorced. The family went through many struggles, but the assurance of that night never deserted her.

Joan experienced the goodness of Jesus—arms of love embracing her and freeing her from fear.

If you want to be encouraged, read Allan's book (see me after church if you are interested).

But what about the help we ask for, sometimes for years, without seeing the answers we long for. This is Nick Cole's experience in praying for justice in Burma which many of us share—Nick wrote, "difficult sinful situations can overwhelm us both emotionally and rationally as we pray but see no resolution—especially when God doesn't appear to be acting. We may end up being able to voice our anguish to God and nothing more. The psalmist encourages us to do just that, but to do it in the context of worship; to be intentional about coming into God's presence. .. in that act of the will to engage with God, the psalmist shares that a true perspective emerges. We are not told when the tables will be turned, but it is absolutely certain that they will."

The key is experiencing God's presence. And this is the second motivator for prayer that Jesus desires for us today—that we know his loving faithful heart. Karen Chase offered us help this week in finding the path to Jesus' heart – it is confession – not just of wrongdoing but "honestly disclosing our secrets to Jesus—our complacency, dabbling, hanging on the fringes, hiding in the peripherals: and articulating a heart desire to "go deep" with him."

Jesus said, the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name. He said, I am the good shepherd, I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. This intimacy that Jesus is claiming with his own is staggering—just like his intimacy with the Father. That is the intimacy he desires and creates with us.

Melanie Carey gave us another key to this intimacy this week-- the prayer, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

One of my heroes is Frank Laubach. He was a missionary to the Philippines who decided to pursue this intimacy with Jesus that Jesus had with the Father. He committed himself to stay aware of Jesus' presence all the time and to completely turn his will over to Jesus—to follow and obey every moment of every day.

(I can't remember if I have shared this in this church before, but it is worth sharing again.)

Here is what he wrote in his diary in January 1930: Although I have been a minister and a missionary for fifteen years, I have not lived the entire day of every day, minute by minute to follow the will of God. Two years ago a profound dissatisfaction led me to begin trying to line up my actions with the will of God about every fifteen minutes or every half hour. Other people to whom I confessed this intention said it was impossible. I judge from what I have heard that few people are really trying even that. But this year I have started to live all my waking moments in conscious listening to the inner voice, asking without ceasing,

“What, Father, do you desire said? What, Father, do you desire this minute? It is clear that this is exactly what Jesus was doing all day every day.

A couple months later he wrote: As I analyze myself I find several things happening to me as a result of these two months of strenuous effort to keep the Lord in mind every minute. This concentration upon God is strenuous, but everything else has ceased to be so. I think more clearly, I forget less frequently. Things which I did with a strain before, I now do easily and with no effort whatever. I worry about nothing, and lose no sleep. I walk on air a good part of the time. Even the mirror reveals a new light in my eyes and face. I no longer feel in a hurry about anything. Everything goes right. Each minute I meet calmly as though it were not important. Nothing can go wrong excepting one thing. That is that God may slip from my mind if I do not keep on my guard. If he is there, the universe is with me. My task is simple and clear.

Several months later he wrote: Last Monday was the most completely successful day of my life to date, so far as giving my day in complete and continuous surrender to God is concerned—though I shall hope for far better days – and I remember how as I looked at people with a love God gave, they looked back and acted as though they wanted to go with me. I felt then that for a day I saw a little of that marvelous pull that Jesus had as He walked along the road day after day “God-intoxicated” and radiant with the endless communion of His soul with God.

Frank Laubach won international prizes for teaching people how to read. His life was extraordinarily fruitful as he made it his primary intention to constantly know Jesus and live in his presence.

And this leads us to the third motivator for prayer that Jesus has for us today – the promise of abundant life – not restriction and fear and following rules that make us feel successful as long as we keep them; but REAL LIFE made possible because Jesus is really alive today. He was truly resurrected from the dead and is alive and living in and among us today.

Frank Laubach’s life showed this vividly. Jesus took him all over the world teaching people to teach each other to read. His life made a huge impact empowering the poor. He’s legendary.

Our lives might not reach that level of legend, but Jesus longs to give us lives full of joy and meaning as we hear his voice and follow-- moment by moment, day by day. Ann Clark shared with us how she and her husband Craig have been listening and been led by Jesus for many years, providing training and resources for village pastors in northern Thailand and Burma and scholarships for children who could not afford to attend school. Now Jesus is leading them in a new adventure of trust and joy finally coming to live and teach here in Chiang Mai after the economic collapse made it impossible for them to live in the US. Now it’s time to make CM home and share Jesus’ heart with kindergarteners at Prince Royal’s College—talk about REAL LIFE.

Prayer is not meant to be a chore, not homework, but the source of our life and love in Jesus. I was chatting on line with my son Nathan this week telling him I was going to preach this Sunday but that it was easy because I got to preach about my favorite thing—prayer. He wrote back that in that case, if he were preaching, it would be about eating pretzels and drinking beer. I laughed and delighted in the heart of my boy who loves life and is living it to the full. We agreed that Jesus would probably enjoy his sermon too—and that Jesus enjoys being with him as he enjoys his pretzels and beer.

Jesus loves us –his beloved bozo sheep—so vulnerable and needy.  
Jesus is GOOD – a loving and self-giving authority—he gave his life for us –  
and then in glorious power he took it up again that we might have REAL LIFE in him.

Today we’re celebrating at his table – it’s not pretzels and beer, but bread and wine— his body and blood, broken and shed for us.

Let us come and meet with Jesus.

Let us bring him those places in our hearts and lives that don’t yet know his GOOD and LOVING presence and power. Come. Let us open our hearts to our Lord. He is here waiting, longing for us to draw close. If we as a church are going to embrace our world with the heart of God, our hearts must first know his heart’s embrace. Come and let our good Lord Jesus love you and give you REAL LIFE.