

Pentecost 21C – with service of Healing and laying on of hands
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Prayer is Something More than Answers

Most Nebraskans have heard of Tom Osborn. Most know he was a congressman, holds a doctorate degree, was voted the “greatest college football coach of all time” by an online ESPN poll, and had a pretty good run as the head coach of a little football team called The Nebraska Cornhuskers.

And some of you, but probably not all of you, know that way back in 1985 Tom also wrote a book called “[More than Winning](#)”. After yesterday’s loss to Tx, perhaps I will need to pick it up again! The book was a response to an even bigger loss in the 1984 Orange Bowl when the unbeaten Cornhuskers, who had spent every single week that season ranked #1, lost to Miami on the final play of the game when we went for a 2 point conversion instead of kicking a field goal. Many people felt we should have **won** that game but in his book, Osborn explained that for him, football was about **more than winning**. The “more” was the people and the process, the relationships and the personal growth that resulted from the discipline of sport. [The “more” was young lives being changed](#) and discovering something unique and talented within themselves. For Dr. Osborn no loss -and no win- would ever be more important than that.

In the same kind of way, I think we might also say [that prayer is about something more than answers](#). Answers are what we want. Answers will help us make sense of what is going on around us. Luke gives his readers this parable from Jesus because they, like many of us, were waiting for some answers. Where is this so-called “kingdom” Jesus talked about? When is he coming back to make things all right? Why is all of this suffering happening to us?

Remember that those who first read the gospel of Luke read it nearly a generation after Jesus’ death and resurrection. Sickness still came to their bodies, tears still came to their faces, and grief still swept over them when their loved ones died. They experienced persecution because they believed in Jesus and his promise to quickly return and put an end to sickness and suffering seemed far away. [It left many of them wondering](#) “why”? When? How long?

It not unlike a question one of the confirmation youth asked on their worship report; “God why do we die here if we have eternal life there – why can’t we have you here and eternal life now?” [Yeah God, that's a good question?](#) It would be nice to have an answer but I think Jesus is saying that prayer is about something **more than answers**.

Corrie Ten Boom, the Christian woman who spent time in a Nazi concentration camp for hiding Jews during WWII, once asked, “Is prayer your steering wheel or your spare tire”. A spare tire is something we carry around but rarely use, except if there is an emergency.

Now don't get me wrong, I'm not saying we should avoid praying in emergencies and desperate situations. We **should** do that and we should be **bold** to ask for answers. Like the widow in the parable, we too are often vulnerable, powerless, and forgotten by the powers that be. [Faith is claiming the right to make our case.](#) Faith is trusting that our voice will not be silenced, even if that voice is shaking, with fear, or doubt, or righteous anger.

But faith also makes prayer something more than a spare tire. **Prayer is also a steering wheel** that guides our living and keeps us turned in the right direction. It is a necessary and continuous **connection** to the power that urges us forward. Whether the road conditions of life are clear or dangerously icy, prayer gives us an ability, a strength, a persistence, to continue on [because we are connected to a power bigger than ourselves.](#)

Jesus spoke these words to a people who needed encouragement in the face of their own struggles. Prayer does not necessarily make all those struggles go away, but the witness of people throughout history, the witness of many people in this room today, is that prayer changes the one who prays in such a way that those [struggles lose their ability to define who we are.](#) Prayer is not gaining control but rather admitting our helplessness and our complete dependency upon God. And in that moment of weakness, a strange kind of **power and peace** begins to transform our lives -[bringing healing in ways we could never imagine.](#)

Such a thing happened to Jacob in the first reading for today. What happened to him, the whole wrestling with a stranger thing, comes right after he [prays](#) for God to deliver him the power of his brother (*you remember- the one he stole the inheritance from!*) Jacob believes he is wrestling with God but he might just as well be wrestling with his own conscience, wondering if the misdeeds of his past are finally going to catch up to him.

But right in his weakest moment, when the battle seems to be at a stalemate, he is [changed](#) and given a new identity. He is able to move forward [although limping] to meet his brother and ultimately reconcile with him and be healed of the guilt that has been eating him up.

In just a few moments, we are going to have an opportunity to [pray together](#) and to ask for [healing](#) as well. We pray not trusting in any special ability on our part but rather we trust in the ONE to whom we pray. We pray trusting that God will indeed give us the healing we need, whether that is physical healing, emotional healing, or most importantly spiritual healing. Like the readers of Luke's gospel, we too find ourselves in a time of waiting, a time of wondering about what God is up to in this world that is still filled with brokenness, sickness, and death.

And yet even as we pray for healing to come to us now, we remember that prayer is **more than answers.** God is at work in the very process of praying, changing us and guiding us and inspiring us to see that [eternal life has in fact already begun in us.](#)

The kingdom of God is not some far off distant future. Through faith in God's victory of the powers of darkness, it is among us now- [whenever we love and forgive, seek peace and insist on justice for the oppressed.](#)

The Kingdom of God is here **now** but it is also **not yet** complete. We must step through the doorway of death to encounter life in a new and unimaginable way. **I don't have an answer for why that has to be** but we take that step with faith, made sure by a life of persistent prayer along the way. Let us continue to pray always and not lose heart, remembering that prayer is **more than answers**. It is an [attitude](#), a [way of living](#) in the love of God that gives us a safe space to wrestle with difficult questions, cry out for justice, and ultimately [connects us](#) to the One who can give us the healing we so desperately need. Amen.