

Laurie Sedgwick:

Good morning and welcome to morning prayers. Please stand as you are able for our responsive reading from the black Appleton Psalter book. Today, we'll be reading Psalm number 92, found on page 46. It is good to give thanks to the Lord, to sing praises to thy name, O most high.

Congregation:

To declare thy steadfast love in the morning, and thy faithfulness by night.

Laurie Sedgwick:

To the music of the lute and the harp, to the melody of the lyre.

Congregation:

For thou, O Lord, hast made me glad by thy work; at the work of thy hands I sing for joy.

Laurie Sedgwick:

The righteous flourish like the palm tree and grow like a cedar in Lebanon.

Congregation:

They are planted in the house of the lord, they flourish in the courts of our God.

Laurie Sedgwick:

They still bring forth fruit in old age. They are ever full of sap and green.

Congregation:

To show that the lord is upright; he is my rock and there is no unrighteousness in him.

Choir:

(Singing)

The Rev. Emmanuel K. Akyeampong:

Good morning. For my inspired text, I have chosen two short scriptures from the New Testament. The first is from Luke, chapter 11, verse one. "Once Jesus was in a certain place praying. As he finished, one of his disciples came to him and said, 'Lord, teach us to pray just as John taught his disciples.'" The second short text is from James, chapter four, verse three. "And even when you ask, you don't get it because your motives are all wrong. You want only what will give you pleasure."

I have chosen two short scriptures from the New Testament on prayer. The first from Luke, a request from the disciples to Jesus to teach them how to pray as John had taught his disciples, suggests that there is a way to pray, or prayer might be a form of specialized communication. Out of that came the Lord's Prayer. This suggestion is reinforced by the second short scripture from James, that there is a wrong way to pray, and that is when we don't get what we pray for.

I have a strong prayer life, and I believe in the efficacy of prayer. I pray because I believe that God answers prayer. Prayer then is an act of faith. This morning I want to reflect on a period in my life when my prayer life was in turmoil. In the summer of 2015, I was a chaplain intern at in Vincent's Hospital in Worcester, to fulfill my clinical pastoral education requirement for ordination. I was assigned to ICU, the dialysis unit, and orthopedics.

The folks in ICU were often sedated. And it was my interaction with their family members in the ICU waiting room that personified their cases for me, emotionally concerned family members who sought assurance from me and requested for me to pray for the recovery of the admitted relatives.

In the dialysis unit, I had some of my most intense conversations on faith, as I encountered the same outpatients thrice a week, and relationships were forged. Young adults whose kidneys had given out. Conversations about why me? Why so early? As an Ashanti from Ghana, I culturally lean toward being buried when I pass on with all my body parts intact. After several weeks in dialysis, I found myself now praying for patients I had gotten to know to become organ recipients.

I recall how I prayed fervently when a young man in his early 30s who'd come for dialysis, but who was also diabetic. He had a diabetic sore in his leg which refused to heal. He had been informed that if the sore did not heal, his leg would have to be amputated. The leg ended up being amputated, pushing him into a state of depression. He continued dialysis, but was noncommunicative. Several of my prayers went unanswered. Going to work as St. Vincent's became a challenge for me.

My CPE supervisor, an experienced and wise psychologist, an ordained minister, sensed my difficulties one morning during the morning prayers that begin or began our workday. He pointed out that it is not us chaplains that bring the presence of God to the hospital wards. God's presence is already at work on the wards, and it is for us to discern what the grace of God is doing and to align ourselves with it.

That had me thinking. It was not that my prayers were not sincere or fervent. It was just that God's agenda was larger than mine, and I needed to align myself with God's agenda. My prayers changed as I began to ask God to show me how to pray in the particular situations I faced, and seeking to understand outcomes not from my perspective. And there were many remarkable incidents that have stayed with me, for they strengthened my faith journey and my prayer life.

I came to understand that God puts premium on intercessory prayers. In Ezekiel, chapter 22, Ezekiel received a message from the Lord about how Israel's leaders since had polluted the land and aroused the indignation of the Lord. The Lord states, "I looked for someone who might rebuild the wall of righteousness that guards the land. I searched for someone to stand in the gap so I would not have to destroyed the land, but I found no one."

As a prayer intercessor, I pray about the many matters the Lord lays on my heart. But in each circumstance, I returned to the request of the disciple in Luke. And I ask the Lord to teach me how to pray for the matter at hand.

May the Holy Spirit guide us in our prayer lives as we seek to align ourselves else with what the grace of God is doing in the world. Amen.

Let us pray. Lord God, you are God who works in us and gives us the desire and power to do what pleases you. Teach us to pray in every circumstance we face, that your divine will, will be done through us. In Christ's name we have prayed. Amen.

Laurie Sedgwick:

And now please stand as you are able and let us pray the prayer that Jesus taught us, saying, "Our father who art in heaven, hallowed be the name. Thy kingdom come, they will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen."

Let us sing the hymn, God Be With You Till We Meet Again, number 90, found in your Crimson Harvard hymnal.

Congregation:

(Singing)

Laurie Sedgwick:

May we hear the melody of life and find ourselves singing harmony. May we be open to the dissonances in the song of the land and its people, that we might be part of the world's urging toward justice, peace, and love. May we feel our bones, the rhythms of life and land, and find ourselves dancing. This we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen. (Music)