

SERMON
 First Lutheran Church
 Aitkin, Minnesota

Mark 13:1-8
 Rev. Darrell J. Pedersen
 November 18, 2012

KIDS' MESSAGE

Kids, a famous writer named **Anne Lamott** has just written a book entitled, "**Help, Thanks, Wow: The Three Essential Prayers.**" In her book she tells us that her parents didn't believe in God. Whenever she went to other people's houses, she looked forward to hearing them pray at meal time. Her family didn't stop to thank God at meal times, but she wanted to, even from when she was a little girl. Now all these years later, she and her sister and brother are all Christians, all believe in Jesus, all pray thank you to God when they eat. (Nov. 11, 2012 Brainerd Dispatch People insert)

From the time when Anne Lamott was little, she believed that if families said grace, they were happier. When we remember that every good thing we have comes from God, I believe that we are happier too. Anne teaches in her book that there are three different kinds of prayers that are very important for us to pray. They are **help**, **thanks** and **wow**. Let's think about those three kinds of prayer a little.

1. **Help** – What kinds of things can we ask God to **help** us with?
 - a. Hungry
 - b. Lonely
 - c. Afraid
 - d. Decisions
 - e. Sick
 - f. Sad
 - g. **Other???**
2. **Thanks** – What kinds of things can we be thankful to God for?
 - a. Food
 - b. Friends and Family
 - c. God's protection
 - d. Guidance
 - e. Healing
 - f. Joy
 - g. **Other???**
3. **Wow** – What kind of a prayer is a "**wow**" prayer? I think that it is the kind of prayer that just tells God **how wonderful and amazing** God (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) is. What are some of the wonderful things about God?
 - a. Loving
 - b. Forgiving
 - c. Compassionate
 - d. Giving
 - e. Creative
 - f. Faithful
 - g. Patient
 - h. Wise
 - i. **Other???**

Kids, what holiday are we celebrating this week? **Thanksgiving** would be a good time to pray – **help, thanks, wow!** **Every day** would be a good time to pray – **help, thanks, wow!** God loves it when we pray. Amen.

ADULT MESSAGE

Jesus was in the last few days with his disciples prior to his crucifixion. As they came out of the temple, one of his followers commented about how **awesome the temple buildings were**. Jesus' response was that these fine, stone buildings would all be torn down. A little later his inside circle of disciples, Peter, James, John and Andrew asked Jesus **when** the temple would fall and what **warning signs** there might be prior to the event.

Jesus then lapsed into a warning that they **not be misled** by people who try to tell them that they have the answer to **when** the last day will be. And don't be **misled** by people who **claim to be the returning Messiah**. Jesus says the end of the temple and of history will be preceded by **wars, natural disasters and famines**. Jesus spoke these words to them when he was about thirty. The Gospel of Mark recorded them about twenty years later. Another twenty years and the temple in Jerusalem and most of the city would be lying in ruins at the hands of the Romans.

As those early Christians, badly persecuted by the Jews and the Romans, **read Mark's words**, they were probably expecting Jesus to return any day. When that **temple was literally destroyed** twenty years later, they must have been convinced that now is the time for Christ's return.

Wars, natural disasters, famines – we have these going on right now! **Wars** - Palestine is ready to boil over and suck in the involvement of the whole rest of the world. Syria is close to the same. What about Somalia? We still fight in Afghanistan. **Natural disasters** – Hurricane Sandy shut down the political and economic centers of our nation. Climate change is increasing in its effects across the globe. One garbage man in New York City said, **"If walls could talk they'd be crying out over all of the baptism pictures, wedding pictures and other personal memories that are being hauled off to the dump."** **Famines** - countries all over Africa are wracked by drought and famine. The numbers of poor and homeless in the richest country in the world continue to climb...

Jesus didn't come again when the **temple in Jerusalem was destroyed**. He didn't come again when our nation was ripped by the **Civil War**. He didn't come again when the Jews were killed in the Holocaust. He didn't come again when the **atom bomb** went off in Hiroshima. When will Jesus come again? What ancient word echoes down to us from Jesus' lips two

thousand years ago? **Don't focus on threats** of trouble, destruction and death. **Focus on God**. If those early Christians wouldn't have kept their focus on God, we wouldn't be here today. They would have given up the faith.

We witness our own personal times of trouble and fear. **Huge college loans** need to be paid off and well-paying jobs are scarce. **Pension plans** are rapidly being depleted. **Family relationships** are strained. The **American safety net** is fraying. We live in an **angry, fearful world**.

