



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

www.mzluth.org

October 17, 2010

Seeking Time for My Neighbors

Sermon Text: [Colossians 4:2-6](#)

Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: [Deuteronomy 10:12-21](#)

Psalm of the Day: [Psalm 146](#)

Second Lesson: [Colossians 4:2-6](#)

Gospel Lesson: [Matthew 25:31-40](#)

Devote Yourself to Dangerous Prayer

Did you watch any of the coverage of the rescue of the Chilean miners this past week? It's kind of a fascinating event, isn't it? I watched it for a while and read a lot of different things about it because I found it fascinating. First of all, it made me think it is a good thing I'm not a Chilean miner because I couldn't fit in that tube. But I also thought then about all that went into this and all the time and all the dedicated effort that went into rescuing these men. I find the story of the men itself fascinating. I think about some of the things they were doing and read and heard the accounts of how their faith in their Savior Jesus made a difference for many of them when they were trapped underground.

When you heard the story or read the story, did you offer up a prayer saying "Lord, help these people?" Did you do that as you were sitting in your comfortable home or in your car as you listened on the radio? Did you take the time to say "Lord, bless the efforts of all these people that are going to all these lengths to rescue them." I would guess that a number of us did. It's a moving thing and it's something you want to see happen. It was really cool to see the prayer answered "yes," right? It was cool to see them all come out.

It makes you also think about some of the other rescue attempts. I read some stories on the internet about that, various rescue efforts in the past, some that were successful and some that weren't so successful. I don't know about you, but it made me think back to 911 and think about all those rescue workers that lost their lives as they went in to rescue people.

I don't know about you and 911, but I remember praying "Lord, help all those that are going into those buildings to rescue those people." I suppose I was sitting on my couch fascinated by the coverage that day back in Minnesota, so it really wasn't hard for me to pray that way, was it? It wasn't real dangerous.

But as we look at these words of Paul, I think he is encouraging us to pray dangerously for others and for ourselves. What I mean by praying dangerously is this...for me to sit on a couch in Lake City, Minnesota and say "Lord, help those rescue workers," that's not real dangerous. Those rescue workers that were rushing up the stairs and saying "Lord, help me to rescue people," that's a dangerous prayer because they are putting themselves on the line, right? So to pray dangerously is at times to recognize the answer to the prayers that you make for God is found in the person offering the prayer.

Sometimes, that makes our stomach tighten and our palms sweat, but when we are talking about showing love to our neighbors and we say “Lord, I really am concerned about this person that I love dearly, my neighbor. I really want you to open up their heart with the Spirit.” Sometimes the dangerous part of that prayer is to instead say “Lord, use me to be the message that your Spirit can work through.” That’s what God has called us to do. I’m convinced that we spend an awful lot of time and energy and resources on things God has not called us to do, but here is one that he has called us to do. So the question is, are we going to do it or not?

I think it’s fascinating that Paul wrote to these people and said “Pray for me. Be watchful...watchful for yourself. Be thankful”...be thankful and recognize the blessing God has given you even as you focus on the truth that Paul was in chains. He was under house arrest. He was there in Rome. This wasn’t the first week of his being under arrest because he preached the Gospel. He had been seized in the temple in Jerusalem and they had taken him north and put him in a prison there. Finally when he met with the governor, he appealed to Caesar. Then he had to take the long trip to Caesar, to Rome. He had to be shipwrecked. He had this long journey and faced death. Finally he gets to Rome and he got the privilege of being under house arrest until Caesar got around to hearing his appeal. We are talking years that he had been a prisoner. Years.

So he tells them “Pray for me.” These people that had never met him, he encourages them to pray for him that God would open a door for him. When we hear that, I think immediately our thoughts would be that he’s telling them “Pray that the Lord gets me out of this place. I’m sick of being in this place. I could be a much better missionary and do much better mission work and share the Gospel much more freely if I wasn’t a prisoner.” I think that’s what I would do, and if you’re honest with yourself, I think that’s what you would be praying, too, wouldn’t you? You’d be looking at yourself and saying “I’m in trouble. Lord, get me out of this trouble.” But Paul is asking them to pray dangerously on his behalf. “Lord, open a door for me so that the message that put me in these chains can be proclaimed faithfully and clearly. The mystery of Christ, the thing that these people that I’m going to come into contact with that come to guard me, they’d never know this mystery unless someone tells it to them...this truth that they are sinners who should go to hell but Jesus lived in their place and died in their place, this truth that can’t be softened, can’t be watered down because then it’s lost.”

