

## Every Great move of God is Preceded by Prayer

Rev Karen Ross 24<sup>th</sup> May 2020

### Welcome:

### Call to Worship:

*"Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. <sup>7</sup> And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."* (Phil. 4:6-7)

**Song:** "Fill Thou My Life O Lord My God", words and music by Douglas Coombes, Horatius Bonar, Thomas Haweis

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### Prayer:

Lord, we live to give you praise. You are above all other names, gods, governments, principalities, and powers. You are greater than sickness, sin, fear, and doubt. And today, in our homes we praise you for who you are and for what you have done. Father, we desire to know the peace and the power of your presence, both as individuals, and as a community of faith. We want to be guided by your heart and your mind, and not our own. So, we need to be filled by your loving, gentle, powerful presence every day. Thank you for welcoming the desires of our heart. Thank you for responding to our prayers.

Lord, we know that over the past week we haven't loved you and we haven't loved ourselves or others as you have called us to. Forgive us for losing sight of your love for us. And Holy Spirit, help us to grow as into the beloved children you created us to be.

God of all creation, we ask for your empowering presence to manifest upon the leaders of our nation who are making decisions that have an impact upon health, economic, education, sports, religious and social conditions – give them wisdom, insight and clarity in their deliberations, and protect their health and wellbeing. We pray for teachers and students who are returning to navigate a new normal – give them grace, patience and creativity to teach and to learn.

Father, as we turn our hearts towards our own families, we pray that you would guard and protect our loved ones, draw their hearts to you, heal their sicknesses, inspire them in their work and study and cause them to be fruitful disciples of Jesus.

We pray of our church family and declare your healing, peace-filled presence upon all who connect with our church. We thank you for our church council and ask you Holy Spirit to fill each of them with your powerful presence, inspire their hearts, renew their minds and help us as a leadership team to lead with wisdom, care and understanding. Father, we want to be diligent and passionate disciples who are known for our love and our faith – so we commit ourselves again to live your mission in our community and beyond. We ask that you take, bless and use what we give through our tithes and offerings – for your kingdom purposes and glory. Amen.

### Affirmation:

We are loved, forgiven, and empowered through Jesus Christ our Lord and saviour and friend. – hallelujah!

### Peace:

**Notices:** volunteer week; updating Zoom; Uniting World

### Reading:

*"<sup>4</sup> While staying with them, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father. "This," he said, "is what you have heard from me; <sup>5</sup> for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."*

*<sup>6</sup> So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" <sup>7</sup> He replied, "It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set*

by his own authority. <sup>8</sup> But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” <sup>9</sup> When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. <sup>10</sup> While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. <sup>11</sup> They said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”

<sup>12</sup> Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a sabbath day’s journey away. <sup>13</sup> When they had entered the city, they went to the room upstairs where they were staying, Peter, and John, and James, and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. <sup>14</sup> All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers.” (Acts 1:4-14)

### Sermon:

- Luke is the author of 1/3 of the New Testament. He wrote the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts.
- Luke wrote both letters to inform and encourage the church by sharing stories of the life and actions of Jesus; and the life and actions of the church.
- For Luke, the story of Jesus ends with the beginning of the church, in fact, for Luke, the whole story of Jesus is the beginning of the Church – it’s just one seamless story with several characters involved.
- The Gospel of Luke is about God working through Jesus, the book of Acts is about God working through the church.
- It is the same God, doing the same work. Nothing has changed. It is a seamless flow from Jesus to the church.
- This passage reveals much to us about three things: the mind of the disciples, the heart of Jesus and the power of God.

1. The mind of the disciples is the restoration of the kingdom of Israel – now that Jesus has risen above the Roman and religious authorities; and death itself, they asked this question: “Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?” <sup>7</sup> He replied, “It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority.” (Acts 1:6-7)

2. The heart of Jesus is to empower the disciples to continue His work through the gift of the Holy Spirit, as noted in His statement:

<sup>8</sup> But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (Acts 1:8)

3. The power of God is displayed in the ascension of Jesus as He is raised up before them and taken into heaven – and of course, let’s not forget the angels!

<sup>9</sup> When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. <sup>10</sup> While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them” (Acts 1:9-10)

- In chapter 1 of Acts we see that the mind of the disciples, the heart of Jesus and the power of God were three separate impulses, by chapter 2 all three come into alignment – they merge to become one.
- The is one key factor that causes the alignment of all three, the mind of the disciples, the heart of Jesus and the power of God → Prayer!

