

Scripture: Romans 12:9-21

Sermon Title: "Persevere in Prayer"

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A couple of months ago, during our prayer time on a particular Sunday morning, we were lifting up the joys and concerns that were on our hearts as we always do. Now that particular day, Emily Adler raised her hand (and just so everyone knows I got permission to share this story!). So Emily raised her hand and she shared the joy of her and Brad's wedding anniversary in which we all rejoiced. She also gave us an update on Brad's healing process with Lyme Disease. And today, we rejoice that Brad is in the loft with the Clarinotes and doing so much better! And, this is what we do, isn't it? We share about the things that are on our hearts, a sharing that I see as the beginning of our prayer, and then we continue in prayer as we still our minds even further, perhaps bow our heads, fold our hands, maybe we look upwards or even look at each person who raised the request, and we are led even further into our time of prayer as I put more words to these things which we have raised. And the day when Emily shared of their anniversary and of Brad's healing journey, that day was no different as I prayed for all the requests that were raised that morning. Well after the service, Dewey Harris (who also gave me permission to share this story), came up to me with a big smile on his face and he said to me, "you know, I never realized that you knew so much about marriage!" Now I was a little puzzled. I wasn't sure what he was referring to exactly. He elaborated and said, "yes, you seem to know a lot about marriage already because during your prayer, when you were praying for Brad & Emily, you said "we rejoice in Brad & Emily's wedding anniversary and all the years they have shared and we continue to pray for Brad."

Now, that was clearly just poor word choice and sentence structure and I couldn't help but laugh at it. My mistake! I didn't mean that Brad needed extra prayers for the anniversary and the continued journey of married life. That's not what I meant at all. And as Mason and I were preparing for our wedding last weekend, I couldn't help but recall this faux pas of a prayer from before as it dealt with marriage, and as I thought

about it and smiled, I also saw glimmer of truth in it. Not just needing continued prayers for one partner but for all on such a journey. After all, as we face different journey's in life, not only in marriages, but even let's say in moves, in new careers, in changes happening around us, in health care trials, in the everyday journey even as we strive to live our best lives, shouldn't prayer and praying for ourselves and the folks on the journey with us, shouldn't that be a regular occurrence? After all, in our reading today from the letter to the Romans, as Paul is sharing a list of what he sees as the marks of a Christian, he says, in verse 12, that we are to persevere in prayer. That we are to continue the journey that we are on, even when we have to struggle to make one more step, or when the way forward is easy and filled with joy, we should pray our way through. We should ask God for what is needed, we should praise God for the good, we should seek help in the struggles - no matter what we are facing we should connect with God, connect with the Divine who connects us all. It's taking intentional time to be with God that is so important all throughout our journeys.

Now prayer looks different for different people and it may even look different for you at different times of life as we find the ways that we commune with God - the ways that we simply make intentional time to connect with the Divine. It may be those moments of giving thanks and praying for the needs around us like we do on Sunday mornings but it is not only this. It is about finding those ways of connecting with something much greater than us. Connecting with the source of our very being. It's also about resting in the love and grace of God. It's about discovering who we are while we cherish the truth of whose we are. For some, prayer is finding the rare moments of quiet to be in silence - those moments to still the mind so that we can be more open to the leadings of God. For others, prayer may be found in ancient words repeated, as the repetition draws us out of ourselves into a connection with God beyond our being. You may use prayer beads or other physical objects to help in your focus and direct your prayer. Or you may find yourself in prayer as you sing the hymns and songs of faith, transcending from the moment we are in to truths much greater. Prayer for you may be those moments of

bowing your head and saying the words out loud or silently that come to you as you talk with God about what is going on in life and in the world. There may be times in your life when it is hard to pray, and you lean on the prayers of others, such as this gathered community, to see you through. You may pray through your actions of care and compassion toward others, connecting with God through the people whom God created and the people of God's holy humanity who have that Divine spark within them. You may even have another way that you pray that I have not mentioned, and I would love to hear about it, for there are so many ways that we can connect with God and commune with the Divine. We need to find the ways that work best for us as we journey through life in prayer.

Persevering in prayer means that, in whatever forms it takes for us, prayer is meant to be a constant in our lives as a way of helping us through. As we seek to do the many things that we read about in Romans this morning – as we strive to genuinely love one another, show honor and care for others, as we strive to serve and bless, as we strive to live in peace and to not be overcome by evil but overcome evil with good – as we seek to do all these things, we need the grounding of prayer and that connection with God to keep us on this path toward righteousness, justice, and peace. Prayer in its many forms may also bring clarity, encouragement, hope, or it may just bring stillness to the body and mind which is so hard to come by in our world today – a stillness which helps us to refocus and even regain strength.

You know, in the life of the church, all of the big events of our shared life – many events which mark beginnings – all of these contain prayer. I mean, think about it. Baptisms hold prayers for the journey of faith about to unfold – a journey which is only beginning when the service ends. From then, one must persevere in prayer. Weddings hold prayers for the couple as they strive to live out their promises and build their life together – a life which continues far beyond the benediction. From then, one must persevere in prayer. When we welcome new members into the life of the church, we offer prayers for our shared journey as the hands and feet of Jesus in this place. From

then, we persevere in prayer as we live and grow together as the church. When we share in the communion meal, we give thanks for God's gifts of grace and love and we pray that they will help us on our journey of faith. When we rise from that meal, we persevere in prayer. Even when we commend to God a beloved person in our lives and we gather for a funeral, we pray for comfort for those who mourn. Their journey is one of continued prayer beyond the hour of the memorial. We pray for the departed too. Their journey is now one of eternal communion with God, almost like an unending prayer.

Beloved People of God, as we all know, the journeys of this life are never promised to be easy or without struggle and we know that they are rarely without their challenges. The journeys will have joys and sorrows. We will stumble and we will also do wonderfully beautiful things! Today, may we think about all the journeys we are on. Journeys of marriage, journeys of partnerships and friendship, journeys of faith, journeys of work, journeys toward health and wholeness, journeys of commitment and community - and whatever journey's we are on, may we persevere in prayer - connecting with God, finding Divine support, love, and care as we journey onward - onward in prayer. So be it and may it be so. Amen.