

“Becoming ‘Oned’ with God”

Rev. Jayneann McIntosh, lead pastor
First United Methodist Church of Wausau
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Psalm 19:1-6

The heavens are telling the glory of God;
and the firmament proclaims God’s handiwork.
Day to day pours forth speech,
and night to night declares knowledge.
There is no speech, nor are there words;
their voice is not heard;
yet their voice goes out through all the earth,
and their words to the end of the world.
In them God has set a tent for the sun,
which comes out like a bridegroom leaving his chamber,
and runs its course with joy like a strong man.
Its rising is from the end of the heavens,
and its circuit to the end of them;
and there is nothing hid from its heat.

Romans 8:26-27

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

Do you remember doing connect-the-dots when you were young? I enjoyed watching my paper as a picture was slowly revealed. We are going to connect some dots today, if only through words. Are you ready?

God loves all of creation, including us. God sends Christ, whom God also loves, to live among us so that we can learn about God’s love. Jesus is baptized and soon begins his life of ministry. So far so good?

Jesus’ ministry includes many different things – teaching and preaching, healing and making whole. Today, we will focus on what is the backbone of all he does and says. And that is... prayer. Everything Jesus does is suffused with prayer. He prays by himself. He prays around and for others. He teaches his disciples how to pray. He prays even as he hangs on the cross dying.

Prayer is the backbone of Jesus ministry.

Since September we have been praying our Breakthrough Prayer (BTP) together. As a refresher, BTP is God’s people – that’s us – joining together in an intentional prayer movement to simply and repeatedly ask God to break through in new and miraculous ways. In our personal lives. In the individual lives of people in our congregation. In our church as a whole. Asking for God to use you, and to use us collectively, for unimagined new purposes. To break through whatever busyness, resistant thinking or attitude hold us back.

The focus of this BTP is for God as Spirit to break through anything that holds us captive so that we can move forward and fulfill God’s intention for us (32-3).

Can you imagine Jesus praying for God to break through in the lives of the people around him? Of course! That's what his ministry was all about. And we pray this prayer because we want God to break through in our lives and in the community around us.

We don't know yet where God is leading us or is calling us to be as a church, so our BTP is also about us bringing our current reality to God, offering ourselves and our church so that God can do what we cannot. This is tricky. We *might* want to give God advice. We might want to *suggest* the God find ways for us to implement *our own* ideas. But what we need to pray is for God to do God's great thing.

God, please do what we cannot. Change what we cannot change ourselves, including changing us (35).

Prayer, when we get serious about it, is a lot more about paying attention for God's input than it is about giving God a wish list. And actually, this is what makes prayer so easy. I say easy, but I know some of you believe otherwise. Every person who is unsure or uncomfortable or afraid that your prayer isn't good enough or is not quite right, anyone who would never dream of praying out loud and or in public, listen up.

When people get worried over prayer, it's usually because we think we're supposed to follow someone else's rule book. You know, the ones who talk about physical stance or say our prayers should include thanks and praise, confession, petition, and such.

If certain patterns works for them, that's great. But prayer is about communion. By that I mean, true prayer draws us closer to God such that we are changed by the experience.

God wants to touch you. God wants to be a part of your life. Pure and simple.

The BTP card fits into this because together we are asking God to shape us to fit God's call – for our church and for our communities.

Okay, I have another dot to connect. We started with God, which led to Jesus, which led to his ministry, which led to prayer. Now let's go a little deeper and talk about a certain kind of prayer.

Julian of Norwich, the 14th century, Christian mystic from England, spoke of becoming “oned” with God and oned with our neighbor.

If I start at the end of my description about oneness, it's about an irreversible shift in our sense of self, and the shift in perception that comes as a result. Our old sense of self melts away, and is replaced by a capacity to live a flowing, unboundaried life.

Some old hymns talk about a mystical marriage in which a person is fully joined to God in love, subsumed in God through love. We become one with God, yet we are still ourselves.

This is our goal for a life of prayer. How do we get there?

Theologians suggest that this shift into oneness might be more about how we see than what we see. It as a rewiring of the operating system of our consciousness.

In the old operating system, we develop our identity based on what differentiates us from everything else. This system allows us to read and think objectively and critically and is responsible. But “binary hardwiring” for all the technological and scientific advances it allows us to achieve also tends to keep us locked in conflict – since everyone else thinks and sees and understands differently than we do.

Imagine if there was an alternative, one that did not depend on splitting things into inside/outside, you/me, us/them. Instead, we would grasp patterns as a whole. We would see oneness because we would see from oneness. This may be what the ancients called *philokalia*, which means “putting the mind in the heart.”

One way we come to this *philokalia* is through contemplation, which sounds off-putting until you understand that “to contemplate” means to pay attention, to observe carefully. That’s actually part of the wording in our BTP. “Pay attention” is something Jesus says frequently.

When things catch your attention, you might pause and pay attention momentarily. The quiet sound of an evening snowfall. Friends leaning close in conversation. The taste of a grapefruit when you haven’t had one since last winter. The blueness of the sky after days of clouds.

You started in a dualistic, task-oriented mindset. Trying to get something done, getting between here and there, scratching one thing off your to-do list. But then, you notice something and this attentiveness brings you an experience of oneness.

You could be taking the garbage to the garage one evening, but as you look around as you walk in the yard, through your deepening attentiveness – of the sky, of the earth at night – you’re graced with a felt sense of oneness with the preciousness of the earth and the gift of life. This sense of oneness in turn leads you to a sense of your own preciousness in your oneness with that life all around you. And your oneness with the One who orchestrates the whole of life and creation.

This experience is true for all of us. We know oneness with the holy – however briefly – as we look on the face of our beloved or a child at play or as we listen to the sound of running water.

As people of faith, we use the word God for this infinite preciousness we realize we are one with. We discover that nothing is missing anywhere and how foolish we are to worry about things.

You may discover that the root of sorrow you experience is your separation from the oneness and exquisiteness of all things. You realize that you are skimming over the surface of the depths of life. Yet God’s nature is hidden in those very depths were skimming over in our preoccupation with life’s demands.

Our dot-to-dot began with God. And like so many of those puzzles, it ends with God. For God gives us Jesus who gives himself – in life and in death. In our baptism, we are called to live our lives in God.

BTP in one good way to know God’s intention. We pray it so that we can live into God’s life for us and for our church. Contemplative prayer is another good way to know God, to live in oneness with God. Two very different prayers. Both effective. Both “right.”

Prayer is communion with the holy. Keep praying. Keep noticing. Keep communing.

Sources:

Sue Nilson Kibbey, Flood Gates, *Holy Momentum for a Fearless Church*, “Flood Gate #2: Breakthrough Prayer Initiative,” Abingdon, Nashville, 2016, 29-50.

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