On several occasions I have sat in **county court rooms** with parishioners in need of support as they faced the consequences of life mistakes. During my most recent visit to the **Beltrami County Court** I witnessed the following. The court room was packed, fifty or so. Ninety percent of them were less than forty years old. Three quarters were Native Americans. All were facing jail or prison time. Almost all of their offenses were somehow connected to alcohol or drug abuse. In addition to the people who sat in the court room, prisoners were shuttled in one by one. I believe that I witnessed at least 30 cases which came before the judge. Many were repeat offenders.

As I sat there listening, it occurred to me that most of these young people were facing perhaps the **darkest moments** in their lives. Many seemed to have **no one present to support** them. I suspect that most of them have **little clue that God stands by their side**. I suspect that most of them have **no notion of praying** for God's help and guidance. I bet that most of them think that the **world is all about taking care of themselves – eat, drink and be merry** - that's all they have for purpose, hope or life. The prisoners shuffled in with **chains on their ankles** and, I am sure, with chains on their **hearts and minds**. Many of them probably think that they are **all alone in their dark hour**... The word that we have to share with them is **not about religion or morality**. The best word that we have to share with them is **about the hope, life and joy** that God longs to bless them with.

I sat at **Uncle Dick's funeral** this past Wednesday. I was in the back of the mortuary and was able to see many people ahead of me. Some of them, my relatives, I knew to be people of faith. Others I observed did not recite the Apostle's Creed or participate in the liturgy. I wondered what was going on in their heads. **Is this religion business just for the old**

and weak?” “Is Christianity just a hoax used to get people’s money?” “Is there a Jesus?” “Dick died. Is that all there is?” “What will happen to me when I die?”

All of us will **likely** sooner or later face our own dark days. All of us will **surely** sooner or later face our own death. Jesus said; **don’t focus on the threats and trouble**. Jesus said, **focus on God**. Jesus said, **“When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed; this must take place, but the end is still to come. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. This is but the beginning of the birth pangs.”**

Did you catch that? “Birth pangs” - Did you hear Jesus saying that all the turmoil and tumult in the world are **carrying us forward to a better day?** Jesus didn’t say that these things are the beginning of the **world’s destruction**. Jesus said that all these troubles are **pointing forward** to the **birth of God’s New Day!** God makes it possible for **light** to appear on the darkest horizon. God makes it possible for **hope** to be born out of the midst of the trouble and turmoil in our lives. God can embrace us with **joy** even in our lowest hour. Jesus says **God is in control** of our world and that God’s **life-giving plan is unfolding** for us despite all appearances to the contrary. We don’t have to wonder when Jesus will come again because Jesus is right here with us today!

I mentioned **Hurricane Sandy**. Did you hear the story of the **baby rescue** in New York City? The hospital basement was flooded, the power was out, and the generators had failed. Nineteen critically ill infants needed to be evacuated into the heart of the hurricane and on to another hospital. Nurse **Margot Condon** held one of the babies, two pounds, and eight hours old. Condon said that the feeling of purpose, that they were doing something bigger than themselves, was tangible. **“Everyone was just focused on keeping the babies safe, on getting them out in a calm manner – the positive intention, it was so strong. It just... carried us.”**

“Amid the unimaginable panic surrounding her, Margot Condon – holding him- is a picture of calm.” **“It’s time to go,”** and there was no turning back. Save for volunteer’s flashlights, the stairwell was dark. Six doctors and nurses juggled the infant boy’s life-sustaining equipment (breathing tube, feeding tube, central line, IV, and heart monitor.) **“He couldn’t breathe for**

himself. We had to breathe for him,” Condon explains. Did you see the picture? Nurse Condon rode on a stretcher with the tiny little baby held closely to her chest, her face pressed closely to his. On the other side of a dark and stormy night, the new hospital awaited and the little one made it. Thanks be to God! And to God’s people. (Newsweek, 11/ 12/ 2012, p. 18)

Can you picture that little baby embraced in the nurse’s arms? Look again. That is just a little glimpse of you and of your precious little ones embraced in the arms of God. **Don’t focus on the hurricanes,** wars and sickness. **Focus on the One who loves and carries us** through all of these and even through our own death.

If you and I can **trust God even just a little bit** with our own lives and well-being, then we will be **set free to help save the babies,** to give support and hope to the **shackled young people** and to **live our lives reflecting the love and joy of our faithful God.** We don’t have to worry about the last day. The last day is in the hands of our amazing God. We are in the hands of our amazing God.

So, it is stewardship time at First Lutheran Church in Aitkin, Minnesota. **What does God ask of God’s people, of us?** God asks that we trust God to love and care for us, no matter what. God then sets us free to love and care for the neighbor and creation around us, no matter what. That’s what stewardship is – how we use, care for and share all that God has given to us. It’s stewardship time and together as sisters and brothers in Christ, we continue to pray:

- **Help** us God...
- **Thank** you God...
- **Wow** what an amazing God you are - **now and forever.** Amen.

