

## **Ninth Sunday after Pentecost**

August 2, 2020

Christ the Rock Evangelical Lutheran Church  
Farmington, New Mexico

**Romans 8:26-27** In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. <sup>27</sup>And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will. (NIV 1984)

### **Praying**

Shrieks jolt him awake in the pitch blackness of the night. Fumbling to locate his glasses on the nightstand with feet shuffling to find slippers, he is oblivious that the numbers on the alarm clock read 3:13am. He pushes out into the hallway as the strange mixture of cries and screams reach his ears. Is it an intruder, a dangerous animal, a deadly disease stalking and striking stealthily? Pushing open the door to his four-year-old's bedroom he sees her standing on top of her bed with agitated feet prancing nervously on top of princess sheets and blankets. "Don't come any closer," she warns her father, "monsters."

And in his half-awake stupor he actually freezes for a moment as his brain processes the last message. And then a smile spreads across his face as he slowly, confidently approaches the bed. He gives his little princess a little hug and assures her, "daddy will take care of the monsters." And he does. He gets down on the ground, peers under the bed, removes some stray stuffed animals, pokes his hand through some cobwebs, and gives the all-clear signal. "No more monster. You can go back to sleep," is his final verdict. With that he tucks her pink blankets under her chin, hands her back her favorite doll, and she drifts blissfully back to sleep.

Wouldn't that be great? Wouldn't it be great if you could just cry out in the middle of the night when something bothers you? Wouldn't it be great if someone was right there when you let out your screams and tears rolled down your cheeks? Wouldn't it be great if you could still have someone to assure you, promise you that there are no monsters under the bed?

### **3) Turn to the Spirit in Weakness**

Of course, what frightens you today is much more real than monsters under the bed. And when the stock market seems to be taking reckless little joyrides and when expert economists are admitting they really don't know when things will improve or when jobs will be more plentiful and when politicians seem to be making a bigger mess of the future instead of instilling even one shred of confidence that they have long-term solutions for substantial problems, you don't exactly start whimpering or crying in the middle of the night. And when the impersonal administrative assistant from the doctor's office informs you that you need to come in for more tests and when the only thing you know for sure is

you don't know anything for sure, it's not likely waking someone else up in the middle of the night will solve any of your problems.

We consider it a badge of honor that we don't burden other people with our problems. It's bad enough we have to deal with life's little setbacks, why should anyone else be troubled by our troubles? And we are proud that we have moved on, we've grown up, we've matured past the point where so many celebrities seem to be stuck – advertising all their struggles and airing all their issues in front of a public audience for everyone to see. And for what? Pity? Sympathy? No thanks. You deal with your problems. I'll deal with mine.

But are you and I overlooking a very real and a very available avenue for assistance to handle the real, the unimagined monsters in our lives? Even if you are the kind of person who will never feel comfortable getting into a great big group hug and sharing your feelings, even if you are the kind of pillar who comes home from your worst day of work in ages and tells your spouse your day was 'fine,' there is a way to deal with life's big and small burdens. It's a helper, an advocate we often overlook: **"In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness."** (Romans 8:26) When you wouldn't even bother to cry out for mommy or daddy, the Holy Spirit is right there at your side. When you aren't even asking for help, the Holy Spirit is extending His hand to you in your weakness.

## 2) Rely on the Spirit to Overcome Ignorance

When you get older than four-years-old and understand there is no such thing as monsters, you begin to look at your mom in a little more mature and realistic way as well. Maybe it doesn't happen overnight. Maybe it will happen by the time you are in middle school, but for sure by the time you are in high school, your parents aren't so smart and powerful anymore. Actually, they get to be kind of clueless: they don't get you anymore, they don't understand what is cool or important to you, they don't get your friends. You don't get how they can suddenly be so old and out of touch. And so you stop wasting your time with them, even asking them for anything.

