

Thoughts on Week 2 of our Lenten Journey

As this Sunday is Camp Sunday, the message, "Branching Out", will be brought by Sean Binder, the newest staff at Storm Mountain Center. As we are continuing together on our Lenten journey, I also wanted to share some thoughts about this week's focus, "Pray Like This" and about this week's prayer focus, 'Releasing our fears, needs, and hopes to God.

The prayer pattern for this week admits our human limitations and calls on God's vast power and strength. The prayer opens with the words. *Loving God*. In these simple words, we see the essence of who God is. As the prayer unfolds, it is love that guides. The prayer speaks of our God who understands our prayers before we utter them and who turns our simple words into beautiful things. The prayer admits our uncertain cry and God's response of assurance and peace. We serve a loving God who desires to lead and bless our lives. As we pray this week, may we each seek to be honest with God. The poem draws near to a close with a call to be fully in His presence as we offer up our fears, needs, hopes, love, and our life. The last line of the prayer points us toward a true relationship with God: *I am yours and belong to no other*. In his preface to the prayer, Reuben Job writes of his childhood experience with a serious illness. During this time, Job recalls being cradled in his father's arms and feeling the deep love that overcame his fears and offered him hope. May this be how we pray this week. In our prayers this week, may we admit our humanity and its accompanying emotions as we seek to more deeply commit our lives to our relationship with God.

In our scripture readings for the week ahead, we see examples of our loving God. In the passage from Luke 11, we find the Lord's Prayer, our model prayer. Following this, Jesus goes on to help us see that we need to ask, search, and knock. Just as the friend was willing to get up in the middle of the night to give his friend bread, so too will God respond to our prayers and our needs, fears, and hopes. We see this on a large scale in the passage from Mark 6. God responds to the people's need for food with the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand. We also see how God's response is bountiful. After feeding this massive crowd, the disciples go on to gather up the leftovers – basketfuls of food! God not only wants to meet our needs, He wants to bless us. In our prayers this week, may we experience this God.

The readings return to the Lord's Prayer on Thursday. This version is closer to what we pray each Sunday in church. Jesus advises us to use this model so that our prayers do not drag on and on, but remain on point.

In the reading from Job, we are invited to give up our gold and silver and to allow God to become our number one. Whatever we value most in life, that is where our focus and attention will be found. Job reminds us that God needs to be our focus and that by worshipping God alone will we find happiness. In the reading from John 17, Jesus expands on the idea of God being our common focus, the thing that draws us all together. For this newly forming community of faith, being one in the Lord and one with God would be essential. Being one with each other offered support and encouragement and accountability. Being one with God allows the body of believers to connect deeply with God in their own personal relationships. In doing so, all of their life becomes worship to God, bringing glory and honor to God.

Reuben Job's selection from Psalm 46 ties neatly into our prayer practice for the week. Verse one reads, "*God is our mighty fortress, always ready to help in times of trouble.*" What great reassurance to be reminded that the all-powerful God of the universe is always with us. As the week draws near to a close, we see Jesus modeling our prayer practice for the week. Jesus kneels to the ground and asks God to spare Him the suffering that lies ahead. Jesus is expressing His very human fears to His loving Father. In the end, Jesus asks for God's will to be done. In Jesus' prayer, we are also reminded that we too are weak, that we sometimes we stumble or fail. This is exemplified in the disciples sleeping instead of praying for Jesus in His hour of need. The passage concludes with Jesus noting that the disciples desire to do what is right. May we strive to do what is right in our week ahead, yielding to the power of the Holy Spirit as God leads and guides our lives.

Blessings to you in the Lenten journey ahead. May we each grow in our faith and in our trust in God as we bring our needs, fears, and hopes to our God. May we each experience His goodness and love this week, as we all seek to draw closer to the Lord our God.