

Text Isaiah 50:4-9a; Psalm 116:1-9; James 3:1-12; Mark 8:27-38
Theme Prayer is our option
Subject Peter's Confession & Jesus' passion Prediction
Occasion 15th after Pentecost – September 17, 2006 –Peace – Pella
(Prayers for Peace in the Middle East; Eucharist vessels made in Bethlehem)

Not so long ago one of our families hosted an exchange student from Norway
Her sponsor family worshiped regularly and invited her to worship with us
Because Lutheran is the state religion in Norway, her citizenship made her a
Lutheran but she had not been baptized, received any Christian instruction or
been to a worship service
After a couple of weeks of worshiping with us, she asked to talk to me
She told me that our worship upset her
I waited for more.
She explained that she liked the singing and liked listening to the sermons
What upset her was when everybody stands up, bows their heads,
closes their eyes, folds their hands
“and then you talk to somebody who isn't here”
When I said, *“God is here with us”*
She challenged, *“How do you know?”*
To be able to teach her about prayer meant I first needed to invite her to faith
Prayer is our option as people of faith

A common definition of “prayer” is *communicating with God*
But you won't read the words “pray” or “prayer” in the Bible as something people
do until Genesis 20 when God tells Abimelech that Abraham would “pray” for him
But notice: God is communicating with Abimelech
In Genesis we hear that God spoke to Adam & Eve, Noah, Abraham
These early stories remind us that God starts the conversation with people
The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; our heavenly Father and father of our Lord
Jesus Christ has invited us into conversation – to pray
God made prayer our option
the conversation, prayer, begins with God

Consider our first reading and what Isaiah endured because God called him to be a teacher:
**I gave my back to those who struck me, and my cheeks to those who pulled out
the beard; I did not hide my face from insult and spitting.** (Isaiah 50:6)
Or James' counsel in our second reading for those who are called to teach:
**Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers and sisters, for you
know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.** (James 3:1)
How can a teacher do anything else but continue the conversation – Prayer is our option

Consider Jesus' teaching to the disciples and to all who name him as savior and Lord:

the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again
(Mark 8:31)

and

For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. (Mark 8:35)

For believers like you and me to continue in the faith

to believe in Christ Jesus who went the way of suffering for our salvation

to believe that living for the sake of the gospel is our highest calling

means we need to continue the conversation – Prayer is our option

This is a hard teaching –

trusting that losing our lives for the sake of the gospel is the faithful life

We're told in the Gospel of John that when many of Jesus' followers heard his teachings they named them just that: *hard teachings*

And they turned away – ended the conversation

So Jesus asked the twelve, "Do you also wish to go away?" Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life." (Jn 6:67-68)

Peter wanted the conversation to continue

We sang Peter's words before the reading of the Gospel

We want the conversation to continue – Prayer is our option

But it isn't only the hard teachings of Jesus that lead us to prayer

M. Scot Peck began his book, *The Road Less Traveled* with a sentence of three words – He wrote simply, "*Life is difficult*"

Facing reality is hard

Think back to last Monday, September 11 – now named Patriot's Day

In marking the 5th anniversary of the terrorist attack on the United States, while on vacation, I saw the movie *World Trade Center*

Monday night I watched *United 93*

The feelings from 2001 all started to come back: the fear, the anger, the sorrow, and a desire for vengeance

Then on Thursday I was in Des Moines and during a conversation with a friend I was encouraged to visit The Healing Field

There I wandered through the 2900+ flags representing the individuals who had died on September 11

Each flag had a yellow ribbon on which was printed the name, age and home town of a person who had died in the horror

As I walked, flags would brush against me – I would stop and meet that one

With each meeting the wounds that I thought were healed were re-opened – my need for healing increased

I remembered God's word, "**Vengeance is mine says the Lord**"
 Then hymn lyrics became my prayer
"Mold me and make after your way"

Since the first Sunday in Advent, December 3, 2000, Christians across the United States have been keeping a prayer vigil for peace in Israel and Palestine.

