

Palisades Presbyterian Church
Palisades, New York 10964

On Being Given...
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First, a blessing and a greeting to all those who are mothers in the many different ways families are formed. As you gather about today with those close to you or perhaps quietly observing this gorgeous May day in your own way... very best wishes and all our love

To tell you the truth, Mother's Day is a funny day for me to write about or even think about. The first thing for me is to make sure I don't forget it – thank God for sisters, but I am very aware of the variety of ways we all have interacted with our parents or caregivers. My relationship with my family is better than it was during my most turbulent years. But for some it seems never to get better. There are *Mommie Dearest* scenarios, the Christina and Joan Crawfords, which epitomize some of the most difficult intersections around human and family relationships. Holidays are not always easy for any number of reasons.

So, with all that said, if love and affection and close companionship comes easy to you this morning and this day, then we share your joy. However, if this is a day that you can't wait to pass for some reason, I would suggest two things. Find a way to mark the day. Find some thing to do – a walk, a bit of writing – and burning, a drive through these scenic parts – something to traditionalize the joy or the pain of the day. That being done, it will help to manage the wide and unpredictable swings of a day that goes on and on, dodging those who remind us of what we are missing, perhaps. More importantly, it will touch us in a place that needs to be touched and caressed.

Secondly, if the day produces memories of resentments, subtle or hawkish – make a decision to talk about them soon and work them through, if even again. In a moment we will talk a bit about the gifts in the reading of Paul today, and one of them is healing. The healing comes most effectively when the Spirit helps us to move to a place of forgiveness. Hard to do if we have been wronged. Cristina Crawford certainly chose a different path. But with time and help...perhaps.

As I said, it can be a difficult day for some so let's make sure we have our arms around our loved ones and one another – for they are the same, I think.

And reaching out a bit from our loved ones here, we have loved ones far away that we need to hold in our prayers today. The effects of the cyclone in Myanmar have been on my mind, no doubt yours, all week long. Aside from the incredulous response of the junta in charge and the target they may just deserve to be for the frustration many are feeling, I think in twos again. First, I have

always wondered why when such great human loss is encountered, whether in Indonesia in the 2004 tsunami or days ago in Myanmar, I wonder why when human life is ended in such great quantities – that we all just don't wake up in the middle of the night or stop in our tracks and be doubled over by the pain by the enormity of the occurrence. It seems that we should be better connected to feel such a thing. To know it happened, to sense it as some creatures in nature are able to do. I wonder why we don't.

The second thing that I wonder is about prayer in moments and times like these. First, let me say. I know prayer works. Too many times have we seen it work to question that it. Why, it has such a reputation here, that as with a couple of Nina's friends, folks who don't "believe," they ask her to pray because they know she does! And that happens more often than not; think about the folks that ask us to pray for them – why us for them, why not they for themselves, or why get as many people as you possibly can praying?

Does God listen to choruses of prayer better than the voice of "one." If so, in all those prayers that must have been offered at the moment of the cyclone, tsunami, or Katrina – why didn't the event stop in its tracks and fall to the ground like the curtain on a stage being loosed from its fasteners?

Where was God?

Yet prayer works. Just not always? Sometimes? Does it need to follow a prescription, an incantation to work to full power – you know the kind that moves mountains or warms hearts?

What are we doing wrong, for we must be doing something wrong if our prayers are not answered –

We've talked about this before to some degree. I can tell you that some of my friends tell me about this (and other things when I get to thinking) – "Just do it and you'll know how it works!" A variation on the old saying, "Right actions create right thinking" not the other way around.

And of course I do pray – lots, and maybe that's why in the ever building body of experience of prayer I have discovered that one of the greatest of benefits is that the act of praying – however one may pray, brings us consciously into the presence of God. Now, we are always there – in the presence of God, whether we think about it or not, but when we are aware of it and praying awake, so to speak – we move closer in some way. Something else gets placed aside and we center in God. Always a good thing to do. And things happen...

I mean Jesus prayed into the moments of his execution, as well as during the times of the most powerful acts of his ministry. So we have powerful examples.

The tsunami victims prayed, I am sure, as the wave rose, and rumbled, and fell. "O. my God!" is probably the most often stated three word prayer of all.

And then....

That's the question. And then...

We deal with the aftermath – of storms, illness, relationships – and we find something unshakable, again from last week, unshakable, ultimately peaceful, and even joyful – if only in sputters and starts at the beginning.

This is where Paul's words of this morning's readings come in for me. He takes God out of the sky as some controlling, unpredictable if not chaotic agent that manifests itself with weather and natural events as signs of being pleased or upset with creation – and brings God to church. Not the four-walled kind, but the church that Paul knew and referred to: Christ. Christ, Church, the Body of Christ for Paul were all one.

You know how we might sometimes think the preacher is a little, shall we say, "out there"? Think of these teachings of Paul 2000 years ago. You know, I don't think he was just looking for metaphors. I think he really saw something that I feel as though I glimpse now and then.

Anyone who has ever seen The Matrix probably glimpsed something like it. The interconnectivity of all human life at some level, not out of science fiction but out of creation...no, as creation, as God. Paul emphasizes this by going beyond the boundaries of consciousness to the "gift" of the Spirit given to those who call upon Christ.

Paul was doing pretty good by me until he laid out these requirement issues. And, that's when I have to go more slowly and embrace Paul in his setting. Did he "get" the connectivity of the Spirit manifested in the way we work to live our lives – yes, I think he did. In fact, he came to this through his faith and experience of Jesus. So, it is natural, faithful for him to offer the gifts of the Spirit to all who called upon Jesus. It was what worked for him and would surely work for you. Such is Paul's faith. It is wonderful.

Yet, beyond Paul's knowledge of the world were other ways and paths, leading to the same interconnectivity of the Spirit. Same spirit, I think, different paths, I know.

And it is in the Body of Christ, in Paul's words and ours here, in the sharing of the many gifts we have and the ways in which the Spirit manifests itself in each of us that healing, understanding, miracles (powerful acts), grace, peace, love, and joy are unleashed into the physical world. In other words, to carry the spiritual world into the physical world you need a vessel that is both. It seems we are that vessel – for better or worse and better again.

In some ways this helps with the prayer question. It may be that when we pray we automatically draw the lines and connections of creation in more closely. Creation inhales a bit, so to speak, embraces itself and the gifts flow from all places to bring the hurting part of the body what it needs to keep the larger body whole. As Paul says, we don't always get the gifts we would like; but as a body we get what we need. Eventually, the healthy body brings wellness to the injured parts in ways that reopen the path to the Spirit's power like arteries cleansed of blockages to the heart.

It seems this is our task. It is perhaps what all the great leaders of spirituality have tried to teach us over the millennia.

There is a notion of a presence called the Divine Third. When two are gathered, a Divine Third is there, as well. It most often is referenced as two of us and God. But I wonder if, in fact, it isn't that the two of us, already Divine, are joined by a third Divine – for we bring the Spirit with us wherever we go.

I think that these are the things to which John referred in the short reading this morning. "Let those who thirst seek me out..."

Let those who thirst find me in one another, and there you will find the kingdom of God, right at hand. Please, turn to your neighbor and say, Amen!