

"Pray Always"

Genesis 32:22-31; 2 Timothy 3:14-4:5; Luke 18:1-8

October 17, 2004

This week I read about the first transcontinental flight across the country. It was completed by American aviation pioneer Cal P. Rodgers in an early Wright flyer. On September 17, 1911 he left Brooklyn NY and arrived in California on December 10, 1911, 84 days later. Rodgers actual time in the air was 3 days, 10 hours and 14 minutes. The airplane was forced down by weather and mechanical failure more than 30 times - some of which required major repairs. When Rodgers landed in Long Beach the only original parts on the airplane were the rear rudder and the oil pan on the engine. Have you ever been that dedicated to any one project? The articles author commented that he would have given up the first time he lost the wings. When your life seems to crash time and time again - where do you find the strength to pull it together one more time?

The scriptures are rich in possibilities this week. I could easily focus on any one of the text for a full 17 minute sermon - perhaps much longer. Some would provide food for thought for weeks. But I find myself picking images from all three as I ponder what God might be saying to us this week.

1st image - from 2 Timothy 4:3

I love the image Paul used in writing to Timothy when he said that people have "itching ears". One of my dogs has itching ears. Every time I rub them in just the right way, he moans with pleasure. I know what Paul is telling Timothy if, as a preacher, you tell the people just what they want to hear, if you rub their ears just right, people moan with pleasure, tell you that you did a good job and are happy. But Paul tells Timothy that what people want to hear is not necessarily theological sound - it is not necessarily the truth. So Paul's admonition to Timothy is to be persistent in being in the presence of God so that he would persistently preach God's true word. It is more fun to just rub itching ears and make people feel good but there is 'sound doctrine' - there is God's word of truth to hold on to and proclaim. It is not easy to hear that word in a world that is so filled with voices proclaiming to be the voices of truth.

2nd Image from Luke 18:1-8

We read the Gospel text for today and we want to hear the pastor say that if you pray hard enough, if you just keep coming to God with your prayers, finally God will grant your requests. — I love the way someone retold this parable:

"In a certain city there was a corrupt bureaucrat who neither feared God nor respected people; and there was a welfare mother in the same city who kept coming to him and saying, "Make my landlord fix the furnace and insulate the walls. I can no longer afford to pay the heat bills and my children are freezing." For a while the bureaucrat refused to listen, but the woman kept coming to his office every day with her three children, and each day she would make her plea again. After several weeks of this, he thought to himself, if I don't give this woman what she asks, she will pester me to death. An order was issued, the furnace was replaced and insulation was installed in the walls. ----- The next day the woman

was back in the bureaucrat's office with her children. She thanked him for what he had done and then she said, "Now let me tell you about my plumbing problems.""

We read this Gospel text and want to believe that God is just like us - specifically just like the unjust judge. But I believe that what it is saying is that God is not like that judge. You may wear people down and finally get them to do what you want them to do – but God is different – God will be quick to give us what is right. Will you believe that? Are you able to place your prayers before God and have faith that He will respond? Or do you want to believe that if you pray hard enough – if you pray often enough - if you pray long enough and earnestly enough - God will have to answer your prayers?

Somebody asked me if that meant that we should only pray about an issue once. Does it show a lack of faith in God if we pray about any matter more than once? My answer is no. Not only does the text tell us that God is quick to grant justice - it also tells us that we should pray always! What we say to God in prayer is heard. And when we speak to God, He listens and responds. The text asks the rhetorical question about faith – Will Christ find faith in anyone when He returns? Can any of us just place our needs in God's hands and have faith that He will respond appropriately? Why then are we told to pray always and to never lose heart?

3rd Image from Genesis 32:22-31

I encourage you to read the chapters in Genesis that immediately precede today's reading from Genesis. The story of the struggles in Jacob's life would make most of our lives look like a cake walk. His estranged brother that he has not seen for years is coming toward him with 400 hundred men. His father-in-law has just left after a major confrontation concerning his daughters who have become Jacobs wives after he had worked for their father for 14 years in order to have the privilege of marrying them. And let's not even mention the joys and trauma of being married to 2 women [sisters] and having 11 children and two maids out traveling with the flocks of sheep and goats. No wonder he had restless nights. He tosses and turns thru the night - struggling - wrestling with one who could have overcome him - wrestling when he might have easily given up – wrestling, as it turns out, with God. And when the struggle through the night comes to an end he is blessed by God.

It is an amazing story that most of us could easily identify with in those times when the complexity of life and those hard times that we encounter can weigh us down to the point of giving up. In those time we too often lash out at the world or give up and let the world role over us. It is in those difficult times that we need most to struggle with God – struggle to find His guidance and receive His blessing.

Three images itching ears an unjust judge verses God and a child of God weighed down by the events of life. What is the common denominator? The common element in each image is captured in the words, "PRAY ALWAYS" We are called to pray always as an invitation to be constantly in touch with God. The call to pray always is not an invitation to be a pest about demanding that God meet our needs the way we want Him to meet them. It is an invitation to speak to a God whom we trust to hear us and respond quickly providing what He knows is best. It is an invitation to listen as much as or more than we speak. Listen for His true word – listen for His guidance even when it runs counter to our desires – listen with ears of faith that do not need to understand or approve but only trust that God is the victorious God of love. And as we pray with our ears open, by faith we receive the blessing of God.

As we soar thru life we may indeed crash many time but God is always there. Pray always! When the wings fall off trust God to lift you again. Pray always! With ears wide open. Pray always!

AMEN