

Pray with other Christians...you'll grow closer together

Text: Jude 1:17-23, Acts 2:42-47

Brothers and sisters in Christ, we continue to explore what the bible has to say to us about prayer.

Now last week we looked at how James encouraged us to take what we've learned about prayer and put it to use in our congregation, and we actually took some time and prayed with each other in small groups.

So if you missed last week because you were away for the long week-end, here's a brief recap.

We do this by adopting an attitude that is not ashamed to ask your leaders and fellow Christians for help, for prayer – when we are in trouble, when we are happy, when we are sick and especially when we are struggling with sin.

What a revolutionary place a church would be if people were comfortable with asking for prayer help from their leaders,

even from other Christians to deal with sin in their lives... even at church...

And so today, we continue to move in that direction of prayer being a central part of our life together when we gather together as a community of Christians.

So well we certainly can and should pray in on our own – Jesus often went away and spent time in solitude and prayer... we also need to pray together.

Prayer is an essential part of your “group” life with other Christians - at church, at worship, in small groups, for social activities, at family meals... and we can even gather together for times when praying together is the main focus – and what do we call that “prayer **group!**”

And so prayer is also a communal part of being a Christian and thus it involves each and every person in the congregation, not just its leaders, or the minister.

So the implication of that for each of us is that the bible expects us to pray at church, to pray with other people from our church, and do so on a regular basis.

So in other words, it has to go from hearing about it in a sermon to being practiced in the worship times and the meetings and activities of our congregation.

And friends – the good news is that we are making good progress in that. I was very encouraged to see everyone who attended service last week participating in our time of prayer together – way to go!

And I know for sure that 2 of our 3 Christcare groups spend time praying for and with each other – because I’ve spent some time taking these groups through the 3 Colors of Spirituality Study and seen first-hand that they are praying together.

And I know that our 1014 leaders have also shared how our youth are willing to pray for each other too.

And we also have a weekly prayer group – who meets here at the church and prays for our church, and for our community.

So we’re making good progress, but we can still improve... right? There’s always room for growth, always room to experience more of what God wants to do in our lives.

There is always room to grow to a point where Valleyview can be described in the same manner as that early group of Christians which we read about in Acts 2: 42 as being “devoted” to prayer.

Prayer is certainly an important part of our church life at Valleyview, but would we be described as being “**devoted**” to prayer?

I mean do we give prayer the same level of commitment and focus in our lives as we would hockey? Or family time? Or Tim Horton’s?

Ok – just think about that for comparison... not to feeling guilty trip on you about enjoying hockey or family time or going to Tim Hortons...

But to understand that if we strive to have prayer be more important, that we would grow to be as excited about prayer as we are about hockey, that we would experience prayer as a bonding or refreshing as we do family time, that we would anticipate or feel the need to pray as much as we want to go and grab that medium double double...

But the truth is friends that praying together with other Christians is often uncomfortable for us.

Partly because the number one phobia that most people have is a fear of speaking in public and somehow praying with other Christians seems to be equated with public speaking.

So when we think about praying in front of other Christians we are worried about what to say, how it will sound, what others will think of us etc...

But friends... remember prayer is not first and foremost public speaking, its simply speaking to God.

You speak with your friends in public right? You don't wait until you are in private to speak to your friends do you because you're worried about how you sound in front of others etc...

So friends, to help us get past this barrier to praying with other Christians – ask the Holy Spirit (our prayer helper) to convince us that we are simply having a conversation with God in front of others, its nothing to be afraid of.

Now praying with other Christians can also be uncomfortable because we think that spiritual matters and what we believe are extremely personal and private matters, that it's nobody's business but our own – so why would I share that by praying with anyone.

Well friends, what flavor of ice cream you prefer and where you like to shop for gas and groceries and whether you wear

boxers or briefs are private matters and up to your personal preference.

But... your faith and experience with Christ is not because the Christian faith based on facts – not personal preference.

The fact that God created this world, the fact that he chose a people for himself, the fact that He sent his son Jesus, the fact that he died for us – publically so others can see the difference He makes in our lives, the fact that Jesus called us his “witnesses...”

These are all facts – public facts – not private opinions, so to overcome our apprehension about sharing what God is doing in our personal lives we can ask the Holy Spirit (our prayer helper) to destroy any thoughts or feelings we may have which want to keep our faith private and personal.

And finally, praying with other Christians can be awkward because the enemy – the devil wants to prevent us from praying!

He wants to stop us from growing together as a Christian community and praying for each other’s sin because he doesn’t want us to overcome it, to experiencing healing and freedom.

So he actively works in different ways to prevent us from practicing prayer as a group. United we can stand against the enemy and overcome his kingdom - but divided we are easily defeated and discouraged.

And so ironically we often resist being encouraged and prompted to pray together with other Christians...

So to overcome the way in which the enemy divides us, how he keeps us apart from each other... we’re going to learn how the Holy Spirit unites us – so that in unity, that common unity (community) which we all share – we will begin to pray together and experience the benefits of doing so.

