

“Prayer Changes Things: Us!”

Date: July 3, 2016

Place: Lakewood UMC

Texts: 2 Peter 3:17-18; Luke 8:43-48

Occasion: Prayer series

Theme: Prayer, Intimacy with God

God is everywhere. Would you agree with that? I wonder why we don't notice God more often than we do? Any ideas? (answers)

I am absolutely delighted when God shows up and surprises me. It is such a joy, to have an expected occasion of grace happen in my life when I least expect it. A week or so ago I was on a personal retreat out at Mt. St. Benedict and it happened.

I try to schedule one day a month to get away just for prayer. I go to Mt. St. Benedict, where the sisters show such gracious hospitality. I'm invited to join them for their noon day prayer. Last week I found a book just sitting in the pew in front of me. It had such wonderful stories, and they fit just perfectly with this sermon series that I'm doing. So, I asked to borrow it and was told I could.

The book is called *“Everyday Epiphanies, Seeing the Sacred in Every Thing.”* It's written by Sister Melannie Svoboda, a sister of Notre Dame. I'd like to share one of her stories. It's called “Fringes Will Do.” She writes:

“During Mass today, I feel as if I'm standing on the outskirts of the church, the fringes of the congregation. I feel as if all the other people in the church are really present and fully attentive to what's going on at the altar. Whereas I am only partly there, hovering at a distance.” (Have *you* ever felt that way during a worship service?) Sister writes, “I don't like feeling this way. I want to feel completely at one with the sacred mystery, at dead center, so to speak.”

“My consolation, every time this happens? – the story of the woman with the hemorrhage (Lk 8:43-48). Her aim was simple enough: to touch the tassels of Jesus’ garment, the fringes, if you will. She told herself, ‘Touching them will be enough to heal me.’ So she did, and instantly the woman was cured of her debilitating and embarrassing infirmity.”

“On days like today, this woman reminds me of this great truth; when it comes to touching the holy – whether through liturgy or prayer or loving – fringes will do. For even the tassels of God’s garment have the power to heal us of all our infirmities.” (*Everyday Epiphanies*, pp. 7-8)

How wonderful to know that every time I go to God in prayer, I don’t have to enter the depths of mystical communion with the Holy One. All I need to do is touch the hem of his garment, the fringes of his robe.

This is week two in our summer sermon series on prayer. Today I invite us to think in a different way about how prayer works. Too often, I think, we conceive of prayer as a form of magic – if we just say the right words in just the right way, then things around us will change. And we’re often disappointed when things *don’t* change.

I invite us to consider it slightly differently. Not that I don’t think God intervenes in our lives to grant us requests. But too often we treat God like Santa Claus and we’re discouraged when He doesn’t bring us what we asked for.

Today I want us to consider this possibility. Prayer does change things; primarily it changes us. Prayer is simply having a

conversation with God. God bids us to pray; God wants to have a chat with us.

God has made us in such a way that we also have this desire inside of us to be with God. Our innermost being wants to spend time with the Holy One. We might mistake the inner nudges and feed them with other things – like pursuing pleasure, or being busy, or all kinds of things. But in our innermost being, we long for union with God.

Another story from Sister Melannie’s little book, *Everyday Epiphanies*. Little Hannah is four years old. Her brother, Aaron, is two. I notice Aaron’s shoe is untied. “Come here, Aaron,” I say, “and let me tie your shoe.” He comes to me and I bend down and tie the shoe while Hannah watches closely.

A few minutes later, Hannah comes to me with her pink sandal strap undone. “Do *my* shoe,” she says, sticking her little foot out in front of me. I bend down and buckle the strap, smiling, for I know Hannah herself undid the strap so I would give her the same attention I had given Aaron.”

Then Sister Melannie makes her point. “We are all like Hannah. We are all little Hannahs. We are all craving attention – from one another (and more importantly) from God. If only we would realize, when it comes to getting attention from God, the attention is there for the asking. (*Everyday Epiphanies, p17*)

“All we have to do is stick out our unbuckled sandal and say, “Do my shoe, please?” And I love her closing prayer, “God I set before you all that is unbuckled in my life.” Is there anyone here who has things unbuckled in their life? Is there anyone here who

wants a little attention? I fully expected to hear a chorus of “Me, me! I do, I do!” Prayer changes things; primarily it changes us.

Prayer is soul care, but not self-care, and there is a difference. They’re similar, but care for the ego is not the same as care for the soul. Prayer is where we meet God, and it is God who changes us. This is what we call spiritual formation, allowing God to change us, to mold us, as if we are a clump of clay in the potter’s hands.

In 2 Peter 3:18, Peter closes his letter with these words, “But *grow* in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” That’s what prayer does; it places us in a position so the Holy Spirit can work on the inside of us, changing us from the inside out. Prayer is the soil in which our soul grows.

Regular prayer increases our confidence in God’s love for us. Prayer helps us to become more patient and kind, more loving and generous. Prayer helps us to be less irritable with others, and become more understanding.

Prayer calms our fears. I can go to God, trusting in God’s love and concern for me. Bad things may still happen, but I know without a shadow of a doubt that God is there for me. I know that nothing can separate me from God’s love.

I haven’t always been that way, but prayer changes us. Prayer increases our faith, our hope and our love. Prayer draws us into the heart of God. As I spend time with God in prayer, I begin to trust Him more, because I know Him better.

And it is enough, if I simply touch the fringes of his garment. And so I go to God regularly, daily. I pray often throughout the day, but I try to have some dedicated time where I hang out with God.

And it is enough if I touch the fringes of his garment. Why? Because I know prayer changes things. It changes me. It changes us. Amen.