

“Change for Resurrection”

Mark 1:15, Jeremiah 24:7, Psalm 25:1-10a & 51:10, 2 Corinthians 5:17 & Romans 12:2

Pastor James York

February 28, 2021

Prayer for Understanding Ever present Lord, we thank you for your word, which is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. Holy Spirit open our eyes to the signs of your presence, open our ears to your voice and open our minds to your wisdom. Amen.

Be tenacious and resolute in your Lenten work of change for your efforts will co-create resurrection. Be diligent and intentional in your Lenten disciplines to enjoy transformation on Easter. Be determined and steadfast in expanding your love to delight in rejuvenation on Easter.

Jesus' is urging us on, **Mark 1:15 NRSV** “**repent and believe in the good news.**” Repent means to turn, to intentional embark on a journey of change. Lent is a season of intentional change to get to the rejuvenation, transformation, and resurrection of Easter.

A primary way we change is prayer. “To pray is to change,” says Richard Foster, who has written extensively about the spiritual practices that help us grow. “Prayer is the central avenue God uses to change us. In so saying, Foster answers the question about why we should pray when God already knows our needs. We should pray because God uses prayer to change us. If we are unwilling to change, we will abandon prayer as a noticeable characteristic of our lives.”

Jesus taught us to pray, “God, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” That is a prayer for personal change and community change. God entered into covenant with us to co-create earthly life. God promises to bless us. We are to bless all people. Sadly, we often hurt each other instead of bless each other. We are to repent, to turn, to change from grumpiness to forgiveness, from fear to courage, curiosity and trust, to change from dreariness to wonder, to change from hate to love, to change from anything that diminishes life to all that enhances life. God has entered into partnership with humanity, for God's will to happen on earth we need to change, to live God's will. God speaks through the prophet Jeremiah. **Jeremiah 24:7 NLT** “**I will give them hearts that recognize me as the Lord. They will be my people, and I will be their God, for they will return to me wholeheartedly.**”

Grace, freely, lovingly forgiving ourselves and others is a crucial component to change. So important that grace is in the Lord's Prayer, “we forgive those who sin against us”. Search your heart, forgive yourself of all your guilt, regrets, if onlys, mistakes and sins. Change, be set free, grow in love by forgiving yourself. Search your heart, forgive others, for hurts, betrayals, and frustrations. Search your heart, forgive others or your unforgiveness may grow into even more destructive behaviors such as, a desire to control another, grudges, jealousy, revenge. Change, be set free, grow in love, by forgiving others. Receive, savor and delight in God's grace for you. Strive to share God's grace. Infuse your change with prayer. Give thanks for God's grace. Ask God to help you be gracious.

A primary way we change is prayer. Oswald Chambers said, “To say that 'prayer changes things' is not as close to the truth as saying, 'prayer changes me and then I change things.’” The center of the Bible is 150 prayers called psalms. As you pray them. Examine the progression, the change, the tenacious perseverance of the one who prayed the psalm. Some of these prayers had numerous years of praying over and over the beginning lines of the psalm to journey to the ending lines of the psalm.

The psalmist prayed. **Psalm 25:1-10a NLT** “**O Lord, I give my life to you. I trust in you, my God! Do not let me be disgraced, or let my enemies rejoice in my defeat. No one who trusts in you will ever be disgraced, but disgrace comes to those who try to deceive others. Show me the right path, O Lord; point out the road for me to follow. Lead me by your truth and teach me, for you are the God who saves me. All day long I put my hope in you. Remember, O Lord, your compassion and unfailing love, which you have shown from long ages past. Do not remember the rebellious sins of my youth. Remember me in the light of your unfailing love, for you are merciful, O Lord. The Lord is good and does what is right; God shows the proper path to those who go astray. God leads the humble in doing right, teaching them God's way. The Lord leads with unfailing love and faithfulness.**”

The psalmist was praying for change, the way, direction on how to live daily life. Over and over the psalmist prayed. “**Show me the right path, O Lord; point out the road for me to follow. Lead me by your truth and teach me, for you are the God who saves me.**” The path, the road, implies movement, progression, journey, and change.

The psalmist is striving to live the most excellent way of love that pleases God. The way of love is not a way that we know intuitively, to grow in love requires practice, study, listening, and discovering.

