

ILLOGICAL PEACE
Series: "Christ in the School of Prayer"
March 6, 2016 –Philippians 4: 4-7
The Church of the Covenant

The Apostle Paul was no slouch in the prayer department. It is believed that he is the author of these passages from Philippians we just read. He also is the author of some of my favorite verses on prayer, those in 2 Corinthians, where he has a *"thorn in the flesh"* as he calls it. The Apostle Paul prays to the Lord God Almighty, three times, that this malady might be removed from him. As it notes in 2 Corinthians 12: 8 –*"Three times I besought the Lord about this, that it should leave me."* And then the Apostle goes on to share what the answer to his prayer was –*"But HE (the Lord God Almighty) said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." (v. 9)* So the Apostle prayed, and the Lord answered, but the answer is not what the Apostle had asked for. The Apostle Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles and the preacher and pray-er extraordinaire, was told by God that the answer to his prayer was that **God's grace is sufficient**. Grace was the answer to the Apostle's prayer. Now if the Apostle had said to the Lord, "I know when my prayer will be answered is when this thorn in the flesh will be removed", he might have missed his answer. He had asked one question in prayer. But God answered it another way. Paul asked God to remove the thorn in the flesh, some physical malady, from him. But God answered Paul by telling him what he was to preach about, what his ministry was to embody, what his letters to the early church were to contain. You're not supposed to be about the thorn, Paul; your life, ministry is to be about GRACE. That is the answer to your prayer, beloved Paul.

So how do we know when our prayer has been answered? See, I think we are always waiting for the specific prayer to be answered in the specific way we have requested it. But I find over time that sometimes we do not even frame the question to God correctly. We define it the way we think it should be. But God's answer may astound us, may be bigger and better than any prayer request we might make to the Almighty. God answered Paul with the message Paul was to preach with his life (far, far bigger than what Paul had requested). Paul's answer was to inform every sermon he preached and every letter he wrote –GRACE, grace and more grace.

Our scripture from Philippians, also from the Apostle Paul, is also on prayer. I begin with an observation. It begins with REJOICING. How often do we begin with rejoicing when we pray to God? I TEND TO BEGIN WITH WHINING, NOT REJOICING. Why do we begin with rejoicing? Because it says that we *"can have no anxiety about anything"* (Philippians 4: 6) And why can we have no anxiety about anything? Because it says to give our concerns to God, *"in everything by prayer and supplication"* (v. 6); we lift our anxieties, worries and concerns up to God and give it away to HIM. After all, HE has had much more infinite experience with all this; HE knows; we do not know. So prayer is beginning with rejoicing because we know that our God is able to handle whatever we lift up to HIM today. There is a WAY forward where we think there cannot possibly be a way. And then we are to pray, to lift up our prayers, our worries and our anxieties to God, as it says, *"with thanksgiving"* (v.6) Well, I thought we were to give God thanks AFTER He had answered our prayers the way we wanted them to be answered. NOPE. Not according to the Apostle. It is clear we are to give God thanks IN ADVANCE for what we know He will do, what He will bring, how HE will handle the matter we are raising to His attention in prayer. We thank Him in advance. We claim victory in advance. We say "thank you, Lord" and I am thanking you in advance because I know the answer to my prayer is bigger and better than anything I could ever hope or imagine. So our prayer begins with REJOICING (not whining); it continues with giving away our concerns to the Lord God Almighty through prayer and supplication; and it continues with saying "thank you, thank you, thank you, Lord, in advance for what YOU are doing and about to do in my life!!!!!" We have

no anxiety because we trust in His promises to answer our prayer better than even what we ask and we can even rejoice and even give thanks in advance, because we trust God in the eternal victory already won for us at Calvary. We can declare victory in advance because we have placed our burdens, our concerns, our fears, our anxieties at the foot of the cross of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. He has borne these burdens already for us. His GRACE INDEED is SUFFICIENT. And HIS Power is clearly made perfect in weakness, as Jesus hung on the cross and bore our every anxiety, for us and our salvation. Place our fears and burdens and anxieties at the foot of the cross, with rejoicing and with thanksgiving and stand back and watch what God can do!

So obviously, take these verses from Philippians and pattern your prayer life on them. Begin with Rejoicing (even when you don't feel like rejoicing), continue with prayer and supplication (literally laying your anxieties at the foot of the cross of Jesus), and do so with Thanksgiving (giving thanks IN ADVANCE to Jesus for the victory He has already won for us at Calvary) I think it would deepen and enrich all of our prayer lives.

So let's say you add a lot of rejoicing to your prayer life, and let's say you find yourself more and more daily able to lay your anxieties at the foot of the cross and give them away to Jesus, and let's say you're even able now to more and more each morning give thanks to God in advance for what He is already doing in your life, and in prayer each day you declare victory in the name of Jesus, let's say now you've enriched and deepened your prayer life, having gone to school with Christ in the School of Prayer...So NOW for the 64 thousand dollar question --how do you know when your prayer has been answered???

"And the peace of God, which passes all understanding will keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4: 7) We know our prayer is answered when the peace of God which passes all understanding floods over our soul. This peace which floods our soul is an illogical peace; it makes no worldly sense. Our circumstances have not yet changed. We may still struggle with the thorn in the flesh. Whatever we think is the answer to our prayer may not have happened, indeed may never happen. But rejoicing leads to prayer and supplication, giving it to Jesus at Calvary. And giving it to Jesus at Calvary with thanksgiving in advance, claiming victory in advance in the name of Jesus, leads to an illogical peace, a peace that is beyond our understanding, a peace that could not possibly come from our own minds, it is so illogical, a peace that could only come from God. When we have prayed something through, not half-heartedly, not some "thy will be done-whatever" kind of prayer, not some prayer while driving or texting, when we have prayed and prayed and prayed, and placed it at Calvary, and taken it back (as we human beings always do!) and then given it back to God, and then taken it back with anxiety, and then given it back to Jesus once again...at some point in this process, a certain peace descends upon our heart. Where did it come from? Why did it arrive? It makes no sense to rejoice or to give thanks in advance. It makes no sense to claim victory in advance. It makes no logical sense to have this peace from God descend upon my heart. But yet it comes. It comes as the answer. He is our peace. Jesus, the Prince of Peace, descends upon our heart. The *peace which passeth all understanding* has come. It has entered our heart. Flooded our soul. We have learned of Christ in the School of Prayer.

Peace, peace, peace, blessed peace; may peace descend upon our souls in this sacrament. For as the Apostle received his answer may we receive ours --"**My GRACE is sufficient...My POWER** to answer prayer is made perfect in the weakness of Jesus' death upon a cross." Amen and Amen.

*By: The Reverend Dr. Stuart D. Broberg, The Church of the Covenant, Washington, Pennsylvania
IF THIS HAS BLESSED YOU, PLEASE PASS IT ALONG TO A FRIEND!*