

“The Mountains Where We Pray”

10th Sunday after Pentecost

August 9, 2020

**Rev. Floren “Tino” C. Cordova, Pastor
Iao United Church of Christ**

**Romans 10:5-15
Matthew 14:22-33**

Poem: “*The Power of Prayer*” by Kathleen J. Shields 2016

My life was about living, every day about the same.
Nothing special to report, because He didn't know my name.
I was lonely and quite hungry, though I didn't know what for.
'Cause I hadn't been to church, so I didn't know the Lord.
When I did attend I went for food, friendship and to sing.
The sermons in between were just, filling for this thing.
I may have kept attending, for wrong mistaken reasons,
but at least I was in church through many, many seasons.
I had heard the stories, bowed my head, but never really prayed.
Belief was unbelievable, my soul was never swayed.
Yet that was when the trials came, such turmoil in my life.
My mother had been murdered and it caused me so much strife.
I was spiraling down a rabbit hole that got darker by the day,
and that was when the Bible Group asked if they could pray.
They placed their hands upon me and asked our Lord to claim,
my heart, my hope, my soul, my faith, for me to know His name.
And in that moment of grief and pain, I was weak enough to feel,
a soul's embrace that felt so warm, my Lord became quite real.
He showed me love that I could sense, its power came from higher.
He showed me signs that He was there, He filled my soul with fire.
When I look back along life's path, my memories seem dark.
I had walked throughout my life, without an inkling of His spark.
Now each day I wake up knowing, that He is part of me.
My roots are set, my trunk is tall. I'm branches of His tree.
I'm reaching out in hopes to fill my readers with my passion
Testify that God's great love is full of such compassion.
He helped me through my rabbit hole. He's with me everywhere.
My Christian soul is shining bright, thanks to the Power of Prayer.

Last week we talked about the dismissiveness of the disciples – “This is a desert place, and the time is now past; send the multitude away, that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves.” We learned that in last week’s Gospel reading in Matthew – Jesus does not send anyone away hungry – neither physically nor spiritually. Jesus commanded his disciples and us “You! – You Iao Church give them something to eat!” Today however, after filling the empty and hungry bellies of the enormous crowd, men, women, and children – Jesus does dismiss them. In our Gospel reading for today, Jesus is in need of some alone time, Jesus is in need of some prayer time. Can we just feel the exhaustion just through the readings themselves? All this time the enormous crowd has been following him and the disciples – beloved church, they were hungry, they needed some spiritual feeding. Not only does Jesus dismiss the crowd, he also dismisses the disciples and sends them on the boat to the other side. We’ve all been there before – Amen brothers and sisters? There is so much going on in our lives, especially today, so many things that need our attention, family, friends, church, school, work – to a point where we are exhausted. This is a time when we need our prayer time out in our mountains, wherever that mountain might be – an actual mountain, at the beach, at home in a quiet room – wherever that may be, we need some time of rejuvenation.

Beloved community, if there is anything, we have gotten from today’s reading is that Jesus himself needed time for rest and prayer – and so do we! There is nothing wrong in taking some time for ourselves – especially when we are feeling exhausted. I do not feel that his disciples would have left if Jesus didn’t insist that they leave on the boat. There are times when we too must insist – when we need rest, when we need prayer time with God. Running ourselves to the ground is unhealthy and serves no purpose – does not serve the mission we are on if we are exhausted. Exhaustion of our souls insist a time of prayer. One thing about prayer is that we must always be in

prayer, at all times be in prayer when things are going good and when things are not going so well – at all times – pray! We pray not just for ourselves, but for others, for situations, for our church, family, nation, etc.

Burdens in our lives seem like we are climbing a mountain. One does not need to climb to that mountaintop to pray, just stop where you are at – at any moment on that slope of that mountain and pray. Whatever storm we find ourselves in, we do not need to pass through the storm to pray, just stop in the middle of that storm and pray. Whatever burden we carry today, whichever storm we find ourselves in today, whatever mountain we feel we are climbing – just stop and rest, stop and pray. God is bigger than any burden, storm, or mountain. Just as Jesus reached out to grab Peter in the water, Jesus reaches out to us as well.