Children of God at one time or another all exhibit traits of spiritual adolescents. We just don't get God. Why does God allow our society to slip farther and farther away from biblical values? Why does God permit moral decay to eat away at even our families, our children, our loved ones? Why does criminality and lawlessness and disregard for authority increase instead of go away? Sometimes we just want to shake our heads at God like the embarrassed teenager rolling her eyes at her clueless parents. In other words, why does God allow so many weeds to infiltrate the good, rich soil? Why does God permit weed seeds to grow right alongside the good wheat? Those are the times when the Bible describes us like this: **"We do not know what we ought to pray for."** (Romans 8:26)

One of the biggest weakness of teens and pre-teens is they have such a narrow focus. In our spiritual adolescence, too often we can't see past today, past our present trials and temptations to grasp the bigger picture. That kind of frustration and perplexity is exactly why Jesus told the Parable of the Weeds. The point of parable is, 'not yet.' Sinful people are all around us. Evil invades even the Christian community. Wouldn't it be better if God did a little bit of pruning and gardening to leave us with lives untouched by impurity? Jesus says

no. What would happen if all those sinful weeds were removed from your life? What would happen to those souls? Oh, God will certainly sort out the sinful and the righteous, the believer and the idolater. But not yet. And it's not your job. It's not your job to do the sorting. And it's not happening yet. But even as God gives the gift of prayer, He promises He is still in control. He is still caring for you. And God has the outcome already under control. Evil and sin won't survive forever. Instead, **"They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."** (Matthew 13:42) And ultimately, believers will be rescued: **"Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father."** (Matthew 13:43)

When you just don't get God, when you shake your head at the state of the world, in your ignorance and in your weakness, turn to the Holy Spirit. Here is God's solution for you: **"We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express."** (Romans 8:26) Whether the Holy Spirit is speaking for us with language that can't be understood by human ears or whether He expresses Himself with inaudible communication isn't really important. But what is important is that the Holy Spirit puts power into your praying. Rely on the Holy Spirit to overcome your ignorance.

### **1) Pray Confidently with the Spirit's Working**

Have you ever noticed how much smarter your parents get once you get a little older? Maybe it happens when you are done with school or when you take your first real job or start your family, but it almost happens overnight. Your parents all of the sudden get real smart. They know things.

An early preacher from one of the first generations after the apostles made this observation that prayer is so valuable: **"since we are ignorant of much that is profitable for us and we ask for things which are not profitable."**<sup>1</sup> We don't always know what is best for ourselves. In fact, we might pray for something that God doesn't want for us, something that won't benefit us. And too often we neglect the prayers that would really, truly benefit our souls. Prosperity or peace or comfort can actually cause complacency and allow you to drift away from your Saviour. The struggles of living among sinful people and dealing with a decaying world and the immoral impulses within yourself can point us to God's 'not yet,' so we yearn for His ultimate deliverance. Because of the presence of righteous believers, sinners can actually be transformed, through the Holy Spirit's working their hearts can be changed to repent of wayward living and trust in Jesus as their rescuer and deliverer. No amount of fertilizer could ever transform a worthless weed into a productive shock of grain. But that is exactly what the Holy Spirit is able to do for sinners who are left in the same world with God's righteous believers.

And who better to go to work on your behalf than the Holy Spirit: **"And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will."** (Romans 8:27) So when you cry out in prayer, the Holy

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<sup>1</sup> Chrysostom. "Homilies on Romans 14." *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, vol VI Romans*. Gerald Bray, ed. Intervarsity Press: Downers Grove, Illinois; 1998, p. 222.

Spirit working for what is best for you. The primary job of the Holy Spirit is to connect you to Jesus Christ and keep you connected to Christ. When you realize your own weakness in neglecting the gift of prayer, He leads you to repent and trust in Jesus for forgiveness. Through Jesus Christ you are a saint, a perfect and innocent child of God through faith in Jesus Christ. When you are confused and overwhelmed by the wickedness in the world, the Holy Spirit brings you back to the foot of the cross to see your deliverance and the ultimate deliverance of the world through the life and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

What if you had someone bigger and stronger and more attentive than a four-year-old girl's parents? When the Bible tells you "**the Spirit intercedes for the saints,**" it is literally saying that you have an ally and helper who is willing to rush into battle on your behalf. He is always there, always attentive, always powerful enough to work to sustain you in Christ's deliverance. Turning to the Holy Spirit in prayer brings God's blessings to blood-bought saints of God.  
Amen.