

August 14, 2016      “Is It Worth The Effort?”      Psalm 112

It has been a marvelous week for Canadians. At the Olympics a young lady, 16 years of age won bronze, silver and gold medals in a variety of swimming events. Her last name Elexsiak has become the stuff of legend. Most of us had never heard of her before the Rio competition. We have come to anticipate that breaking news stories from Rio would involve this kid having done it, yet again. It has been breaking news, that Canada is a swimming power on the shoulders of Elexsiak!

What is not breaking news, is that God wants us to pray. The balance of mankind simply does not believe there is anything to it. Of course that changes the moment our health breaks, or tragedy intrudes. The second it becomes obvious that we are not in control of life's unfolding patterns a surprising number of people want to know where God was as the storm broke, and the thunder rolled, and the lightning flashed.

Prayer does not fill the evenings news casts. Prayer does not make headlines. And yet the fact is those of us who pray have stories to share concerning miracles. Miracles of faith. God's undeniable presence. The Lord's touching us, the love of Jesus being real, the Holy Spirit's influence overcoming on our behalf. For people of faith...and we Christians, disciples of Jesus are people of faith is seems foolish to ask the question, “is prayer worth it?” Is prayer worth the time we spend at it? Is prayer worth the energy it takes to say the words? Is prayer worth the hunt for the presence of God's love and power in a world than can blind side us in the most awful ways?

There is no question that does not have value in its

2.

being asked, provided we are genuine in our eagerness to have the answer. Is prayer worth the effort? If God already knows how much trouble I am in, is it worth calling on the Lord for help? I answer with an unqualified YES! Psalm 112 opens with that marvelous exclamation..."Blessed is the man who fears the Lord." It is a most basic of Biblical insights. Blessed, happy, is the person, who believes in the God who is revealed in the Holy Bible. In fact the thing that makes the Bible Holy...set apart from all other books is this truth. In its pages, its stories, its commandments and its prayers we meet the God who is. Remember this: fearing the Lord is not about being afraid of HIM, it is about believing HIM. Trusting Him. Knowing HIM even as we are known by HIM.

And in that adventure of faith, walking with God, being upheld by His Spirit's power, being saved through the death and resurrection of His Son Jesus, spending time and energy in prayer, is like taking a walking stick on a hike. It is tangible support amidst the perils of the pilgrimage which is life. I cannot count the times I requested help...for myself,,,for loved ones...for people I know who have been in trouble. And in the midst of the storm, God has shown up to make safe, keep safe, and to see us through dangerous waters and valleys. In the relationship of prayer we see God at work in our lives and the lives of our friends. We get to see the reality of Jesus saves, when we pray, because as the old saying goes, prayer changes things. I complete that sentence. Prayer changes things because God comes to us.

Is prayer worth the effort? Yes it is if you want your faith in HIM confirmed in the midst of the challenges of every day living. Yes it is. Prayer is worth it if you want to know you matter to God who reveals Himself in Jesus, and whose Spirit is truly ONE of

power and joy, light and laughter.

In the midst of my experience of cancer and radiation treatment, and viral infections in my right eye...always the right eye....I have learned a new phrase. The power of accumulated prayer. What am I talking about? When there are more people praying for one individual facing one problem, because the request has been made by some one...please pray for him, for her, for this particular situation. I was humbled by the numbers of people who prayed for me in a season of illness. More importantly I was struck by the effectiveness of numbers of people praying for me in a time of potentially life threatening illness. I now say, it has been an outstanding experience of the power of accumulated prayer. My journey was altered by those prayers. My health was changed by those prayers. And I give the glory to God that I am still here because of that accumulated prayer's influence.

There is another reality that I treasure in this matter of prayer and praying for others. It is amazing how prayer leads to our discovery of getting the balance right between asking for stuff and doing stuff. Most of us really want to be self-reliant. We believe that we really do know best...what is best for us...and how to make the best happen for ourselves. The path of faith runs into and through a different kind of territory. Faith recognizes that I am not alone in this. And I do not know all that can be known or done about specific problems. This last year has been one of discovery in my case about how dependant I am on those who are part of my faith circles...and it so happens my life intersects with a number of faith circles. I have had to recognize there are limits on what I can actually do. That there are things with which I need help. Which requires that one ask...asking help of the brothers and sisters, asking help from God

Himself.

When my daughter was very young she taught Barbara and I lesson about stubborn self reliance. We would be going out somewhere as a family. You work to get it organized. You try to work to schedule. My daughter was learning to tie her own shoes, or buckle her shoes up, or just plain get them on. I would bend to help her, I was in a hurry. And she would shout, "I do it myself!" Most of us tend to feel that way. One of the things we learn in the journey of faith, is that there are times and circumstances in which we simply cannot do it ourselves. We need help. Part of being willing to ask for help is learning to pray and committing to make prayer a part of our tool kit.

Part of what happens as we pray is that we learn how to be a little more consistent than is our normal pattern. We learn to walk the walk and not just talk our way through. People who pray are consistently giving the Lord the opportunity to shape and shave them. Rough spots get smoothed off. Weak muscle becomes stronger as a result of the exercise. And yes prayer is spiritual exercise and people of faith need the exercise involved in prayer time.

The 5<sup>th</sup> verse of Psalm 112 says, "God will come to him who is generous and lends freely." It would seem to be talking about our wallets or what is in our garage among the tools and other stuff. But surely there is an application to the experience of being one who prays. Again, if we are asking God to lend us a hand, and if we are looking for God to act in our neighbourhood, in the part of the landscape where we can see the action, are we not more likely to see ...to see with our eyes,...the presence and the mercy and the power of God's Spirit than otherwise would be the case?

If the question remains, is prayer worth the effort? Part of the answer is Yes it is. You will see the generosity of the grace of God and what is more you will be convinced it is nothing else but the generosity of the grace of God! My faith continually looks for confirmation. I believe God heals and helps. And in part because I pray for help and healing, for myself and for others, I see visible proof that God answers prayer. That God heals. That God helps. There is a group of people with whom I pray regularly. So it is not just me... My prayer partners are really good at following up to find out what happened when we prayed for someone outside the group. Our faith grew and became more adventurous as we logged answered prayers...we saw God at work. God was more visible as a result. Yes prayer is worth the time and effort we spend at it.

Because this is where prayer and praying will inevitably lead. We will be more trusting of God than we were when we began this journey. Prayer leads directly to increasing our commitment. And prayer will lead most surely to our being aware that God has work for us to do where we are. We will feel led to the work that bears His name. And we will see more and more opportunities to serve HIS name in the work we are doing. Imagine the real life change we would experience if the words of Psalm 112 became our experience....verse 7 of Psalm 112...He will have no fear of bad news. His heart is steadfast trusting in the Lord. His heart is secure, he will have no fear. In the end he will look in triumph on his foes.

Let us pray:

Heavenly Father, help us to freely lay our burdens before you in Prayer. Make us quick to pray for others whom we know that are going through challenging times. In moments of triumph, grant that we may humbly recognize your sovereignty over our lives and

6.

the surrounding circumstances. Grant that in all our situations we may be aware that you are present, and that your love for us is an unbreakable bond. Be visible as our best friend, our best company, our redeeming God. Amen