

# Notes for Brian's Sermon at Brentwood Presbyterian Church

## Sun, Mar 29, 2020 – Lent 5 – Amidst Pandemic Anxieties

### The Power of Prayer (Ps 121 and Luke 22:39-46)



**“Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me;  
yet not my will but yours be done.”  
(Luke 22: 42)**

#### How does this fit into the story of God's forgiving and reconciling love

Most of you know that I am a restless soul – especially in my physical presence – I don't stay still well – that has remained true during this time of relative confinement in the condo as we collaborate to control the coronavirus – so I wander around the rooms in our 987 square foot space – in that space are a lot of books – and I've made some wonderful discoveries – “I didn't know I'd bought that book! Let's see what's inside!” – this past week, I was drawn (I do think it's the work of the Spirit provoking a focused fascination) to the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary edition of the English translation Karl Barth's seminars on the Lord's Prayer in Neuchatel between 1947 and 1949 – from a shorthand transcription in French, then translate English by Sara F Terrian – the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary edition features essays by distinguished Reformed theologians in the USA – John Hesselink, Daniel Migliore, and Donald McKim – so, a wonderful example of how we formulate and reformulate our understanding of God's faith in conversation with God, others, and ourselves – the invitation I accepted in this discovery was to ponder more deeply the power of prayer, especially in the midst of this pandemic

#### Provocations to ponder

This is still very much a work in progress – I have not seen myself as a person of prayer in any disciplined sense – but I am reframing that, for reasons that may become apparent as we reflect further together – so far, in my reflections, the Spirit has drawn my attention to two dynamics in prayer that have the power to reform my understanding of this aspect of God's faith in us – God's patient and persistent pestering of us to accept the invitation to participate more consciously and fully in Christ's mission

- First, prayer is a conversation initiated by God – in everything God has done to forgive and reconcile the world to its original intent – of being an interdependent, mutually-enriching community where blessing abounds – it's in that grand vision

of flourishing that each of us, in the depths of our fears and needs, finds God's answer to our prayers – prayers God has provoked before we find the words – prayers God knows before we do – Barth places great emphasis on Jesus, the Christ, praying for us and with us – embracing our needs into the self-giving love of the triune God - carrying our longings into the ultimate caring of the Holy Trinity – that flourishing for all of creation is the will of God

- Second, prayer, then, is the central dynamic of our Christian discipleship – everything we do, personally and communally, is a form of prayer – a form of conversation with God - in the sense that it is part of the Spirit aligning our flourishing in the energy of God's forgiving and reconciling love – what we confess to be the most powerful force in creation – when we refuse that invitation to align, we generate trauma for each other and lament for God – but the invitation persists, pestering us to reform – with your next breath, with my gift of your next breath, focus your attention over here on the possibilities for generating blessing instead of trauma – you can do it, with my redeeming support – but you have to accept the invitation into that possibility

### **Possibilities for our missioning at Brentwood**

I'll speak for me and pray that the Spirit provokes possibilities for you – I am becoming more conscious of the opportunities I have in my way of being to engage in more intentional conversations with God – as I look back, that's been happening for my whole life – but I had not been awakened to its presence and power – this pandemic reformulation of my habits has made me more aware of God's invitations into conversation – I hope these reflections have awakened you to some of those dynamics in your lives as well – stay safe, dear friends in Christ, and help others do the same

### **My Notes**

### **My Prayers**

