

Wednesday Evening Service, March 25, 2020 - Reflection and Prayer Practice

Help, Thanks, Wow Pastor Amy Zalk Larson

A reading from Psalm 28 ...

⁶Blessed be the LORD, who has heard the voice of my prayer. ⁷You, LORD, are my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in you, and I have been helped; so my heart exults, and with my song I give thanks to you.

This is a time that calls for so much prayer. I want to share a reflection on prayer written by author Brian McLaren that came to me as a daily email from Richard Rohr's Center for Action and Contemplation. I encourage you to sign up for its daily emails especially right now as they are focused on praying in crisis. Go to cac.org

McLaren writes ...

When we call out for help, we are bound more powerfully to God through our needs and weakness, our unfulfilled hopes and dreams, and our anxieties and problems than we ever could have been through our joys, successes, and strengths alone.

Anxieties can gray the whole sky like cloud cover or descend on our whole horizon like fog. When we rename our anxieties, in a sense we distill them into requests. What covered the whole sky can now be contained in a couple of buckets. So, when we're suffering from anxiety, we can begin by simply holding the word help before God, letting that one word bring focus to the chaos of our racing thoughts. Once we feel that our mind has dropped out of the frantic zone and into a spirit of connection with God, we can let the general word help go and in its place hold more specific words that name what we need, thereby condensing the cloud of vague anxiety into a bucket of substantial request. So we might hold the word guidance before God. Or patience. Or courage. Or resilience. Or boundaries, mercy, compassion, determination, healing, calm, freedom, wisdom, or peace ...

Along with our anxieties and hurts, we also bring our disappointments to God. If anxieties focus on what might happen, and hurts focus on what has happened, disappointments focus on what has not happened. As the saying goes, revealing your feeling is the beginning of healing, so simply acknowledging or naming our disappointment to God is an important move. This is especially important because many of us, if we don't bring our disappointment to God, will blame our disappointment on God, thus alienating ourselves from our best hope of comfort and strength ...

Whether we're dealing with anxieties, wounds, disappointments, or other needs or struggles, there is enormous power in simple, strong words—the words by which we name our pain and then translate it into a request to God. Help is the door into this vital practice of petition, through which we expand beyond our own capacities and resources to God's ... Through this practice of expansion and petition, we discover something priceless: the sacred connection can grow stronger through, not in spite of, our anxieties, wounds, disappointments, struggles, and needs.

I invite you to join me now in just repeating the word **help** before God as you breathe in and out. Now if there is another word that comes to you, bring that before God. If there isn't, continue to pray with the word **help**.

Author Anne Lamott says that the three most important words for prayer are **help, thanks** and **wow**.

This week I encourage you to pray those words as you move through your day.

- As you listen to news, as you hear distressing things, as your anxiety rises, envision that word **help** and pray that over and over in your mind.
- But also, look for the reasons you can say **thanks** as you go through your day.
- And end each day by writing or naming aloud three reasons to say **thanks**.
- And whenever possible, pause and say **wow** - "**wow**, there is bird song, there is the river, there is this community." Pause and breathe in the wonder and the gifts God pours out upon us.

Join me this week in praying **help, thanks** and **wow**. As you do, you can trust that God hears you, that God is with you.

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