

# PLUM Pastoral Message September 2022

## The Power of Prayer

“As we fight to change the world, when we pray, truly pray, we are the ones transformed by the ones that we are praying for and with.”

Claudio Carvalhaes, *Praying With Every Heart*

“I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people.” Ephesians 1:18

Dear Brothers and Sisters In Christ:

Blessings to you as the summer winds down and fall begins to creep up on us. Now comes what we call, “the busy time”; children are going back to school, those meetings that we cancelled over the summer are resuming, most of us have already taken our vacations for the year. As we enter this, yet another, time of transition, I have a question for you.

How did you learn to pray? Perhaps your parents taught you to pray. Maybe, it was a grandparent or other relative. Maybe you were baptized as an infant and raised in the church and there heard the prayers of Sunday School and worship. As a grandmother, I take joy in teaching my little ones to pray in their simple language words of thanksgiving, grace at mealtimes, and prayers asking God to help them. In our house, we call them our “Dear Gods”.

Have you ever been in a room full of people when the question is asked, “Who would like to pray for us?” If you really want people to stop looking at you, just ask this question. It even happens among us pastors! Why are we so reluctant for others to hear our prayers?

Perhaps, we think that our prayers aren’t eloquent enough. Perhaps we struggle with what to pray for. Sometimes, we don’t think that God hears or answers our prayers. I know that for a very long time, this was true for me.

When I was twelve years old, my grandfather became very ill. My cousin said that we should pray for God to make him better. So the two of us, two little girls who loved their grandfather so much, stood outside in the yard of my family home, and

prayed that God would make Pap better and send him home. My grandfather died shortly after. After that, I did not pray. It wasn't until I was a young adult and started attending church with my then fiancé, Keith, that I began talking with God regularly.

And that is what prayer is, it is a conversation with God. God wants to hear our prayers, no matter how simple or complex. Something that I have learned recently, since I began a two-year training program for Spiritual Direction and Leadership, is that there are so many ways to pray, and sometimes, we don't even need to use words.

Some of the ways to pray that I have practiced lately include: the Mirror Prayer, Imaginative Contemplation, Walking a Labyrinth, the Daily Examen, Lectio Divina, drawing, working in clay, sitting with nature, and the prayers that we use weekly in worship. Many of the Psalms are prayers. You can look up any of those prayer forms, or call me to ask about them, and try them for yourself. I will describe three of them for you.

First, the Mirror Prayer. For this prayer, you need a mirror of any size. You can do this prayer fully clothed or fully naked, but the point is to look into the mirror at yourself and see yourself, truly see yourself. What story do the scars tell? Whose face do you see when you look into your own? What is the history behind the wrinkles and the sagging skin? Most importantly, what does God see when God looks at you? This prayer can lead us to see our life's story, our joys and sorrows, and see how and where God was at work in and through us.

The Daily Examen is a simple prayer that can be done at any time of the day, or even throughout the day. You begin with thanksgiving – what are you thankful for at this very moment? Then, you look back on your day or the day before to see when you felt distant from God, when you may have sinned. You ask God for forgiveness and to help keep you from sinning. Finally, what is ahead for you in the coming hours or the next day? How do you want God to help you with those things? You could end with the Lord's Prayer.

Imaginative Contemplation is one of my favorite forms of prayer. For this prayer form, you choose a portion of scripture and read it through. What words or phrases stand out to you? Why do you think that is? Then, after reflecting on that, you read the passage again. But, this time, you put yourself into the story. You could be a bystander, observing the scene. You could be one of the characters in the story. What do you see? What do you hear? What do you smell or taste or touch? Is Jesus in the story? Does he look at you, speak to you? What does he say? How does he look at you?

For any of these prayer forms, it is often helpful to write down your thoughts and feelings about the experience. You will find that, as you repeat these prayer practices that your prayer life grows richer and deeper.

I am currently reading a book, *Praying with the Heart*, by Claudio Carvalhaes. In it, he writes that there is a difference between praying for and praying with someone. We do a lot of praying for. How often do you see prayer requests on social media with numerous comments of “praying”? All of us have a list of names that we are praying for in our congregations. It is good to pray for others. But, how often do we pray with someone? When you pray with someone, they know that you have heard them. When you pray with someone, you can’t help but become part of their circumstance and they become part of you – one body, united in Christ Jesus.

Sisters and brothers, there is power in prayer, power to transform lives and to transform our world. May God keep us diligent in our prayers!

Pastor Sue