Think about what he is saying to them. “Pray for me that I don’t water it down, that I don’t try to get out of this difficulty that I’m in by just soft pedaling a little bit.” Think of that temptation Satan was giving him. “Paul, just say that Jesus is one of the ways. The Romans will love that. They like to think that everything is a god and everyone is a god and all this stuff, and if you just say that Jesus is one of the ways to approach God, they’ll let you go. Then you can go and preach fully and freely.” You don’t think Satan is whispering that in his hear? Of course he was. That’s why he’s saying “Pray dangerously for me that I put myself on the line and keep sharing the Gospel as I should.”

Ever since the day God had slapped Paul across the face on the way to Damascus and blinded him, that's when he opened his eyes to see the true nature of sin and grace and that it's centered in Jesus Christ. Now, he knew this is what he was to do...proclaim Jesus Christ to those who don't know it. But there were temptations to not do it.

I think we've detailed over the last few weeks some of the temptations Satan is using for us to take our eyes off of praying that we each be emboldened to share the Gospel, pray for one another that we'll share the Gospel with others. We get so inward looking at our own bellybuttons, staring at our own needs and our own wants and our own challenges, that we forget what God has called us to do. That is to love our neighbor and love him with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

We can't use the excuse that we're facing difficulties within our own congregation so now I don't have the time to share Christ with someone else. We've been encouraged to pray for our congregation. That's good and that's a wonderful godly thing. But as you've been praying for our congregation, have you also prayed that God would open the mouths of your fellow believers to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ with the people they come into contact with daily? Or has that been pushed to the side and relegated to the back burner?

God is encouraging us to pray for one another. Pray not just for those who share the Word with us, not just pastors and teachers that they remain faithful to the Word, but pray for one another because God has called each and every one of us to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ, to be ready to give an answer for the hope that we have. Pray that God would open our eyes, each one of us, to those opportunities. Pray that God would bless us with the Spirit so that we know the reason for the hope that we have and that we speak it and that we don't just say "come and see" but "sit and listen" to those people that don't know Jesus Christ.

It's easy to say "Come and see." Come and listen to our pastor preach. Come and sit in one of our Bible Studies. But if they never come, they've never heard the Gospel. So pray that God would give us the courage to love our neighbor enough to put ourselves on the line so that we freely proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ as we ought.

Paul then turns his encouragement to not only pray for him or us to pray for others, but he also says to watch yourself. Pray for yourself. Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders. Make the most of every opportunity. What does he mean to make the most of every opportunity? You don't have to wonder. Look at what he says. He tells you. "Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone." May your conversation be always full of grace means speaking the message of Jesus Christ and reflecting the love that Christ had for the lost in how you approach the lost. When he says "Let your conversation be seasoned with salt," he isn't saying "Have salty language." He's saying "salt" as a preservative. That's how they used it. The message that you and I have to speak that's full of grace that preserves those who don't know Jesus Christ is the Gospel of Jesus Christ, so that you know how to answer everyone, so you are always ready to give an answer for the hope

that you have and that you do it with gentleness and respect to those who don't know Christ. That's what God has called us to do. That's what he has commanded us to do. It's called the Great Commission. It's not called the great suggestion. God has commanded us to do this. The question is, are we going to take him seriously? Are we going to pray dangerously and say "Lord, use me."

Here's one of the things I often hear from our members. "I don't know anyone going to hell. I don't know anyone I can share the Gospel with." I find that hard to believe. First of all, you're all interrelated to each other, right? Except for about 10-15 of you. That means you are related to someone we probably haven't seen at the Lord's Table in over three years, right? Or that we haven't seen in worship. And if you're not interrelated to everyone, you probably work at a workplace. I have to believe you come into contact with people that are going to hell. Do you even know? Do you even care? Or are we so busy looking inward at our own bellybuttons that we're going to continue to march along and not say "Lord, use me."

We can have a deep and abiding love that wrings its hands and says, "Isn't it terrible that these people don't know Christ?" That's good, that's a start, but our God has also called us to pray dangerously and say "Lord, use me. Let me be your voice. Let me be your hands. Let me be your arms. Let me be your feet. Let me be the one that brings to these people the message of the Gospel so the Holy Spirit can work faith." You and I can't work faith. Don't confuse yourself. We don't have that ability. But God can work through stumbling, bumbling idiots like you and me. He does it all the time.

What a privilege it is that our God who loved us enough to die for us trusts us enough to give us the message of reconciliation to proclaim to the world. That's what he's done. I'm sure you've screwed up and I've screwed up. We've all sinned. We haven't done what God has called us to do. There's no denying that. And if you want to deny it, you're a fool. God's given us a better answer. He simply said "Take it to the cross of Christ and know that I've taken away the sin of your hesitancy, your unwillingness to put yourself on the line. I've taken that sin to the cross, and I died for it. And I sent the Spirit into your heart so that you know for certain that you are forgiven for all the times you have failed me." Then, motivated by that kind of love, strengthened by that kind of love, start living that kind of love as you share the Gospel.