

Prayers of the People – December 16, 2018

I was asked to lead in the ‘Prayers of the People’ for the worship service at Winfield United Church, on Sunday, December 16, 2018. I decided to use a revised Advent liturgy from the Prayer Group at Trinity United Church in Vernon. That Prayer Group meets every Thursday afternoon, follows a liturgy which changes with each liturgical season, and then goes through a list of people that they pray for. That list is generated from prayer requests from the Sunday morning worship at Trinity, plus requests for prayers that are made directly to the group by friends and acquaintances, or through friends and acquaintances. Sometimes, the people we pray for are known to us – sometimes they are merely names, with perhaps an explanation of the reason the prayer request is being made. Some people are on the list of a few weeks – others have been on it for years. I have been a member of that group for about 20 years.

Obviously, I believe in the power of prayer. But when we pray, I don’t believe we are praying to some ‘being’ out there – some ‘God’ that will answer our prayers if we ask nicely, and heal the person we are praying for. Frankly, I think it is obscene to think that some being could always intercede to heal and make whole, but won’t do it unless asked – or pleaded with – or bargained with.

First of all, as the following prayer suggests, we don’t always know exactly what we should be praying. Perhaps we should be praying that the person be cured of their ills, and made whole and healthy once more. But it could be that what the person wants or needs is death, as a release from what they are dealing with. That can bring its own healing and wholeness. And so, we pray for. And so we pray “that our prayers for them may be answered, as is best for those for whom we pray”.

And then, I believe it has been the witness of our faith has always been about healing and wholeness. We believe that to be aim and focus of the universe. So why wouldn’t we believe that God is about healing and wholeness, without being asked?

And the creation is witness to the same truth. When our bodies are attacked by some illness or calamity, they immediately set about healing themselves. When a river is polluted,, and becomes lifeless because of the pollution, it immediately sets about cleansing itself. Sometime, in ourselves, and in nature, the attack is too devastating, and overwhelms us, but the focus – the natural action of the creation – is to heal itself, and become whole once more.

So, I don’t believe we have to pray for that healing to happen. I believe we have to hold ourselves, and the person we are praying for, open to the healing process of the creation. In the prayer group, when I hear the name of the person mentioned, I try to focus my mind on that name, and hold that person in my spiritual arms, praying that they will find and receive, whatever they need to find the healing and wholeness they seek.

I really believe in the power of that kind of prayer. People we have been praying for, have told us that they feel a great source of power and strength, in knowing that there are a group of people who are continually holding them in prayer and love. Science has shown that people in hospital who are prayed for, have a statistically higher chance of getting well, than those who are not prayed for, even when they don’t know someone is praying for them. And it isn’t just some sort of psycho-somatic influence – quantum physics says that when a butterfly flaps its wings, it changes something in another part of the universe, and I believe that happens when we

pray.

Prayers of the People

We gather our prayers together, and seek the strength of the Source of all love and power:

Where relationships are full of stress, and unkind words shatter the Spirit,

We pray for reconciliation and renewal

When the load seems too heavy and our backs are tight with pressure,

We remember that there are those who are willing to help us bear the load, so that the yoke will be easy, the burden no more than we can bear.

When change comes too fast and too painfully, and our lives are all in pieces,

We pray for the courage and strength to shape ourselves anew, out of the fragments.

We turn our prayer to others, for whom change is coming too fast to cope with – whose courage and strength might be failing them at this time.

We gather to pray for one another, even when we do not know what to pray for them – only that they are in need. We ask for infinite wisdom and compassion, that our prayers for them may be answered, as is best for those for whom we pray.

We also pray for healing in our world.

May factions that divide, grow to understand one another, and to seek the good of all.

We pray for peacemakers

We seek wisdom for all those who labour for peace, however that labour is expressed, and whatever peace they strive for.

We pray for the wounded places of our world.

(here we pray for places around the world where there is suffering and loss – we call out our concerns as they come to us)

We end our time of prayer with a petition for this season of waiting

God- presence, we pray for your people as they seek justice and peace, healing and wholeness. Source of love and power, you are the healer who was made known at Christmas, in Jesus Christ. We know you are come again, when people are healed and the poor hear Good News. Be known among us in healing power, for we pray in the name of Jesus Christ, who is always present, when we pray in need, and out of hope. AMEN