So I want to read again for us that passage from Jude 1:17-23

¹⁷ But, dear friends, remember what the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ foretold. ¹⁸ They said to you, “In the last times there will be scoffers who will follow their own ungodly desires.” ¹⁹ These are the people who divide you, who follow mere natural instincts and do not have the Spirit.

²⁰ But you, dear friends, by building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, ²¹ keep yourselves in God’s love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life.

So what stuck out for me in this passage is how Jude is talking about the source and problem of division in the church, and how prayer is part of the solution to overcoming and preventing that division.

And In fact these “scoffers,” whom Jude speaks of, and the fact that they “are following their own instincts, not the Spirit’s leading” – are what’s behind the reasons I listed as to why we are apprehensive to pray together, and this leaves us divided.

You see nothing will stop people from praying with fellow Christians faster or more effectively than being scoffed at, ridiculed, or made fun of when they put forward a need for prayer.

And nothing will kill the desire to pray with others more effectively than when someone experiences being talked down to, belittled, or shown up during a time of prayer.

And we are all capable of scoffing at people in such ways when we are not “praying in the Spirit” which is all about praying with the help and guidance of the Holy Spirit as we learned a couple weeks ago.

Now the actual scoffers that Jude is talking about in this letter to the early church were people who didn’t confess all the truth and teachings of the Christian faith, but yet had managed to become influential people in these early Christian communities and they were spreading false teachings.

Jude says *“They are ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord”* (vs. 4)

You can imagine how easily false teachings like this could cause a church to become divided.

So, friends – we must be on our guard against those “scoffers” who exist in the church today, in our case its people who do not teach the truth or who twist the truth about the Christian faith and cause division.

For example we can see how the false teaching that faith is a private matter or a personal matter is something that divides us – because as we saw earlier if we believe this then we don’t see any need to pray with each other – we stay separate.

And friends when we allow false teaching to flourish in our midst, when we don’t expose lies for what they are, or when we scoff or ridicule fellow Christians in our own sinfulness –

then we are providing the enemy with the opportunities he is looking for to prevent us from praying together.

But – Jude encourages us, we can overcome division – in fact we can prevent division, he says *“build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit.”* (vs. 20)

So one thing we learned a couple weeks ago is that when we pray in the Holy Spirit, He will bring things to our attention that need to be confessed – and changed – namely our sin.

We are all sinners who have inherited this rebellious condition against God from our first parents, Adam and Eve.

So as much as our sin can set us against each other, last week we saw it is also something we all share in common, and confessing it to each other can unite us – and begin to heal the ways it has divided us, and in this way we also all share and are united in the forgiveness that God offers us in Christ.

And as we are honest with each other about sin – you get to know the real me, and I get to know the real you...

And as we accept the reality of who we are and what God is doing in each of us it bring us closer together- we are truly known and accepted in a Christian community.

How revolutionary would that be – to know that there is a group of people who knows all about you, who knows who you can be in your worst moments... which will most likely involve hurting them - and they still accept and love you.

Where else can you find that friends?

You see friends, praying together and praying for each other is really the only way a group of Christians can get past polite society's definition of church, which is a group of nice, polite, well mannered, well behaved people who are nice, polite, well-mannered and well behaved around other nice, polite, well-mannered and well behaved people – what a sham that is!

That's not a church- that's a country club!

But a church that is praying together and praying with and for each other becomes a safe place for people to come with their weakness and brokenness.

It becomes a place where we are healed and forgiven, a place where false teachings and lies do not survive but instead the truth is proclaimed in love, a place where we can know God and each other authentically.

Through praying together the church becomes what God intended it to be – the body of Christ.

So friends, my goal this morning is to motivate us to take what we are learning about prayer in this series and put it into action.

There are so many good reasons to do so - but I hope that you will because your hearts have been warmed by the

revolutionary possibility of what it can mean to be together as the church.

Of what it can be like to growing closer together with each other – so my prayer is that the Holy Spirit will motivate us to pray with each other at church, but also in our homes, in our meetings and to do so regularly.

Now I realize this may feel a bit awkward for us at first. But that's ok...

It's just like overcoming the awkwardness we've felt when we attempted other things for the first time.

It was a bit awkward the first few times you tried skiing, or ice skating, or rollerblading, or when you learned to ride a bike or ride a horse... right?

But you didn't believe that because it felt awkward that it wasn't genuine or that you shouldn't continue to try it right?

Instead, because you continued to do it – it started to feel normal, natural - it didn't feel awkward anymore, you became comfortable and adept at it and you enjoyed the benefits of it.

So to friends praying together with other Christians will begin to feel normal once you've done it a few times – and not only will we all grow closer to God; we will grow closer with each other.

I think Timothy Keller summarizes it so well in this quote.

“To be loved but not known is comforting but superficial. To be known and not loved is our greatest fear. But to be fully known and truly loved is, well, a lot like being loved by God. It is what we need more than anything. It liberates us from pretense, humbles us out of our self-righteousness, and fortifies us for any difficulty life can throw at us.”

Pray with other Christians friends – you'll grow closer together. Amen.