

Sermon Series: Intentional Disciples—Purposeful Discipleship—Lord of Life Lutheran, Westfield, IN—3/12/06

Title: Fervent Prayer

Text: Acts 12: 5 (1-17) (Print and read Acts 12: 5)

Intro: *Ills.: Angel-born prayers*

Theme: When prayer becomes more than a spiritual activity or rituals but rather a disciplined faith action of our lives in Jesus, then our relationship with Him becomes purposeful in seeking out God's will for our lives.

Building prayer into our lives as a necessary spiritual activity (Print and read Acts 12: 1-6)

- When it is our “**day of trouble**,” pray! (vs. 1-2)
 1. Often in our self-sufficient pride we fail to engage the power of prayer for self and others within the Body of Christ
 2. But God tells us, “*call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will honor me.*” *Ps 50: 15*
- How to pray in the midst of the crisis (vs. 3)
 1. For God's promise
 - a. *This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us.* *John 5:14*
 - b. Nothing is off limits to pray to the Father in Jesus' name
 2. For God's will
 - a. It was no coincidence that Peter was suffering for Christ during same celebration of Passover
 - b. *But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. . . So then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good.* *1 Peter 4: 13, 19*
 - c. Purposeful discipleship is seeking out God's will even when it means something different than what I want
 3. Purposeful discipleship is employing prayer “**fervently**” (vs. 5)
 - a. *Fervently* = with outstretched hands (need), with resolve (conviction), with endurance (persistent)
 - b. *The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.* *James 5:16*
 - c. The pattern of fervent prayer is: **BY** the church— **TO** God's deliverance— **FOR** another (intercession) (vs. 5)
 - d. **Ills.: Righteous praying**
- When the mission is truly impossible, PRAY for God's solution
 1. Peter was in an airtight lock-down, looking at certain death
 - a. Four squads of soldiers, two chained to him, maximum security double gate — looked escape-proof
 - b. Herod had probably heard of Peter's Houdini trick from Acts 5 and thought “I'll show them/God”
 2. *Why are the nations in an uproar? And the peoples devising a vain thing? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers take counsel together Against the Lord and against His Anointed, saying, "Let us tear their fetters apart and cast away their cords from us!" He who sits in the heavens laughs, The Lord scoffs at them.* *Psalm 2:1-4*
 3. Adopting a supernatural calm about our situation by turning to God's supernatural solution — **PRAYER**

Purposeful Discipleship = Ask, expect, act (Print and read Acts 12: 7-17)

- Ask expecting God to respond
 1. Because Jesus gives you that privilege and right as God's child through his access to the Father on our behalf
 - a. *If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. ⁶But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. ⁷That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord.* *James 1: 5-7*
 2. At first neither Peter nor the early Christian expected God to act or be able to act
 - a. “*Now I know for sure that the Lord has sent forth His angel and rescued me from the hand of Herod .*” vs. 11
 - b. “*You are out of your mind!*” *But she kept insisting that it was so. They kept saying, "It is his angel."* Vs. 15
 3. How many times don't we pray with our own backup plan in place
 - a. *If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you.* *Mat 17: 20*
- If you have **ask** and you have **expect**, then be ready to **act** when God acts
 1. Peter is given specific commands (rise, bet up, put on, keep on following)
 - a. The command to follow is different from the rest (ongoing) but back to what fundamental discipleship is=**follow**
 2. Rhoda recognizes with joy and the early believers debate the supernatural but leave Peter standing exposed at door
 3. When God brings answers to our dilemma, he expects us to act upon his direction and solution
 - a. **Ills. Getting our attention**
 - b. Purposeful discipleship is always keeping our spiritual antenna tuned into listening for and hearing God

Angle Born Prayers

At the beginning of his novel based on the apocryphal book of Tobit, Frederick Buechner captures this wonderful insight on prayer through one of his characters, Raphael the archangel. I am Raphael, one of the seven archangels who pass in and out of the presence of the Holy One, blessed be he. I bring him the prayers of all who pray and those who don't even know that they're praying. Some prayers I hold out as far from me as my arm will reach, the way a woman holds a dead mouse by the tail when she removes it from the kitchen. Some, like flowers, are almost too beautiful to touch, and others so aflame that I'd be afraid of their setting me on fire if I weren't already more like fire than I am like anything else. There are prayers of such power that you might almost say they carry me rather than the other way round—the way a bird with outstretched wings is carried higher and higher on the back of the wind. There are prayers so apologetic and shamefaced and halfhearted that they all but melt away in my grasp like sad little flakes of snow. Some prayers are very boring. **Frederick Buechner, On the Road With the Archangel, (Harper San Francisco, 1997) p.1; submitted by Lee Eclow, Vernon Hills, Illinois**

