

Matthew 6:5-6

Preached for Stone Church of Willow Glen via Zoom by Rev. Sharon J. LeClaire

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## **In Extraordinary Times Like These**

I have some good news! Anyone who has a birthday in 2020, does not have to age one year. I was talking with my younger sister, 48 years old, a few days ago and she told me that all the Executive Admins at her office got together and just cancelled this year. Now this is the long, painted nails, blond hair to the waist, can do 5 things at once crowd. So, I figure...why not? If she is as busy as she is and can still discard a whole year...then let's do it! As one of your pastors, I am now 54 years old.

Friends, this is an extraordinary time in which we are living. As I write this it was a few weeks before now, people were driving with their headlights on because the smoke from surrounding fires was too thick to see clearly without them. We have been Shelter in Place now for approximately 347 years or so and try as we must to endure, some days are really stressful.

We love our kids but we thought the agreement was that they were supposed to be away from home several hours a day at school. Isn't that the deal we signed up for? For some of you there is nothing funny about these times. Folks have been laid-off or lost their jobs in some other way. Savings that used to be KID'S COLLEGE FUND, now pay the monthly bills.

And we even worry if we can keep living where we are. It is sad to say that families have split up as the parents and even the kids need a break from each other in this extraordinary time.

A lot of us are depressed or anxious or angry ... what else should we feel? And, let's face it, we blame God for our trials ... why hasn't God put the cure for Covid-19 in some chemists' head so we can end this pandemic? And who else could have made the lightning strikes? Sometimes we blame God ... because we aren't even sure God is listening. Does that ring true for any of you?

Do you feel comforted when people you don't even know say, "thoughts and prayers are with you." Since the people who say that are usually leaving to go about their business we don't have the opportunity to say "Thank you for the thoughts and prayers ... do you wish to know what I need prayer for?" Have any of you experienced the well-wisher actually stop? I'm not trying to put a monkey wrench in our ways of communicating, I just feel in my inner being ... THERE HAS TO BE MORE!!

And there is. There is prayer. I know that many of you are dedicated Prayers who have lists and notes of whom you know needs prayer. Praying for others is a wonderful way to stay connected to each other and to God. Jesus wasn't kidding when he said that where 2 or 3 are gathered in God's name, God will be there. There are many ways to pray and I'm not qualifying one over another One thing I have heard so much in these extraordinary times, is that some days we are alone all day...in fact, that's what we are supposed to be doing.

So I want this morning to talk about a specific kind of prayer, using DEVOTIONS. Devotions are a type of prayer where we read scripture or a lesson from a book and use that to help us focus...to help us to settle and get quiet and pray. This can certainly be done with a group but let's look at devotional prayer just you and God.

To show you what I mean I have a book I wrote that is called *Psalms for People Like Us: Twice Daily Devotions for Those with Mental Health Challenges*.

Let me clarify this by saying it is not necessary for you to have mental health issues to use this book. In these extraordinary times, devotions can comfort and renew the spirit with in us.

All the scripture is from the Psalms and I guarantee that any trial or feeling can be found in the Psalms. Of course, there are several books in the Bible like Lamentations and Job that are written as laments, experiencing sadness when we are stricken But I have found that whenever I need to get to my feelings or even if I just need help saying a prayer, my go-to is the Psalms

There are many difficult feelings especially in this extraordinary time, that can be very powerful.

My book has chapters like Hope, Trust, Mercy, Forgiveness and more. I know many of you already use a devotion book . For those of you who don't I'll read a page from the "Faithfulness" chapter. First will be the Psalm, then some thoughts and then a short prayer that may help you to focus on more prayer and deeper prayer time.

Psalm 5:1-2

<sup>1</sup> Listen to my words, LORD,  
consider my lament.

<sup>2</sup> Hear my cry for help,  
my King and my God,  
for to you I pray.

Sometimes the writer of the Psalms says a lot of words to say “HELP!” which can make us feel that we have to speak some fancy words to go to God to ask for help when we are in trouble.

The thing is though, one of the many awesome things about our God is that God will come to us exactly as we are. There’s no dress code. There’s no age limit. There’s no test to take.

Angry, sad, lonely, hanging on by a thread...we don’t have to dress up our language. We don’t have to write out our prayers first, so they sound “just so.”

“HELP!” is a perfectly good prayer.

And the prayer for this page: Holy God, be with us when we don’t have any other words to pray but “HELP!” Amen

Do you see how a devotion can help to focus in prayer? Now, I know that probably most of you have been in groups or even by yourself when you have used a devotion with prayer.

I’m not trying to talk down to you. My thinking in the extraordinary times like these, we can get off track in our prayer lives. Friends and family members may be ill. You may be grandparents and so wishing to hug those grandchildren. You may live alone and although you call your friends and family ... it just isn’t the same. You may be students and have not been able to go to school in real classrooms and be with your friends. All of that and so much more have us living in an unusual way. As I said earlier, there are many ways to pray. But whatever way you pray, the goal is to maintain a connection with God.

Yes, I know ... easier said than done. I knew a pastor who was a wonderful, gifted preacher. He would often say, “If you feel separate from God, who moved?”

Friends, I know we are in troubling times ... masks, 6 feet apart, all over the world. And in CA it seems most of the state is on fire. If you have a way you pray that works to help you stay close with God ... then by all means stick with it.

My purpose in talking about devotions is that it is relatively easy...and we all know we are more likely to stay with a practice if we don’t have to “Stand on the street corners” as the Jewish officials in Jesus time. also know that getting away to pray as Jesus did may be very tricky in our living situations. Whatever time of day, it doesn’t matter...go sit in your car, lock yourself in the bathroom, go out to the garage, walk

through your garden...and of course there are times to pray if we make time to pray. I understand that some of you are in a real struggle right now.

Truly, honestly, I understand. My job is to remind you God never goes away. God never sleeps.

God's blessings are continuous, and God opens God's heart to welcome everything that you struggle with, every time you scrape you knee, every time you feel alone and also everything you celebrate.

So, in these extraordinary times, pick out a scripture that speaks to you. Use a book of devotions to help you focus ... whatever you need to draw closer to God. God will not only honor your prayers God will anoint those prayers bringing in the spirit to pray with and for you.

It's not too late ... in God's time, it's never too late