“When they had entered the city, they went to the room upstairs where they were staying, Peter, and John, and James, and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. <sup>14</sup> All these were constantly devoting

themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers.” (Acts 1:13-14)

- The disciples had just seen Jesus ascend before their eyes and now, in obedience to Him, they returned to Jerusalem to await the promise of the Holy Spirit.
- Their season of waiting for God to release His promise, their season of waiting for God to act, their season of waiting for God to move in power was spent in prayer.
- It was prayer that enabled the mind of the disciples, the heart of Jesus and the power of God to become aligned.
- **When God is going to do some great thing, He moves the hearts of people to pray.**
- God stirs our hearts to pray so that we might be prepared for what God is about to do.
- The disciples needed the self-examination that comes through prayer and supplication, so that they might be ready for the tremendous event which was about to take place.
- Prayer brought the mind of the disciples into alignment with the heart of Jesus and the power of God.
- Prayer prepares our hearts for God to move in and through us.
- God doesn't sit back with folded arms refusing to co-operate or oblige our requests until we pray 'properly'.
- God wants us to connect with His heart so that His heart becomes a part of us, renews our minds.
- Then, we are transformed, moved and driven by God's heart and not societal pressures, not selfish desires, not worldly pleasures, but, by God's heart.
- The mind of the disciples was reflected in their question about the restoration of Israel – it was driven by social and possibly selfish desires?

I wonder where you have seen the church act as a result of societal pressures, or selfish desires, or worldly pleasures?

Perhaps those actions have happened because the church has lost its' passion and heart for prayer.

- God doesn't want us to pray because there's nothing good to watch on TV.
- God wants us to pray so that our hearts and minds will be profoundly exposed to and therefore come into alignment with God's heart.
- Part of our transformation as disciples happens as our worldly, selfish, desires become aligned with God's heart.
- God's heart is full of compassion; pure, undefiled and unconditional love; a holy fire. God's heart will completely and utterly change us.
- When we experience just a glimmer of God's heart, we will weep with compassion for the lost, we will be driven to speak, pray, give and love in ways we have never known before – just read the book of Acts!
- Prayer is the key to experiencing God's heart. It is more than knowing about God's heart, it is the avenue we walk down that enables us to experience and be transformed by God's heart.
- That's why God wants us to pray – it will empower, enliven, and enrich us.
- The disciples devoted themselves to prayer and their hearts and minds were prepared for and open to God's power.
- Prayer is the highest form of Christian action.
- Prayer is not the only form of Christian action. Deeds of loving kindness and works of social reform also comprise a necessary part of Christian life, but they must always be informed by prayer.
- The presence of God is the goal of prayer, social action is the fruit of prayer.
- In prayer we catch the vision of God's future, and that inspires us to take action in the present.
- In prayer the kingdom of God becomes a part of our own action motivating vision.
- And yet, prayer is more than an envisioning of the future, it is a resource for battle, as Paul says:

*"For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places." → Armour of God, stand firm in prayer (Eph. 6:12)*

- Through prayer we tap into the power of God, the power of the kingdom which alone has the power to demolish strongholds.
- By prayer we are strengthened for service, renewed in faith.
- Prayer lays hold of and releases God's willingness and power to act in accordance with His will therefore, prayer enables us to glorify God:

*"If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. <sup>8</sup> My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples." (John 15:7-8)*

- Through prayer our hearts and minds are aligned with God's heart and mind and therefore, our requests to God are in line with God's will and desire – this glorifies God.
- By devoting themselves to prayer, the disciples' hearts and minds were changed from being concerned about the restoration of the nation to Israel – not that that was a 'bad' concern, it just wasn't what God had in store for them at the time. Their concern was 'this big', what God had in store, was 'this big'!

Have you ever asked something of God, it may not have been a 'bad' or 'wrong' request, but perhaps it wasn't God's heart and mind for you at that time? God always has something else, bigger and better in store, something that we can't always see.

- While the disciples were waiting for a great move of God, they devoted themselves to prayer precisely for this reason – so their heart and mind would be open and responsive to God's presence.

It has been through prayer that God has met with me and encouraged/brought forth some of my lesser thoughts and ideas, challenged some of my prominent/dominant thoughts and ideas, and re-arranged my heart and mind to become more aligned with His. This happens gently and slowly and is always in alignment with scripture.

Eg. Giving advice/sharing information – in prayer God prompted me to contact a colleague:

*"But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy." (James 3:17)*

- In prayer, my heart and mind became aligned with God's heart and mind – but I needed to set the time and space aside in order to be still and listen.
- Do you know how many times it says that the disciples devoted themselves to prayer in the book of Acts alone....
- When the people of God are open and responsive and in alignment with the heart and mind of God – God will move in, around and through us in powerful, life changing ways!

I believe that we have all experienced this in some way – perhaps a simple prompting to phone someone, or do something, only to find out that, that is what was needed at that precise time.

- We are most likely familiar with being open and responsive to God, even if it is in a small way.
- Every great move of God is preceded by prayer – because prayer prepares our hearts for God's powerful presence.

A question for us to consider:

- What is God inviting you to today?

**Prayer:**

**Song:** "I Will Seek Your Face O Lord". Words and Music by Noel Richards, Tricia Richards.

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**Benediction:**

**Final Slide:**

**End Recording:**