

Pastor T.C. Arnold  
24<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity  
Colossians 1:9-10  
November 10<sup>th</sup>, 2013

Thursday, October 24<sup>th</sup>, 2013 will be a day I will never forget. I along with three members of the Lutheran High Soccer team – two of which are members of this parish-family – were on our way back to the high school from an afternoon soccer game in Lee’s Summit. We were on Holmes Ave., south of I-435 heading south – and then it happened. A loud crash, debris flying everywhere, a spinning car in the north bound lane, and another car smashed head on into a tree in the front yard of a house on Holmes. If we would have been 30 yards further south on Holmes, we would have been involved. The crash was devastating. I didn’t know what to do, but I knew I had to do something.

We stopped and I headed toward the mangled mess of a car to see if everyone was okay. Not everyone was okay. The two in the front, the father and his 13 year-old daughter, were unconscious. I tried to remove the glass from his nose and mouth as the impact had thrown him from his seat to the passenger’s side. He was head down in the lap of his daughter in passenger’s seat. There was no more front end to the car. It was gone. I did hear crying. That was good.

I looked in the back and saw two children. One girl was a teen. She was crying hysterically, in pain, and looked scared and confused. The other girl was 5 years old in the middle of the back seat – both had their seatbelts on. The car was on fire. The only thing I could think to do was to get them out of the car. By God’s grace I managed that. The children in the back were away from the car and seemed to be doing okay. The two in the front did not make it.

I tell you this story of tragedy because I had a feeling that day that I’m sure you have had a time or two as well. I had the feeling of helplessness. I could not free the two passengers in the front seat. I was scared to even try. I was helpless. I did the only thing I could think to do. I prayed. I prayed with the children now away from the car and with the dying still in the car. I still felt helpless. All I did was pray.

Your best friend tells you they have cancer and the cancer is inoperable... you feel helpless. You say, “I will pray for you.” A close relative pours out their heart and surprises you with their secret sufferings... you feel helpless. You say, “I will pray for you.” You don’t know what else to say. You don’t think that’s enough. You may even feel guilty that you are not doing more – can’t think of anything else to say – can’t think of what else to do.

Beloved, don’t ever feel guilty for saying to someone, “you will be in my prayers.” That’s the best place to put them. The reason: God’s hands is the best place to be and it’s the very best place for people we love – and even for people we don’t know when tragedy strikes. It’s a precious thing to be able to pray. It’s a precious thing to hear the prayers of others for us.

It was a precious thing for the Colossians to hear that St. Paul was praying for them. That’s the best he could do. He was in prison more than a thousand miles away. This was the greatest thing he could do for them. “*We do not cease praying for you, asking that you may be filled with an ever-growing knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding...*” The town of Colosse was going through rough times. It had turned into the Detroit of Asia Minor. The church was filled with false teachings. In so many ways the church and the town and the people were going through their own tragic times. And Paul could pray. That’s what he did.

Prayer is what St. Paul promised to the people that he loves. So it is with the ones we love. Prayer begins by asking that we may be filled with an ever-growing knowledge of the will of God.

God does not promise to provide us with all the right answers to share or all the right works to do. Prayer directs us to listen to His will in the midst of that which is unknown to us.

Beloved, direct your prayers, for the sake of the church, toward wisdom and spiritual blessings. There is nothing wrong with praying for the physical welfare of those we love. We do it all the time right here at this altar. We should do this. But many times, we forget, or count as “not so significant” the spiritual part of the lives we pray for. When Paul prayed for the Colossians, he prayed not for their physical blessings – that they may have more things – get rich – have bigger churches. Rather, he prayed for knowledge and spiritual wisdom – the same thing wise King Solomon prayed for in the Old Testament. When Paul prays that his friends may have wisdom and understanding, he is praying that they may understand the great truths of the Christian faith and that they may be able to apply these truths.

So pray, not only that our family and friends find physical comfort and healing, but that they live with Christ before them in what they think and in what they do. Our prayer is not, “Lord, have them be well... Amen.” It should rather be, “Lord, have them be well, and blessed with your tender mercy, that they may live in you, and for you... with a faith that grows... That they can share... and in the wisdom that you provide to know that your will be done.” Do you see the difference?

On that day of the car accident, I was looking tragedy in the face. With the 13 year old girl who was in the back seat, I could see fear, pain and confusion. She couldn't answer me right away when I asked her questions like, “Where do you hurt?” She only looked at me and cried. But she did know and hear these words, “Would it be okay for us to have a prayer together right now?” She nodded her head, “yes”. The prayer was brief – it was for her health and for the health of the other victims – but it was also for strength, both physical and spiritual. She said with me, “Amen” to end our prayer.

But when I prayed with those in the front – not long before they would stop breathing, there were no words in return. Does that mean those prayers were in vain? Does that mean they were of no use? Never. God's hand clutched that tragedy. He clutched them both. I have to say, I did find consolation with the small girl in one piece of jewelry she was wearing. She had a cross necklace. Does that make her a Christian? Not necessarily. But it gave me hope as I prayed to God as if they were. As I would pray for anyone – just as you would – in such a situation as that.

Is prayer all we can do? Sometimes. But prayer is never a small thing. At times our own chin is not up, but rather bowed because of someone, or something wrong. But that's not the worst posture for a Christian. It's the same as that of prayer. Beloved, pray! Pray for your church and for your family. Pray for your friends and your country. We have a long list. And pray for their spiritual well-being. That's what Jesus did for you. You remember... “*Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.*” That was a prayer for you. That prayer was from a dying, bleeding-to-death Jesus for the sake of our eternal life.

Jesus has that prayer for you every day. In Christ, you have it. You are prepared and you are equipped – to share – to pray – to love and to live. Praying is not the least you can do. It's the best you can do. Never feel guilty when you say it. Never feel as if you have failed because that is all you can say. I'm praying for you. You have others praying for you as well. And never forget, when we ask the Lord for those spiritual blessings of forgiveness in faith, we are given the answer yes... every time... unconditionally with certainty -- Yes. Beloved, have joy that you can pray and that your prayer is never a small thing. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.