Righteous Prayer

In their book *Dangerous Intersections*, Jay Dennis and Jim Henry write: Prayer changes things. That's what a church in Phoenix discovered after the pastor asked members to randomly choose 80 people from the telephone book. He then requested daily prayer for each person for 90 days. At the same time, he asked members to choose another 80 names from the directory, but the second list was simply laid aside and nobody prayed for those people. After 90 days, members called all 160 people on the lists, asking them whether they would allow Christians to visit them to pray for them. The amazing result," says Alvin VanderGriend of the American Lighthouse movement, "was this: only one person on the list of people who did not receive prayer was prepared to allow Christians to visit, whereas 69 of the 80 people for whom the church members prayed were prepared to allow Christians to visit, and 45 even invited them into their houses, offered coffee and named special prayer requests." **Jay Dennis and Jim Henry, Dangerous Intersections: 11 Crucial Crossroads Facing the Church in America (Broadman & Holman, 2004)**

Getting our attention

As Josh was sailing down a Chicago neighborhood street in his two-month-old, 12-cylinder Jaguar XKE, a brick sailed through the air and struck its shiny, black passenger door. Brakes slammed, gears ground into reverse, and tires spun the Jaguar back to the spot from which the missile had been launched. The young executive jumped out, grabbed the kid, and pushed him against a fender. "That's my new Jag," he shouted. "That brick you threw is gonna cost you lots of money!" "I'm sorry, mister! No one would stop! I didn't know what else to do," the youngster sobbed, pointing. "It's my brother. He rolled off the curb, fell out of his wheelchair, and is hurt. He's too heavy for me. Please, help me lift him back." Josh's head of steam evaporated. Straining, he lifted the boy's brother into the wheelchair, wiped the scrapes and cuts with his handkerchief, and checked to see that there was no serious injury. He then watched the younger brother push the wheelchair down the sidewalk toward their home. Josh never did fix his door. He kept the dent to remind himself not to go through life so fast that someone would have to throw a brick to get his attention. **Skip Heitzig, Jesus Up Close, quoted in Men of Integrity (4-18-05), March/April 2**

Acts 12:1-17

¹Now about that time Herod the king laid hands on some who belonged to the church in order to mistreat them. ²And he had James the brother of John put to death with a sword. ³When he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also. Now it was during the days of Unleavened Bread. ⁴When he had seized him, he put him in prison, delivering him to four squads of soldiers to guard him, intending after the Passover to bring him out before the people. ⁵So Peter was kept in the prison, but prayer for him was being made fervently by the church to God. ⁶On the very night when Herod was about to bring him forward, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and guards in front of the door were watching over the prison.

⁷And behold, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared and a light shone in the cell; and he struck Peter's side and woke him up, saying, "Get up quickly." And his chains fell off his hands. ⁸And the angel said to him, "Gird yourself and put on your sandals." And he did so. And he said to him, "Wrap your cloak around you and follow me." ⁹And he went out and continued to follow, and he did not know that what was being done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision. ¹⁰When they had passed the first and second guard, they came to the iron gate that leads into the city, which opened for them by itself; and they went out and went along one street, and immediately the angel departed from him.

¹¹When Peter came to himself, he said, "Now I know for sure that the Lord has sent forth His angel and rescued me from the hand of Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting."

¹²And when he realized *this*, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John who was also called Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying. ¹³When he knocked at the door of the gate, a servant-girl named Rhoda came to answer. ¹⁴When she recognized Peter's voice, because of her joy she did not open the gate, but ran in and announced that

Peter was standing in front of the gate. ¹⁵They said to her, "You are out of your mind!" But she kept insisting that it was so. They kept saying, "It is his angel." ¹⁶But Peter continued knocking; and when they had opened *the door*, they saw him and were amazed. ¹⁷But motioning to them with his hand to be silent, he described to them how the Lord had led him out of the prison. And he said, "Report these things to James and the brethren." Then he left and went to another place.
[NASB]