**LENT 3 Prayer.**

Today, the third in our Lenten series on the spiritual disciplines, we’re looking at the topic of prayer.

Preparing today’s sermon was good for me – because I needed some inspiration about prayer myself. I’ve been praying for two weeks for my son Joel’s friend Nathan Clarke, who simply disappeared two weeks ago. They still haven’t found him. I feel so much for his parents, and for his fiancé Lisa. It can be hard to keep praying into what seems like an abyss.

I’d already nearly finished my sermon for today when I came across a message on the web written by a Dr Charles Stanley on prayer that moves mountains.

It so caught my attention, that I put aside what I’d prepared and decided to share some of his thoughts with you. We all have mountains in our lives at times that we’d love to move! What I have to say isn’t Dr Stanley’s sermon as such, but it follows his outline. I hope you’ll be as encouraged as I was.

In our Gospel reading this morning, Jesus said to his disciples,

 “ I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you."

Often when we face obstacles in our lives, our first response is to be rational - a mindset that comes from our culture. We look at the problem, and say “That’s a big one. It’s too hard. Nothing can be done.” Our response is often the same, whether we are looking at a personal mountain, or a mountain of global proportions.

But Jesus said to his disciples that with faith as small as a mustard seed, we can *move* mountains.

So what is it that we need to move mountains? (faith)

**THE PRAYER OF FAITH**

**The type of praying that moves mountains is the prayer of faith**. Listen to some of these verses – I’m sure we know them all….

* (John 14:14). “If you ask anything in My name, I will do it”
* (Mark 9:23). “…everything is possible for him who believes”
* (1 John 5:14-15). This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him.

If we believe, as the Scriptures tell us, that Jesus is the same, yesterday, today and forever, then we can believe that God is just as much in the mountain-moving business today as He was 2,000 or 4,000 years ago!

What we need to do is be willing to trust Him, willing to get out on a limb and believe that God can and will intervene in any and every human circumstance. And if there is no faith – then we need to pray for the gift of that faith!

**FOCUS ON GOD, NOT THE MOUNTAIN**

**A second characteristic of mountain moving prayer is that it needs focus on God and not on the mountain.**

One of our difficulties in praying is that we get caught up in the problem.

There’s a story in 2 Chronicles which is a great model for us. King Jehoshaphat heard that his enemy was approaching. What did he do? He didn’t look at the approaching army and go into a panic. He called a national fast, fell on his face before the Lord and cried to Him for rescue and protection. He began: "O Lord, God of our fathers, are you not the God who is in heaven? You rule over all the kingdoms of the nations. Power and might are in your hand, and no one can withstand you.”

Jehoshapat didn’t focus on the problem. He began to pray a prayer that focused completely on God. And the next day the Scripture says, he went out to meet the enemy. And get this - He went out with his choir out in front of his army singing their way to victory.

Jehoshaphat knew that the secret to victory was not to focus on his particular mountain – the approaching enemy - but upon the God who moves the mountains.

**FAITHFUL PRAYING**

**A third characteristic of prayer that moves mountains is that it needs to be faithful praying.**

How easy it is to begin praying for a situation fervently, but then to run out of steam. Another legacy of our culture is that we are so tuned to the instant. Unless we have instant gratification – even in praying – it’s hard to hang in there. That has been my problem praying for Nathan to be found. It’s so easy to lose heart when there’s no answer in sight.

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Jesus told a parable about a widow and an unjust judge, and the whole point of that parable was to illustrate that we need to pray and *not give up*. There are times when we need to be faithful and keep praying, regardless of whether an answer is in sight.

God honours faithful prayer.

**FEARLESS PRAYING**

**A fourth characteristic of mountain-moving prayer is it needs to be fearless praying.**

If we’re going to see the power of God at work in our government, or our council, or in our neighbourhood; if we’re going to see people come to faith and our congregations grow – these things can only happen as God intervenes.