Sometimes we take steps backwards, other times we get lost, sometimes we intentional grow in the wrong direction by thinking unloving thoughts. The psalmist acknowledges this in their prayer, **“Do not remember my rebellious sins. You, God, show the proper path to those who go astray.”** A navigation checkup is to check your peace, joy, and love for God’s ways are suffused with **“unfailing love and faithfulness.”**

When one accepts God’s invitation to listen and talk with God in prayer, God transforms their heart and changes their life. Joyce Meyer says, “Prayer changes us. If we are diligent in seeking God, slowly and surely we become better people.” The prophet Ezekiel exclaims. **Ezekiel 36:26 NLT “I will give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit in you. I will take out your stony, stubborn heart and give you a tender, responsive heart.”**

For Lent you could join the psalmist in regularly praying. “Show me the right path, O Lord; point out the road for me to follow. Lead me by your truth and teach me, for you are the God who saves me. Do not remember my rebellious sins. Show me the proper path to those who go astray. Thank you for always leading me with unfailing love and faithfulness.” You could pray the prayers in the Lenten devotional provided by our denomination. There are a wealth of books and online resources with prayers. You can sing. Augustine said, “To sing is to pray twice.” Make time to pray in your preferred way. My preferred way to pray is with movement, rhythm, walking, biking, skiing. Also make time to pray in some ways that are challenging for you. I have been striving to expand my ability to pray through meditation, silence, and yoga. Several years ago, I received a wonderful gift from my mother-in-law, a book of illuminated prayers. The art helps my focus, be still and know God. Alan Cohen says, “The purpose of prayer is to change your mind so you can see through the eyes of God.” The Apostle Paul wrote. **2 Corinthians 5:17 NLT “Anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!”**

Reading scripture is praying. Immersing yourself in God’s word is an excellent way to listen to God, which helps one know God’s voice, enabling them to hear God’s voice more easily in a variety of ways, perhaps through books, nature, people, art, music, creation, movies.

For many spending time in nature is a way to pray. Go for a hike, a drive, or go for a virtual hike. I enjoy retreats to nature. The change of location, change of routine, change of what I see, touch, hear and feel opens me to hear God and change myself. Locally, Clearwater Forest and the Wilderness Fellowship Prayer Cabins are inspiring places. I have found that for me to keep changing, to make forward movement on my spiritual journey, I need to enjoy some sort of outdoor prayer weekly and quarterly retreats away from home. A favorite retreat prayer of mine is from Psalm 51. **Psalm 51:10 NRSV “Create in me a clean heart, O God and put a new and right spirit within me.”**

Philip Yancy points out, “Sociologists have a theory of the looking-glass self: you become what the most important person in your life (spouse, parent, teacher, coach, manager, etc.) thinks you are. How would my life change if I truly believed the Bible’s astounding words about God’s love for me, if I looked in the mirror and saw what God sees?” Prayer and prayerful reading of scripture helps us see ourselves through God’s eyes. Find some people who can tell you who God thinks you are. I have Leslie, Spencer, and Abigail who often use the words I spoke from God in a sermon back to me. I have friends that remind me of God’s gracious love from me. I have pastors. A key aspect of worship is that we tell each other about the Good News, God’s redeeming love freely offered to all people. The Apostle Paul wrote, **Romans 12:2 NLT “Don’t copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God’s will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.”**

Another way to pray is to serve others. Douglas wood says, “We pray to change ourselves. Because it is when we change ourselves ... that the world is changed.” Our service changes our self and expands the love of the cosmos. I hope you are making progress on our Lenten challenge to pick three additional ways to lovingly serve through love of creation, love of others, and love of those in need.

Lent happens in the spring so creation can encourage our change as creation changes, flowers bloom, trees cloth themselves in their green leaves, animals frolic, plants produce fresh, delicious food, the smell of rain, soil, growth, the sensation of warm sun, the serenade of critters. The cosmos cheers us on our journey of change, of growth, of becoming a perfect, glorious, joyful loving person.

Lent is an invitation to pray, to change, to weave more love into your life, to experience transformation, renewal, restoration, rejuvenation, and resurrection. Jesus is smiling upon you, inviting you to repent and believe the good news. The psalmist’s prayer echoes beyond time and space to all of us. “Show us the right path, O Lord; point out the road for us to follow. Lead us by your truth and teach us, for you are the God who saves us. Do not remember our rebellious sins. Show us the proper path for we sometimes go astray. Thank you for always leading us with unfailing love and faithfulness.” Amen

