

“Pray It Forward”

Series: Get My People Going

James 5:13-16

January 12, 2014

This sermon was preached by Pastor Kurt Jacobson at Trinity Lutheran Church, Eau Claire, WI

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ:

What a great morning. Thank you for being part of the community of Trinity worshipping God today. We are blessed to have such life and beauty among us – including the reminder of all those who were baptized in this church in the past year.

As Lutherans we believe that Baptism is the starting point in the life of faith. It’s our adoption into the Christian family. As you heard in the account of Jesus’ baptism at the start of worship. Baptism includes the clear declaration that God loves us and that we belong to God.

This morning we are also focusing on a wellness initiative called “Get My People Going.” It’s part of our effort as a congregation to be good stewards of our lives and all that God give us. Here on the day when we read of Jesus’ baptism – we see that Jesus got going immediately after he was baptized. The Bible concludes Jesus’ baptism by telling us: “And the Spirit immediately drove Jesus into the wilderness.” Baptism got Jesus moving into a life directed by God’s Spirit.

“Get My People Going” is an initiative to get us to look at our lives and aspire to live more as the good stewards of all that God gives us. So here’s how this initiative works: You choose up to three goals that you’ll work toward for the next 8 weeks. We’ll give you a booklet to help shape how you choose your goals. Then throughout the eight weeks - our Parish Nurse Marti Hofer will contact you weekly to encourage you in your efforts.

Let me illustrate some things that you might choose as goals when you sign-on to Get My People Going! Some goals might deal with physical or relational health.

Let’s say you choose better eating habits as a goal. Perhaps those quick, fat and sodium-laden deli meals, secret encounters with bags of chips or late night bowls of ice cream have finally haunted you to the point that you’re going to improve your eating habits.

Or maybe you’re a night owl and when morning comes and you have to get up for work or school, you’ve only slept a few hours. You might make 7 hours of sleep a night a goal because you’re tired of being tired all day.

Maybe you’ve let the technology of your smartphone, iPad, Facebook, or texting take over communication with others and its been a long time since you stepped away from those gizmos and stopped them from replacing or invading time with key people in your life. Your goal for Get My People Going might be to take a walk or have lunch with a friend each week. Good friendships and quality conversation are part of Christ-like, healthy living.

I think any of these goals have merit for people. But there’s another goal I hope we will all aspire to as children of God. It’s prayer.

This year invest yourself in growing as a praying person. Perhaps you have a hard time praying. Maybe prayer has never worked much for you. Even if you do get to praying, maybe you find yourself distracted quickly.

There’s a light-hearted commercial for getting better at tuning out the distractions while praying. Watch this: [Statavert](http://Statavert.com) sermonspice.com

Oh, if getting more prayer into our lives was as easy as a purple pill! While I know of no pill to improve your praying, Get My People Going might be the start to get you going on daily prayer and a richer experience of God in your life.

Whether you sign-on to Get My People Going – or choose prayer as one of your goals – I want to say more about prayer in the next few minutes — and encourage us all in this important aspect of living faith in daily life.

Prayer – we could spend many weeks on this topic. So many questions come to mind on the topic of prayer:

Why pray? Does God hear my prayers? Can praying change God's mind? Should I keep on praying even when I've never experienced an answer to prayer? Can I pray for the same thing many times, or should I ask only once? – All good questions and all the answers are YES!

Let's turn to the Bible reading from James for some insight on prayer. James is addressing the people of his church who need to get going toward better health. Some of the people of his church are hurting. Some are suffering. Some of them are doing great – life is going along just fine. There are others in his church who are sick and some of them are carrying the guilt of sin and they're looking for forgiveness. James, in describing the people of his church has just described us hasn't he?

So James goes on to give all the people of his church a prescription for better living: Pray. "If you are suffering", James says, pray. "For those who are sick" he says, pray for them. "If someone has sinned" pray for them. James make his point so clear: prayer is what we should be doing all the time!

Thus, I want to offer two reasons for making praying a goal for all of us in this new year. And here's my first reason: We know what prayer will do. The second reason is, we don't know what prayer will do. And before you think I'm trying to confuse you, stick with me for a little while longer.

First, we know that prayer will change us. The Bible tells of people changed by prayer. Moses, that leader of the People of Israel was changed by Prayer. Again in the Old Testament, a guy named David, whose life was really messed up by bad, selfish choices was changed by prayer. Prayer changed Jesus. He struggled greatly near the end of his life and he prayed to God to be spared a violent death. In the midst of his praying, he said "If you won't grant my prayer to be spared this death God, then not my will, but your will. Let your will be done." When it came to his crucifixion, Jesus was changed. Prayer changed him. Prayer will change you. But if you do aspire to pray more fully this year, accept this spiritual equivalent of a Surgeon General's announcement: "Warning: prayer causes people to change."

When you start to pray more, you'll realize that up to that point – something had been missing in your life. Richard Rohr operates a retreat center in New Mexico and he says prayer brings about a spiritual awareness in people. He calls it: "Holy consciousness." I have talked to many of you who, through prayer, have come to know God's presence in your daily life in much clearer ways. You see, prayer removes the distractions, the debris that accumulates in our lives that we carry around with us year after year. Prayer creates a "holy consciousness."

Think about it this way. If you want a greater sense of God in your life, you have to make some room for God. And prayer, as it changes us, makes room for God.

I hear from people that God sometimes seems absent or distant and I wonder if that's because our lives are so cluttered. There's no room for anything beyond ourselves, our busy schedules and daily demands. Prayer is a means of clearing out all that's distracting. Prayer remodels us inside, making room for God. Prayer creates

a “holy consciousness.” First reason to pray: We know what prayer will do. It will change us.

The second reason to pray is: we don't know what prayer will do – God's got that part covered. Why? Because prayer engages GOD - the Almighty - the Creator! And God can do whatever God wants to do in response to our prayers. God, the one who is most relentless is loving you, the one who holds you most dear, will do for you that which you can't even imagine. We pray because we don't know what it'll do – but we know that God who is good -- will do that which is good for us.

There are two primary reasons to pray. First, because we know what will happen. We'll be changed. Renewed. And the second reason we pray is because we have no idea at all what will happen. That's up to God - the God who loves you and claims you in baptism — and the God who can do amazing things through prayer.

Let's pray: God, thank you – for loving, claiming and always yearning to hear from us in prayer. Inspire our praying. Then, through prayer, change us to be more like you -- for the sake of our neighbors and this world. Amen.