And if God is to intervene, it will be in response to his people’s prayers. Fearless, confident prayer that God will send his spirit upon our nation and our towns – and our churches! Charles Wesley once said that “God does nothing, but in answer to prayer.”

God is far more willing to answer prayer than we are to ask Him. He doesn’t want us to approach Him hesitatingly, as if we were beggars, or as if we were unworthy, but with confidence and boldness. We aren’t coming in our own righteousness, but through the cleansing blood of Jesus.

Let me quote directly from Charles Stanley here. He says,

“Little puny prayers that we lift up while hopping out of bed or driving down the expressway in the morning won’t get the job done. God is not going to change a life or change a nation with that kind of praying. I know the excuse people give: “You can pray anywhere.” Sure you can, but you won’t move mountains by praying on the expressway! The kind of prayer that approaches God is one expecting Him to do something and not giving up until it happens.

How many times have you said to God, “Lord, here’s what You said You’d do. I am not giving up until You do it. I’ll keep sending it back up to You until the answer comes pouring out of heaven, just like I ask.” That’s fearless praying!”

Go Charles Stanley!

**PRAYER THAT IS A BURDEN FROM GOD**

**Another characteristic of mountain moving prayer is that it results from a specific burden from God.**

Most of us have no problem praying fervently when something critical directly affects our own heart – say when someone we love is suffering, or their life hangs in the balance – but to share God’s heart does not come as easily. We need to invite him to do that, and then sit quietly in his presence and allow him to share his heart with us. It’s when our heart is feeling the weight of God’s heart that our prayer becomes impassioned.

When we begin to feel what God feels, it will absolutely transform our prayer life. It will no longer be light little perfunctory prayers at bedtime, when you spend just two or three minutes with God. It will be the kind of prayer that drives us to our knees, maybe prostrate on the floor before God as we plead with Him to do something we’re are unable to do.

It is passionate, fervent and heartfelt prayer from God’s own heart that moves mountains!

**PRAYER WITH FASTING**

**Another aspect of mountain moving prayer is fasting.**

In our Gospel reading this morning Jesus says “this kind (of demon) does not go out except by prayer and fasting.”

What is it about fasting that gives power to our prayers? We’ll have a look at fasting in a bit more detail in our Lenten study groups, but briefly – fasting declares that our devotion to God is more important than satisfying our bodily needs. It’s being willing to engage in physical sacrifice to underline our prayers. Fasting should never be an attempt to manipulate God – he will see right through that of course – but fasting can be a way for us to emphasise our devotion to God, and underline the fervency of our prayer.

A story Charles Stanley’s sermon. He says:

I remember back in 1957 while I was a student in school at Ft. Worth, Texas. I was in a corner of my living room and had been praying for quite some time when I felt God say something to me I have never forgotten. I had been talking to God about what I wanted to do with my life, and I felt Him saying to me, “Charles, whatever you accomplish in your life you will accomplish only on your knees.” As I look back on my life, I see the times when I have gotten up, and nothing happened. But as long as I stayed down, God has done some tremendous things.

**PRAYER IS GOD’S PRICE FOR SUPERNATURAL POWER**

Time and again as we pray, we’ll discover that God releases his power when we pray with faith, focusing on God and not the mountain; and praying faithfully, fearlessly and fervently, reflecting the very heart of God.

That’s when his supernatural power will be released and mountains will be moved.

In our parish, many of us work hard at thinking of ways to reach out to our community. Over the last year, we’ve engaged Anita to work with youth and families; we’ve started a contemporary service; we’ve begun two mums and toddlers groups and we’re about to launch into an Alpha course.

All these are wonderful initiatives – but unless they’re backed up by mountain moving prayer from our people, nothing will happen! We’ll just be busy. If we want to see people come to faith; if we want to see lives transformed; if we want to see our churches grow – then we need some mountain moving prayer!

Let’s pray now…