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So I am tired of praying... We have been praying as a church for some two thousand years, and the world is still falling apart.... And for us, United States citizens, in a culture that prays a lot, we are witnessing division among us not seen since the Civil War. Some commentators say that in no time in our history, except for the Civil War, has our democracy been so tested. The ideal that our government, conceived by our founders, is a government by the people and for the people, has become a platitude, when in reality our government has become the means for the pursuit of wealth by those in power. We are fast becoming a plutocracy wherein our government has become infrastructure for corporate interests serving the gods of profit and wealth; profit and wealth for an elite few. And of course the victims of such a system are the poor and the voiceless, and now a shrinking middle class. Fear is such a system's calling card, because fear can control the powerless, and the willfully ignorant. The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan were and are all about profit, not only for the military industrial complex, but also for mercenary corporations who contract for war at a profit; self-interest in short. Just look at Haliburton's stock price before Iraq, and after. The unlawful detention of immigrants at our border is all about profit. The detention facilities are mostly private enterprises making a killing, as it were, on the backs of our neighbors

fleeing the violence south of our southern border... violence for which we have no small responsibility through our marauding capitalist interests in Latin America over the past century. The unbridled gun violence in the U.S. owes nothing to the interpretation of the second amendment to our constitution, but has everything to do with the profits of gun manufacturers via their intense lobbying by the NRA. We have far and away the greatest number of incarcerated people in the world, not because we are a nation of criminals, but because prisons are big money, big profits. Racism, and xenophobia, that malady that has plagued humankind for millennia, flourishes in such a system, and in fact perpetuates it: because guilt needs a scapegoat. The president of the United States, an exemplar of self-interest, has made racism and fear of the other normal. It is not normal, and it is not acceptable.

And in the face of such violence, and that's what it is... violence... the faith community leadership has asked us to pray... and I'm tired of praying... because it seems that our prayers go unanswered. Nothing changes. We, the church, have been praying for peace and justice and non-violence for years and years... and the violence continues, and the injustice continues, and the upheaval in our communities, our nation, and the world community continues... So when the prayer vigil for immigrant justice was announced last week I decided not to go... I

knew that if I went, I would pray, and then just go home and hope for the best... So I didn't go, because I'm tired of praying. Just recently at a diocesan clergy gathering... someone asked the question of what we can do as Christian people to stop the injustice and the violence that injustice engenders... and a clergy person, well-meaning, said... "all we can do is pray." I said to the group that I was just done... done praying... because I was tired... sick and tired.

So, I don't really mean that, of course (I am sick and tired; I'm talking about the praying part)... But we are, after all, a people of prayer. Luke exhorts us to pray. In Luke, Jesus prays constantly... Jesus doesn't do anything in this Gospel until he prays first. Prayer is what we do as people of faith... So perhaps we need to revisit what prayer is... I think for most of us, prayer is what I call the 'big ask'... you know... we don't pray until we really need something, when we or someone we love is in a pickle... And we ask God to fix things... Even in our liturgy our prayers seem perfunctory... that is one principal reason we vary our Eucharistic Prayers, our Prayers of the People, our post communion prayer, even the translation of the Lord's Prayer... so we can say the words with energy and renewed awareness... But what I want to suggest this morning is that prayer is much more than asking. Some say prayer is more about listening, and that is certainly true... but there is much more.

My definition of prayer, that has stuck with me for a long time now, and you have heard me say many times, is that prayer is the 'art of paying attention'... Prayer is a reality check, as it were... It is a discipline by which we reflect on ourselves and the world around us... a means by which we raise to consciousness our desires and aspirations... even our fears... It is about focused awareness. The Buddhists call it mindfulness. We believe in the tradition of the church that God speaks to us in prayer, amid our enlightened speculations, and passionate questions..... But in the early church, and in many cultures around the world, prayer always preceded action... Prayer was both reflection and action... a process bringing awareness to enlightened action... The liberation theologians called it 'praxis'. Prayer is not just an exercise of mind and heart, but an exercise for the body as well... That is why we most often stand to pray... that involves our hearts minds... and body... It says, outwardly and visibly, that we are ready for action... but in our western postmodern Christian world we have lost that dynamic, the action side of prayer.... You know, our culture tells us to keep our prayers to ourselves... keep our prayers within these walls.... Safe, comfortable... and perhaps... irrelevant.

"Teach us how to pray", asks one of Jesus' disciples in today's reading from Luke... And Jesus does not give them a litany of petitions. He's not teaching the

'big ask'... He gives them one thing to pray for, just one thing, and that is to pray for the coming of the kingdom of God. So prayer has everything to do with how we live together. Therefore prayer is first and foremost corporate. "Your will be done on earth as in heaven." That is the one petition that informs our life of prayer, all of our asking... The writer of Luke here uses the aorist tense in the Greek... the aorist tense doesn't exist in English. It can be both present and future... So our prayers find their context in present and future... in the now and the not yet... Luke is speaking of process; of becoming; God's time is not confined to past, present, or future; God's time is always becoming... and our prayer practice enables us to recognize where we are in the process.... To perceive the need around us of restoration and redemption in ourselves and in the world, and then our prayers call us to creative and enlightened action.... Our prayers make present the not yet in the now. Prayer is about being attuned to the process of creation; which is to say, change and transformation; making way for God's reign. God's will is best seen in change.

Prayer bears witness to the incarnational principle that it is human action in the world that embodies God's action... Our loving the world is the means by which God loves the world... so thoughts and prayers (so-called) without action are really the means of abdicating our first responsibility as people of faith... and

that responsibility is to effect the kingdom of God in the world,... And then something very important in this prayer: Luke's insight into how this kingdom comes about: "Forgive us our sins as we forgive the sins of others against us." That's empathy. The way, the means to the kingdom of God is empathy.... That's loving one's neighbor right? Loving our neighbor as we love ourselves; that is the way to the world God imagines.

So our prayers are to be for the coming of God's reign in our own place and time... and Luke goes on to tell us what the reign of God looks like.... In God's gracious reign, even if interrupted in the middle of the night, we give what is needed for our neighbor... In God's reign the abundance of life on this earth is there for the asking and the sharing... In God's reign our quest for discovery is always answered, if we persist. In God's reign the doors of possibility are open to everyone... In God's reign, welcome is our guiding rubric. In God's reign kindness and dignity and justice are given as signposts to the heart of our stewardship... and in this world, this world that God sees as heavenly, the world in which God is at home, it is our bounden duty to see that it is so... It is our prayer in short.... Our self-awareness, our empathy, our compassion reasoned and imagined into creative action... It is the action part that we need to work on... I need to work on.

Brian Stevenson says it best: that we are to be proximate to the world's brokenness. Proximate: Mind, heart.... and body.

So I ask you this day... what does that look like? If we become the prayer that God requires, what do we do?.... Do we protest in the streets? Maybe. I really don't know what's next; but brothers and sisters, keep awake; our heightened attention is now required of us. I believe that if we are open and committed, and mindful, we will know what to do.... We just need to be willing and ready to do it.... If not, then why are we here?... Brothers and sisters we are God's people... We are bearers of God's love... We are God's people charged with the urgent challenge to bring about the well-being and dignity of all people... We are called into a noble history... I am so tired of praying about it... But for God's sake, let us pray... After all, it's what we do.... But let our praying be the way Jesus taught us... Let it be our compassionate and enlightened doing... so that our praying changes everything.