

Our Life Together: Prayers & Presence
Acts 2:46-47; Luke 6:12-16
November 7, 2010

You are an important part of the puzzle. God has brought you to Sunrise to contribute in significant ways to the building up of the Kingdom of God – in your own life and in the lives of others. You and I make these contributions by living into our membership vows. When each of us joined the church, we vowed to support the church with your prayers, presence, gifts, service, and witness. When you are a good steward of your time, talent and treasure your membership vows are fulfilled and your piece of the puzzle helps construct a big ministry picture.

This morning we are beginning our annual stewardship campaign. It will conclude in 2 weeks on November 21 with pledge Sunday. As a part of the campaign the sermons will focus on our membership vows. This morning we are talking about prayers and presence.

When membership vows are taken, they are done so within the context of the Body of Christ gathered. This is important because when an individual takes vows it's not just an individual act...it is a covenantal act between the individual and the congregation. We covenant together to help one another live out our vow to support the church with our prayers, presence, gifts, service and witness.

What does it mean to support the church with our prayers? It means that we are to pray for the church – for her mission, for her leadership, for me (the pastor) and other staff, that God's vision would be her vision. It means that we pray for one another in times of joy, in times of sorrow, and all the times in between. It means we pray for ourselves – that the Holy Spirit would truly bring us to the place that we can die to our old selves and be raised anew with Christ.

In 1 Thessalonians we are instructed by Paul to *pray without ceasing*. (5:17) I believe he was calling us to model our life after Jesus'. In the Lukan passage this morning we find that in preparation for choosing who his twelve disciples would be, Jesus prayed all night. How many of us pray all night about a decision; yet, there should be no decision, large or small, that is not undergirded with prayer – in our individual lives or in our collective life together. That is why I keep sending out the prayer that I wrote for the building project. As a church, we need to undergird that decision – as well as any others – with prayer.

Prayer binds us together as we seek oneness in the Spirit of God. It gives us a common purpose and a common language. Prayer is a means of grace that forms who we are as Christians and followers of the Christ.

So, the vow to support the church with your prayers is most important; but how about supporting it with your presence.

What does it mean to live out the vow to support Sunrise Church with your presence? When I talk to people about joining the church I explain it this way:

While common sense will tell you that it is probably impossible for you to be present at every church event and activity every time the church doors are open...you are expected to participate in the life of the congregation. Please don't think it is acceptable to have your name entered on to the church membership roll and then never show up again. That would represent a direct violation of the membership vows you took and the covenant that you entered into with the rest of the congregation.

In Acts 2 we find a people who meet every day for worship and for meals. They enjoyed life together – not just a life of worship and sacrament, but a life in which they became intimately important to one another. And God blessed that shared life by *adding to their fellowship those who were being saved*.

In our life together in Sunrise Church, your vow of presence is lived out when you join others for worship, when you come to fellowship dinners, when you actively support mission activities and fundraisers, when you engage with other Sunrisers in Bible Study, Sunday School, Youth Group (or some other small group activity). In this busy world, keeping such a vow can be difficult and challenges our priorities. Matthew and Luke both recount the story of a person who tells Jesus, “*Lord, I will follow you wherever you go.... But first let me go and bury my father.*” Jesus’ response to that person was, “*Let the dead bury their own dead....*” (Mt 8:22; Lk 9:60) The person had asked to go take care of something that they saw as important business. Jesus knew it was important, but he also knew that in order of priority, the person’s life in the Kingdom of God was more important. We must be willing to forego good activities, in favor of those that are best for our own spiritual lives and for the Kingdom of God.

Another way we keep the covenant of presence is by viewing our congregation as a family. There are some who get upset or find fault in a church and instead of treating it like family – remaining present and working through the difficult times – they act as if the covenant does not exist and they leave. Unfortunately, they will most likely approach their relationship with the next church in the same way. Our challenge is to keep our covenant not only in the easy times, but in the inevitable hard times that present themselves. It is by growing together through the difficult times that we grow closer in Christ.

Friends, when you are not present in the life of the church for whatever reason, the influence God meant for you to have is lost – the way that God wanted to work through you doesn't

happen. You are an important piece of the puzzle...and when you are not around the picture is not complete.

As we go to the Table and share in Holy Communion, remember as you receive the Body and Blood of Christ that this same Lord prayed for you. His words you will find in John 17:20-21:

I am praying not only for these disciples but also for all who will ever believe in me through their message. I pray that they will all be one, just as you and I are one—as you are in me, Father, and I am in you. And may they be in us so that the world will believe you sent me.

Receive the gifts of His prayer and his presence, and commit yourself to giving those same gifts to your brothers and sisters in this, His Church.