

October 4, 2015    Prayer As Communion    Reverend Dr. Junie Ewing

Mark 10:13-16 People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them. But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, "Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it." And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.

When I came back from my nephew's wedding last weekend, I heard prayer and the value of prayer was debated last Sunday, with some believing prayer matters and others saying prayer does not work. There were times when I belonged to the latter group.

As a child I spent two days a week with my grandparents, so we were very close. When I was 19, my grandmother developed cancer. When I came home to visit, she would briefly answer my question of how she was doing and then shift the conversation back to me. She died when I was 20, though I prayed and prayed she be healed and live. I concluded prayer didn't work. It took me years to begin to understand that whether God's answer to my prayers is "Yes," or "No" that prayer is about trusting God whatever happens - like Job did.

For there is much in Topeka and our world that needs prayer, that needs God's healing hand. Violent crime from gangs in Topeka has escalated greatly. Families are drowning and dying as they flee war, ISIS and violence so bad that risking death makes sense to 19 million people migrating from Syria and the Middle East and Africa. Much seems hopeless, which ironically is when our choices matter most. It is when facts say "give up" that we are to choose to trust in God's knowledge and actions and persevere. This hopeful prayer is what we will engage in today. The kind of prayer that comes from choosing hope in God for self and others.

Time and time again we find that those who choose hope make it through impossible situations into new life and better times. We even see this in novels, when we come to the chapter in which a beloved characters we love faces a choice - to give up and die - physically or spiritually - or to choose hope. If it is a book we have read before and know they get rescued or something miraculous happens in the next chapter, we want to yell out loud, "Hold on - it is about to get better!"

Ever wonder if God is saying the same to us? Hold on - don't give up! I am about to do a new thing here - can you not see it?" For what if the purpose of prayer is to act on the belief that we can trust God even when, and especially when all the facts say otherwise?

Today is World Communion Sunday. In some ways, Communion is like an open prayer. A prayer in which we trust God to bring Jesus back again in the future and to be with us now with Holy Spirit help. Today we pray for God's help to let go of personal burdens or cares without using our name or any identifier. We pray for people around the world as well, for help or healing or rescue or shelter from impossible places and situations beyond our control. We give them to God in our prayers and trust God to act.

We write our prayers on slips of paper and place some or all on a prayer flag we will later sew together as one; or we place some of the same prayers on the "Wailing Wall" up front; and/or write prayers of hope and caring to our shut-ins on pre-addressed cards. You can do all three or choose one or two - it's up to you. Today we offer prayers to God based on hope and trust in God as the One who sustains us and will never leave us.