

Second Sunday in Lent
Sermon text: Philippians 3:17-4:1
Related text: Luke 13:31-35
Date preached: February 24, 2013

Grace to you and peace from God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit. AMEN.

There are many different postures one can use when praying. Whether one is kneeling, sitting, or standing, has their hands up high in praise or folded on their lap, replies with each petition or simply remains silent the point is that we are taught to pray. We are taught the truth that not only does God hear our prayers, but delights in us when we pray. God answers our prayer, be it yes, no or not now.

One of the things we are also taught in prayer is to close our eyes. The purpose is to allow us to focus in prayer on God, without the distractions of our environment.

We are a people that can easily be distracted. A big play during the football game can distract the husband from hearing something his wife is saying. What results is a lack of focus or concentration to the wife. Without focus, some important messages go unheard. That can be true of God's Word to us.

In this season of Lent we are invited into a deeper life of prayer. It is a season that also calls us to look beyond the moment. However, this is very difficult for us.

From the 13 chapter of Luke we hear of some Pharisees who are very focused on the moment. It would seem like they had good reason. They warn Jesus about Herod's desire to have him killed.

However, where they see a momentary threat, Jesus looks beyond it. His view is toward the goal.

His eyes are toward Jerusalem. He knows that is where it will all come down. He'll be welcomed by crowds of people chanting, "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord." In a few short days from there, a different chant will arise. "Crucify Him. Crucify Him."

Yet, even there the focus is beyond death. His focus is on opening the door for our eternal dwelling.

While we know in our minds that our focus should be on that end prize, it is easy to stumble. The reading from Philippians highlights that well. "For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ.

Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things.”

Consider the simple things God gives us along the path of our life. Our life of faith starts with plain water to which God’s Word promises to cling. Here is a morsel of bread. Here is a taste of wine. Spoken are words of hope.

However, we miss the gifts that come in these places. We turn aside from these gifts because we see things that are more glitzy. We are enticed to feeding our now hunger, be it for recognition, for power, for control, for insistence that things be done our way, or even something more innocent sounding as our own comfort.

Besides, we are much more likely to be focused on what it good for me today, or good for my children today and we’ll worry about the consequences later.

Then we also hear the lies that there is no consequence to our sinful behavior, because everyone will get to heaven anyway. There will even be voices that say since everyone goes to heaven it doesn’t matter if you believe in Jesus. That is a lie. When we buy into such lies we ignore God.

What is neglected is the end to which the simple gifts of God lead us. Too frequently it takes a moment of personal or communal anguish to make us realize the trap which ensnares us. In our despair we pray for Christ's help, yet we don't recognize the true love and protection that comes from Christ. Our eyes fail to see His Word as having meaning, so it goes neglected.

As we pray in this season of Lent, let us do so with eyes closed to the distractions around us. Let us close our eyes to the lures, deceptions, and empty promises of this life.

Instead with eyes closed let us listen to the Word.

- “Your citizenship is from heaven.”
- Jesus is the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in him, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in him will never die.
- Christ will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body.
- This is my body, given for you.
- This is my blood, shed for you, for the forgiveness of your sins.
- In you Lord, shall I dwell in safety.
- Christ has died. Christ has risen. Christ will come again.