Many of us, especially if you are feeling somewhat exhausted like myself, find it difficult to stop and just be in silence. Lately I have found it difficult to just be – so much going on so much to think about – worried about the deployed Iao Church – putting virtual worship together every week, hoping nothing goes wrong with the equipment – so many distractions. I need to remember from my Buddhist class to just sit in meditation and bring all the distractions into my meditation practice and silence that energy, silence those distractions. Like Jesus – there was so much to do and to think about, yet he took time to be alone, took time to pray as a way of giving us an example of self care. Alone time does not mean we spend time on social media – alone time means we give our bodies and minds a break – a disconnection from our surroundings, a disconnection from society, from distractions, from family and children and work – and find our oneness with the Divine. Our time with God must be between us and God – no other distractions. This then, beloved church, beloved community, becomes our sacred rest, our sacred time with our bodies, our sacred time with our minds, and our sacred time with God. It becomes a time when we can

lay it all out on the table with God – for God can handle anything we put at the foot of the cross. God – all this work you gave me is exhausting me! What might be God’s response? “Tino – I didn’t say you had to do it all in one day, nor did I say you had to do it all by yourself!” Amen to that beloved community. We do not need to do everything in one day nor all by ourselves. That is the whole purpose of “being” the church – we must ALL share in the work. Let me say that again – we must ALL share in the work. Here’s another thing that God might respond with – especially for your pastor. “I didn’t say it had to be perfect either!” – Amen to that church! God works through our imperfections; all God wants from us is our presence – and may God’s presence be enough. Virtual Worship services will work out how they work out, food distribution ministry will work out how it works out, all that is required from us is to be present in prayer. “Be still for, I am still God!” – Amen!

Beloved community – no matter the real life storms we are facing – the storms in our heads, the storms stirring up our souls – the constant must always be prayer. We must be in constant sacred time with God not matter where we are on that mountain. Time of prayer must never be restrained nor restricted because if left to our own devices, we will never find the convenient time to pray.

One might think that Jesus sent his disciples out onto a storm at sea as another teachable lesson. Sometimes it seems for many of us what we are called to do is to head right into a storm. Why? Why Jesus did you send us into this storm? Things just are not going well, everything is falling apart, the perfect plan just doesn’t seem perfect any longer, everyone is mad at each other – Jesus then calls out to us to “be still” – “just be in my presence.” We sometimes feel like the disciples out at sea, being beaten around by waves of life, waves of exhaustion, sea sickness sets in, maybe anger sets in, maybe even doubt sets in – until Christ walking on water comes to us with his hand reaching out to pull us out of our sinking selves and calms the

storms. Hope begins to take over – fear begins to subside – “Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid” Christ calls out to us Iao Church. We will weather this storm of COVID19 – we will weather this storm of missing one another – we will weather this financial storm together. Jesus calls out to us to walk with him on water and what do we do Iao Church – we begin to doubt once again and begin to sink into the water – yelling “Jesus, save us!” “You of little faith, why did you doubt?”

Let us close with this Iao Church – virtual world, supporters of our beloved church – the winds will eventually subside. This COVID19 storm that we find ourselves in will not have the last word. WE must weather this storm together. Jesus gives us the example of how we must react when we find ourselves exhausted from ministry, from family life, from the burdens of society. Let us go to our mountains of solace and pray. Let us find our time of sacredness with God and pour out all our burdens at the foot of the cross. Let us empty ourselves of all the worries that we carry. Let us not be discouraged when things go wrong – for Christ reaches out to us and catches us – let us not be “of little faith” but of courageous faith. Rest in prayer – Iao Church – rest in prayer.

Amen, Amene, Ashe, A-ho, and Alleluia.