

I-K Lutheran

Where God is doing new things

November 2019

Then Jesus told them a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart. (Luke 18:1)

Listen, God is calling, through the Word inviting, offering forgiveness, comfort and joy. (ELW #513)

Pray always. Do not lose heart.

What is the intimate connection between these two needs, not commands, as Luke portrays them? Is prayer, constant prayer, prayer in all situations, a key to avoid losing heart? Does losing heart, becoming discouraged or disillusioned, become a barrier to active prayer?

And, by the way, how is your prayer life – and that of our faith community – these days in which it is so, so tempting to give up and give in, to lose heart?

In her helpful book Help, Thanks, Wow author Anne Lamott suggests that these three words capture the three essential prayers. In many ways, I think that she is right. From Genesis to Revelation, scripture is filled with cries for help, expressions of gratitude, and wide-eyed wonder at the works of God.

But I also wonder whether we need to be reminded that “praying always” also suggests listening, the kind of listening that any life-giving, relationship-growing conversation requires. Perhaps a book about that form of prayer would simply be entitled, What?

Listening prayer may be the most important – and most overlooked – form of prayer for the church and all the baptized Spirit-sealed people of God at times like our time, when it is so easy to lose heart, when so much of what we hear, experience, and feel is about loss, decline, diminishment, and uncertainty.

Listening prayer begins with questions like: What is God’s narrative, God’s story, about the present and the future? Or, better, listening prayer begins like this: *Gracious God, what are you saying to us, to me, in this challenging time? What are you up to? What needs to change in my life in order for me to follow faithfully?*

Such listening prayer begins with deep, slow, careful, exploratory listening to scripture and tradition, both for the promises of God that have sustained and guided God’s people through the centuries and for the stories of what God’s deliverance looked like when the promises were fulfilled (hint: it was seldom what God’s people first imagined it would be when they started listening).

Listening prayer arises from hearts and minds that learn to listen below the surface of the routine humdrum of daily life for the God who is present and speaking right now, in this moment. It calls us to intentionally let go of what we think should happen and open ourselves to whatever God’s Spirit may be saying and through whom God may be saying it. After all, God often speaks through those through whom we least expect God to speak, as old Balaam discovered [see Numbers 22:22-35].

Listening prayer invites us to let go of the need to always speak and, instead, to be quiet for a time, to create “empty” and expectant space in our hearts, our days, our life together for God to fill with God’s Word by the power of God’s Spirit for the sake of God’s renewing work in us and in our world.

Listen, dear people of God: Pray always and do not lose heart.

Peace be with you,

Bishop Bill Gafkjen



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