## Hosanna!: Congregational Prayer Experiment Gospel is Focus, Gospel is Abundance August 2022 / Jo Ann Kunz

John 10:10... I have come that they may have life, and have it abundantly.

**Philippians 4:6-8...** Do not worry [don't let your mind be divided by anxious thoughts] about anything, but **pray** and ask God for everything you need [make your requests known toward/between you and God], always giving thanks. And God's peace, which is so great we cannot understand it [because it transcends/surpasses all comprehension], will keep [guard] your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

[Now then] Brothers and sisters, think about [focus your thoughts on; fill your minds with] things that are true and honorable and right/just and pure and beautiful [lovely] and respected [commendable]. If there is anything that is good [morally excellent] and worthy of praise, think about [focus your thoughts on; fill your minds with] these things.

**Luke 12:22-31...** I say to you, **do not worry** [same word as in Philippians... don't be distracted by anxious thoughts] about your life, what you are going to eat. Do not worry about your body, what you are going to wear. Life is worth more than food. The body is worth more than clothes. Look at the birds. They do not plant seeds. They do not gather grain.... Yet God feeds them. Are you not worth more than the birds?

... Think how the flowers grow. They do not work or make cloth. Yet, I tell you, that King Solomon in all his greatness was not dressed as well as one of these flowers. God puts these clothes on the grass of the field which is in the field today and put into the fire tomorrow. How much more is He clothing you of little faith? **Do not give so much thought** to what you will eat or drink. **Do not be worried** about it. For all the nations of the world go after [intensely crave, demand] these things and your Father knows you need these things. Instead, go after the holy nation of God [give yourself wholly to worshipping and knowing God/focus fully on living in God's kingdom]. Then all these other things will be given to you.

Here is a synopsis of the spiritual practice I created during my sabbatical time... and messily described in my message this past Sunday. I invite you to follow my pattern... or adapt it... or create a prayer pattern of your own to help you to re-focus your thoughts/mind away from old, negative thought patterns which prevent you from experiencing the fullness of abundant life in Christ... and to set new, life-giving thought patterns into your thinking which will allow you to more fully experience abundant life in Christ.

Of course, this is not magic. And it will never be perfect. But it is a way of cooperating with the way God has created our brains to re-wire themselves in response to new experiences/thoughts/feelings (neuroplasticity). It will take time and is something we will need to continue throughout our lives. Yet, the more we remained focused on what is true, honorable, right/just, pure, beautiful, loving and lovely, admirable, good, worthy of praise... and the God who is all of those things and more!... the more our brains will rewire themselves in response. The old, negative neural pathways will begin to lose power... and the new, life-giving neural pathways will increase. And, before long, there will be a "tipping point" where we will find that our new normal thought patterns are more positive... peace is present even in hard circumstances... and joy grounds us deep down inside, even though our feelings may come and go.

We are inviting you to participate with us in this prayer experiment between now and Labor Day. We're not looking for anything in particular. There is no way to do this wrong! We just want to see what may shift if we simply pray the scriptures together... trusting the Trinity to do what only they can do... and understanding that the process might be fully of messy grace. It's an experiment... and there is no way to fail.

## A Way to Pray (Adapt as is Best for You!)

- Ask God to help you become aware of your thought/behavior patterns.
- When you notice (and you will) that you are thinking/behaving in some way that is negative... STOP
  for a moment and be aware of what you are telling yourself... what you are believing in that
  moment.
- Don't condemn yourself. Don't try to fix anything. Just notice it.
- Continue doing this until you get a sense of what the pattern is... what is the "story" or set of assumptions/expectations underlying this old story (such as: old programming from childhood, a painful experience, "bad" theology, fear, shame, etc.). I noticed that although I knew in my head that I didn't have to be perfect... and have experienced LOTS of freedom from perfectionism... there were still layers of "un-truth" there causing lots of "un-freedom" in my relationship with God, myself, and others. I saw this because I caught myself saying things like "I'm a screw-up!" "Why can't I ever do anything right?" And there was the tension between what I know in my head, but not fully in my experience.
- Don't try to fix it yourself! Don't try to make the tension go away! Be gentle with yourself. Let
  yourself feel what you are feeling... and show it to God, asking for what you need. You might not
  know what you need. That's okay! Ask God to show you what God knows about this... what God
  thinks/feels about you... and for God's grace to keep you aware so you can cooperate with God's
  grace.
- And then live your life! When you notice that you are on "auto-pilot," caught in an old, negative
  pattern... don't fight it! Don't criticize yourself! Don't give it any power! Just see it... and then "lean"
  gently into what is truly true and really real about you and God.
- It helps to be prepared with some truth statements about who you really are, so that you don't have to feel anxious in the moment. We know these times will happen... so creating simple statements of truth about who you are in Christ can allow you to simply refocus... feel deeply the presence of God and the positive emotions this truth evokes in you... and move on!
- Create your I am statements based in scripture... and aligned with your old negative patterns. For
  example: If you struggle with thinking/feeling that you are not enough, you might think: "On my own
  I am not enough (this is true!) YET in God's grace is more than enough for me. When I am weak, I am
  strong in Christ."

Or, if you are afraid that you will not have enough, you might think: "I feel afraid YET I am secure. God is providing for all my needs according to His glorious riches in Christ Jesus."

Or if you feel unloved or abandoned, you might think: "I feel unloved YET I am loved with an everlasting love... and nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate me from the love of God that in Christ Jesus my Lord."

Or if you feel like the worst sinner, you might think: "I feel like such a sinner YET I am the righteousness of God in Christ!"

You get the idea! This is very important... repeating the words isn't the point. Focusing on the reality they describe... and allowing yourself to feel that reality... even if only for a moment at a time... that's the point. Because that is what, over time, allows you to cooperate with the Spirit's ongoing process of transformation.

- You don't have to wait until you catch yourself in the tension to say what is true about yourself. Consider beginning each day by prayerfully remembering who you are in Christ.
- And, since Philippians 4 says to practice this refocusing prayer with thanks... you could end each day by briefly looking back with the Holy Spirit... and jotting down at least 3 things you are grateful for. Just bullet points. Not repeating things too often (We're always grateful for Jesus! Jot down a few things unique to that day. (2))

And that's it! Simple, really... though not always easy. I can't explain to you how all of this works, I can only assure you that it does. I can't guarantee that things will change miraculously in a very short time (it might take quite some time), or that they will ever be perfect (never will happen on this side of eternity). BUT, I can tell you from my own experience that God will work all of this together with everything else in our lives... and will reveal more and more to us of what is already true, good, and abundant in this amazing life we have been given in Christ.

Let's keep the conversation going... and encourage one another... and most of all, let just stay present in the prayer process... and trust God to do all that is needed, and more.