Each state was assigned a date to keep the vigil until the violence in the Middle East ends, when all can celebrate a lasting, negotiated resolution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict

[Our former presiding bishop, H. George Anderson, took a leadership role in establishing this nationwide vigil

He once explained, "*The strife in Israel-Palestine is so complex that God's intervention is our only hope for a lasting peace.*"]

Iowa was assigned the 17th of the month – so today is our day

We've been keeping this vigil in Pella since 2001

When interest waned and area congregations and pastors decided not to invest themselves in keeping the vigil, I struggled with whether to continue

In my conversations with God, my prayers, I was overwhelmed by my calling to serve as a pastor of a congregation named Peace

How could I let us quit our part in this national prayer vigil for peace?

So with generally only 6 people coming to pray for peace in the Middle East

One night, while wrapped in a prayer shawl, God and I had a conversation

I was awakened to our need for peace (sense of wholeness, well-being and serenity) in every realm of our lives

I asked Lesley if we could keep the prayer vigil at Vriendschap Village, the independent and assisted-living facility on the west side of town, where she works

She checked it out and now that's where we gather

Now 20 to 30 people gather to pray for peace in every sphere of our lives:

Our worship is a conversation with God because Prayer is our option

We sing, listen to scripture and we pray for the peace only God can bring for our health, families, and relationships

for our town, county, state, nation and the world

Especially we ask for peace in Israel-Palestine by continuing the conversation: listening to scripture & naming our concerns

Not so long ago I warned about only multi-tasking our prayers

Washing dishes and praying

Driving and praying

Exercising and praying

Many of you talked to me about this

We multi-task all of our relationships

Conversations go on in the midst of life
 Doing daily chores and talking with family
 Going for a walk and talking with your friend
 So sure, multi-task your prayers

On the other hand,

I know there are times in the midst of daily chores,
 when we stop so our conversation can be focused
 While driving deciding to stop for a coffee and focus the conversation
 Or while on the walk, stopping to be more attentive

One of the best times of conversations is when children come home
 Come home from school, their jobs, or out with friends
 Parents giving their undivided attention as they hear what their children experience
 Listening for what the children are facing, thinking, dealing with
 Listening for questions
 And then sharing some parental wisdom: stories laced with the values of the family
 and how being a Christian influences what we say and do
 Years later children will treasure these conversations as holy times

Elmer and Berdine were married in 1942

He was 21; she was 18.

They grew up in Christian homes and were life-long members of Bethel
 Lutheran in Parkersburg

They lived on a farm northeast of Parkersburg

They raised their 2 children there

Elmer was hard working German with a gleam of mischief in his eye
 Elmer had a big voice and could call children home from a half mile away
 He died in 1986 at the age of 65

Berdine is 82 – she is a short round sweet woman with a ready smile

She made wonderful cookies – one was never enough

I was able to talk to Berdine this past week to be sure I had the story right that
 I'm about to tell you.

On their wedding night they went to their farm where Elmer had been living & working
 Before they fell asleep that night,

Elmer wrapped Berdine up in his arms and started whispering the Lord's
 Prayer in German;

Vater unser der du bist im himmel

Berdine joined him in English

And so it would be, every night of their marriage

They would pray for their children and grand children and other concerns and then Elmer would begin

Vater unser der du bist im himmel

After Elmer's throat surgery in 1984, he couldn't speak without an appliance
So at bedtime Berdine would pray aloud while Elmer moved his lips

Vater unser der du bist im himmel

When Elmer died, Berdine stayed on the farm for 4 years.

Every night praying Lord's Prayer before she went to sleep
And sometimes remembering Elmer's voice

Vater unser der du bist im himmel

Berdine supposes this kind of devotional life is what Christians do:

surrender the day to the Lord's keeping

These days she begins each day reading a devotion from *Portals of Prayer* to listen for God and then she offers her prayers

She ends her day reading a devotion from *Christ in Our Home* to listen again for God, offers her prayers and concludes with the Lord's Prayer

Berdine lives the life described in today's Psalm

I love the LORD, because he has heard my voice and my supplications.

Because he inclined his ear to me, therefore I will call on him as long as I live.

(Ps 116:1-2)

Life is difficult – Living a faithful life is even more difficult

But no matter what happens Prayer is our option

Soon we will stand and bow our heads, close our eyes, and fold our hands

Prayers will be spoken out loud as we continue the conversation

We can do this because we believe

GOD IS HERE