

04.28.21 – A Weekly Word for Covenant Church

Title: “Surprised by Prayer”

Scripture Reading: Acts 12:1-19

Reflection: Pastor Henry

As many of you know, before coming to be a pastor at Covenant Church, Amy and I were pastors at Monroe Community Church in downtown Grand Rapids. Monroe Community was church plant. Starting a new church requires all kinds of different people, ministry partners, and the work of the Holy Spirit. Covenant Church was one of MCC’s many faithful ministry partners.

Since we didn’t have an evening worship gathering at MCC, some of our ministry partners would invite us to come, lead and preach at one of their evening worship gatherings and take time to report about what was happening at MCC. One time when one of our ministry partners invited me to lead their evening service, I asked if they would be open to our worship team coming along as well to lead the singing. Doing so, I mentioned, would allow our ministry partner congregation to experience a different style of worship and meet some of the people who were involved at MCC. They graciously said yes. So, when the time came, our ragamuffin team headed off to worship with this traditional, formal ministry partner congregation.

Soon after the service began, while the worship team was playing and leading us in singing some songs together, a man from the congregation walked up to where I was standing and singing all alone in the front pew and handed me a piece of folded paper. After completing his delivery, he then walked away as quickly as he appeared.

What would you have done if this happened to you? Here is what I did. I stopped singing, I sat down, I unfolded the piece of paper, and I read the note. This is what is said: “During your congregational prayer, please pray for Bob (not his real name) who is having surgery to remove a tumor later this week.” This note presented me with a little problem. Why? Because, we didn’t have a typical “congregational prayer” planned for our worship gathering that evening. What to do? What to do? The worship team was almost finished singing their last song. What to do? What to do? The worship team and congregation just finished singing and were now joining me in sitting back down in their seats. What to do? What to do?

So...I stood up and said what everyone just witnessed while we were singing. “I was just handed a note asking me to pray for Bob who is going to have surgery this coming week to remove a tumor.” Then I did what we often did at MCC. I asked, “Is Bob here with us tonight?” As soon as I asked this, people started to all turn in the same direction and a hand slowly started to go up. It was Bob’s hand. And even if Bob didn’t raise his hand, you could follow the eyes of everyone else and figure out who Bob was. 😊

My intention was to invite people to circle around Bob, who was wearing his navy blue three piece suit, lay hands on him, and pray for Bob right then and there. This was how we often prayed for people at MCC. The only problem with this plan was that Bob was sitting in the very middle of the longest pew that I had ever seen in my life. I bet it was 50 feet long and he was in the middle with quite a few people sitting on either side of him. There was not going to be an easy way for Bob to get out or for people to get to Bob to circle around him, lay hands on him, and pray for him this way without people having to climb over people. Even so, I sill invited everyone to circle around Bob as we spent time praying for him.

Since we did this regularly at MCC, the worship team knew what to do. They immediately left their seats on the side of the sanctuary and started making their way over to Bob, climbing over pews and people along the way. Following their lead, a number of others sitting nearby Bob joined them in forming a circle around him, laying hands on him or the person in front of them. In a short amount of time, Bob was encircled in prayer. Many joined in praying boldly and fervently, interceding before God for Bob and his upcoming surgery. After we finished praying, we made our way back to our seats and preceded with our worship time together.

Two days later, on Tuesday, I received a voicemail at MCC from Bev (not her real name), Bob's wife. Her voice on the message sounded distraught to me. Her message was short and to the point. All she said was this, "Call me back as soon as you can about Bob." When I initially heard the message, my heart dropped. I thought to myself, "Oh No. What happened to Bob?" Given the sound and urgency in her voice, I assumed the worst. So, I said a prayer to God and gave Bev a call.

When Bev answered my call, she said: "You will never guess what happened. They were prepping Bob for surgery and decided to do one more preparatory x-ray before going in to remove the tumor from his abdomen. And when they got the x-ray back, they couldn't find the tumor. The new x-ray showed that the tumor was gone. The doctor had both pictures, the one from a few weeks ago showing the tumor and then the one they just took, up on the light as he was telling us this news. He (the doctor) couldn't make sense of it. The tumor was there in the one picture and now it was gone in the one they just took. He was at a loss for how to explain what had happened. He had never seen anything like it. So, I told him I knew what happened. I told him about the prayer time this past Sunday night and how we prayed for Bob. I told him that God took the tumor away and healed Bob. The doctors didn't know what to do, so they just sent him home. No surgery was needed. I wanted you to know this."

This story and our story for this week in Acts 12:1-19 are fascinating stories...and they leave me with all kinds of questions.

Why was James killed, but Peter was spared and freed from the government oppression of the early church?

Why was Bob's tumor taken away and while other people's tumors remain?

What do you make of Peter's story? Bob and Bev's story?

I don't have all the answers to these questions. But I do know that God does hear and use the prayers of his people to further his kingdom here on earth. God used the prayers of a rag-tag team of both new believers as well as some seasoned ones who were willing to move outside of their comfort zone in this formal church setting to perform a miracle in the life of someone they prayed for.

Prayer:

God, help us to be quick and ready to pray whenever, wherever, and with whomever. Help us to pray boldly, fervently, audaciously, and persistently. Help us anticipate and recognize your answers to our prayers. AMEN.

Action Item for the Day/Week:

Look for 3 opportunities between now and the end of this week where you can pray with and for other people. Be open to the possibility that these opportunities may be in situations or settings that you might not typically

consider. Instead of walking past them, step into them and pray. Take note of what happens each time you do this.

Songs for today:

[What A Friend We Have In Jesus](#)

[Lord Listen to Your Children Praying](#)