

Never give up!

Luke 18:1-8

October 16, 2016

The top ten signs that you have given up ...

Number 10: You turned off the TV after the eighth inning of last Tuesday night's Cubs game.

Number 9: You watched Monday Night Football instead of the first presidential debate.

Number 8. Since the second debate, you have been searching online for houses ... in Canada.

Sign number 7 that you have given up: You locked the bathroom scale in the closet and yard-saled the treadmill.

Number 6: Nothing makes you excited.

Sign number 5 that you have given up: Nothing makes you angry.

Number 4: You have stopped listening.

Number 3: You have stopped wondering.

Number 2: You have stopped praying.

And the number 1 sign that you have given up: You pray, all the time, but you don't expect God to do anything.

Will the Son of Man find faith on earth when he comes? Will the Son of Man find faith in you?

Faith expects God to listen. Faith expects God to do something. Faith expects God to do something good. And faith keeps on asking, keeps on hoping, keeps on expecting, keeps on waiting until God does. Faith never gives up. Faith never stops praying.

Praying for what? What should you pray for?

Should you pray to find your lost car keys? To sell your house? To have a sunny day for our Fall Festival?

Absolutely!

Should you pray about finding a new church custodian? About making a difficult decision? About this election?

Absolutely!

Should you pray for healing an illness? For healing a broken soul? For healing a broken relationship?

Absolutely!

Should you pray for your friends? For your enemies? For your minister? For your wife? For your children?

Absolutely!

Should you pray for peace, for an end to suffering in Syria? For justice, for an end to abuse of power? For God's kingdom to come, for an end to pride and greed and prejudice and apathy?

Absolutely!

There is nothing you can't pray for, nothing that is "out of bounds" because God is God and everything, all time and all space, is infused with God.

Don't just pray to God for the "big" things, the "important" things, the "god" things and leave the rest of the mundane details of your life to yourself. The mundane details are where you live and God wants to be with you, alongside you, in you, involved in every aspect of your life, where you live!

So pray about your job, your kids, your doubts, your fears, your hopes, your failures, your victories.

And don't just pray for the "little" things, the things you need and want, for yourself or for those you love. God wants you to care about what God cares about, to think big and care much and pray hard and act boldly on the "big" things.

So pray about poverty and climate change, about terrorism and civil liberties. Pray for Waterloo and Cedar Falls. Pray for these United States and pray for the world. Pray for all the peoples of this world.

Prayer is not just about changing God's mind, but about changing us, changing our minds. Prayer teaches us to be insistent and to be patient, to tell God honestly what we want and to wait faithfully for God to act.

Prayer is an act of remembering: remembering who we are and remembering who God is. Prayer puts things into perspective. We don't just pray "at" God, we pray to God. It is a conversation, inviting God into our own space and listening as God invites us into his own space, invites us to look our lives, at our aspirations and our indignations, at our sense of what is right and what is wrong, from his point of view.

Prayer is passive. We are still, quiet, attentive. But prayer is also active. When we pray we are doing something, doing something that matters.

Prayer is not a last resort, only used after running out of options, after coming to the end of our rope, after giving up. Prayer is our first resort, our first course of action, the place we begin. We begin by acknowledging that it is in God and by God that we live and move and be.

Prayer is action. Prayer is political action.

Prayer appeals to a higher authority. Prayer is, in short, a political act. It affirms that all human political power is subordinate not ultimate, relative not absolute ... (Christopher Wright)

All human power, personal and political, is subordinate not ultimate, relative not absolute, which means that there are limits to what we can expect of our leaders and our governments and no limits to what we can expect of God.

States like to posture as the sole source of all benefit to their citizens and to demand in return an ultimate loyalty. We may not quite deify our kings or presidents, but we easily turn patriotism into a creed and alleged lack of it into a heresy. (Wright)

Prayer is a political act because it sets our loyalties straight. We are first and foremost citizens of the kingdom of God. What should we expect of God? Everything, because God is creator, provider, protector, savior.

And what should we expect of our leaders? Listen to what Micah says (we are studying Micah in our adult Sunday School class): "You [rulers] are supposed to be concerned about justice."

Don't ask your leaders to make your life better. They can't. Ask God.

Don't ask your leaders to ensure your safety. They can't. Ask God.

Ask your leaders to ensure that the laws of the land and their execution are just. Ask your leaders to ensure that no one is left out or left behind, that no one is pushed under or pushed aside.

Prayer is crucial to the politics of Jesus. So pray always! Never be discouraged! Never give up!

If you are dismayed with this tenor of this election, pray, and never give up!

If you are struggling with self-care, physically, emotionally, or spiritually, struggling with your weight, struggling with depression, struggling with doubt, pray, and never give up!

If you don't know what to do to mend a failed relationship, pray, and never give up!

If you are heartbroken about Syria, about Haiti, about Nicaragua, about Israel and Palestine, about Ethiopia, about Afghanistan, pray, and never give up!

If you are a Cubs fan -- ok, I am not going to tell you to pray -- but really, never give up!

Never give up.

Will God not judge in favor of his own people who cry to him day and night for help? Will God be slow to help us? I tell you, God will judge in your favor and do it quickly ...

So pray ...

But will the Son of Man find faith on earth when he comes?