

August 10, 2014
Pentecost 9

"The Holy Spirit Intercedes for Us"

ROMANS 8:26,27

In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. ²⁷ And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will.

Last week we had the opportunity to spend some time with Norm Larson when he came to visit us here at Star. Twice Norm told us he was having a hard time praying for our country because he was overwhelmed by the changes he has seen in the ninety plus years of his life here on this earth. But then he referred to these words we just read to you from Romans 8 about the Holy Spirit interceding for us. How comforted he was to know and believe that when we are overwhelmed by our circumstances in life and find it difficult to pray as we should, the Holy Spirit steps in and intercedes for us. The Holy Spirit offers prayers for us that words cannot express.

There are so many times that we stumble in our prayers. We just don't pray as we should. But then the Holy Spirit steps in to help us. Just as we cannot fully comprehend how many angels are in this room rejoicing with us as we worship, we are not able to see and comprehend how often the Holy Spirit steps in and helps us with our prayers. Jesus said the Holy Spirit is our Comforter or Counselor who teaches us all things and brings everything into our memory. This morning we want the Holy Spirit to teach us and help us remember how often he intercedes for us when we find difficulty in knowing what to pray.

We need the Holy Spirit to intercede for us

We need the Holy Spirit to intercede for us because of our weakness in prayer. "In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Holy Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express." Last week we heard how the Holy Spirit helps us see that the problems of this life are small compared to the blessings that will someday be ours in the place Jesus is preparing for us. Here it says the Holy Spirit helps us in another way. The Holy Spirit actively intercedes for us when our prayers are weak and feeble and even half hearted.

How true it is that we do not know what we ought to pray for. There are moments in life when we become so overwhelmed by our troubles and difficulties that we find it hard to pray. One man told me that it was so hard to pray when his daughter was dying from cancer. All he could pray were the simple words, "Lord help me!" over and over again. During times of extreme pain, the only words that come from you are moans and groans and deep sighs. Severe pain makes it hard for us to even concentrate our thoughts and prayers to our loving heavenly Father.

There are other situations in life that can keep us from praying as we want to pray. There may be times when our minds are not what they should be. Perhaps it is some prescription drug that affects your ability to think clearly. It may be that there are hormonal or chemical imbalances in your system. Feelings of depression, anxiety and fear build up and make it hard to pray as you want to pray. There are the waning years of life when poor circulation or loss of brain cells make it hard to think and remember. What a comfort it is to know the Holy Spirit helps us pray during such moments of life.

Once a month I do a Bible lesson and hymn singing for the people in the Santa Maria Care Center on Cook Street. Most of the people in the room don't seem to be tracking very well when we sing a hymn or have a Bible lesson. But then it comes time to pray the Lord's Prayer. It is amazing how suddenly they seem to come to life and join in praying.

It is not just in the waning years of life that we need the Holy Spirit to help us in our prayers. Think of how the pressures from a job, the problems in the family, or even endless hours spent on the internet or smart phone can keep us from simply talking to our God at the level we desperately need. How often we spend so much time worrying about ourselves and thinking about ourselves and indulging ourselves that we forget about our God and the depth of his love for us and the privilege we have in prayer.

Oh, how our heavenly Father longs to have us come to him in prayer over and over again. In my personal devotions this past week I have been reading from the gospel of John. In John 16 Jesus said, "In that day you will no longer ask me anything. I tell you the truth, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name." We just sang these words in the hymn: "You are coming to a king, Large petitions with you bring. For his grace and power are such, None can ever ask too much." The opportunities for help from the Lord with all our tasks of life are there for us 24/7 and they are endless. We need the Holy Spirit to help us remember to pray and also help us when our prayers are weak.

We need to talk about another weakness we have that keeps our prayers from flowing to our heavenly Father as they should. Remember what we heard from Romans 7 a few weeks ago. "For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do- this I keep on doing." Because we lose this battle we live in guilt and shame for not living up to what we want to do in our love for our Savior. David spoke about watering his couch with his tears. We are in desperate need of Jesus to intercede for us and forgive us for losing the battles with sin. The prayers that come from these low moments in life are in desperate need of the Holy Spirit to help us and intercede for us. David prayed in Psalm 51, "Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me."

We have the Holy Spirit to intercede for us

What a privilege it is to know the Holy Spirit is right there praying for us when we are weak. "In the same way the Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness." The Greek word for help has the thought of taking hold of someone as you walk alongside of them and being in their place. In Luke 10 we see this word use to describe how Martha wanted her sister Mary to come alongside of her and give her a hand in getting a meal ready for Jesus and his disciples. If you need to move a piece a furniture you can slide it along the floor and

risk scratching the wood flooring. How much better if two people lift up the furniture and move it carefully. The Holy Spirit is there to help you in your prayers. Yes, the Holy Spirit is even there to do the heavy lifting in your prayers.

The Holy Spirit helps us by interceding for us. The thought in this word is just being there for someone in their place. Later in this chapter of Romans we are told that Jesus is at the right hand of God making intercession for us just as he did at the cross when he prayed, "Father forgive them for they do not know what they are doing." Here it says the Holy Spirit intercedes for us with groans that cannot be expressed. The Holy Spirit is right there with you as our Comforter or Helper to hear the groans and sighs that don't even reach the level of "Lord help me." He takes these groans and sighs that are actually created in us by the Holy Spirit and intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express.

A Peanuts cartoon once appeared in the Sunday paper that showed Charlie Brown watching TV and letting out a big sigh. Lucy says, "Romans 8:26." and Charlie says, "What do you mean?" She responds, Romans 8:26, "But the Holy Spirit intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express."

Surely the Heavenly Father, and our Lord and Savior Jesus, and the Holy Spirit know every word and every thought that comes into our minds. "And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for us the saints in accordance with God's will." Perhaps the groan or sigh did not say much. The Holy Spirit knows what is behind that deep groan and that deep sigh. The prayer that is so humble and so weak is taken by the Holy Spirit and presented to our heavenly Father in accordance with his will. As one man said rather humbly when talking about his weakness in expressing his faith and even his prayers, "The Lord knows my heart."

How true are the words of Psalm 139 that say, "O Lord, you have searched me and you know me. You know when I set and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down, you are familiar with all my ways." God knows my heart. He sees things about me that others cannot see. He sees the depth of my sin and the evil of my heart. That is why our my God sent his Son Jesus to die for me. He washes us clean through the blood of his Son. He remembers our sin no more. He drowns them in the depths of the sea. Deep within this heart of mine arise the prayer, "God be merciful to me a sinner." Now the sighs and groans and yearnings and longings come to my heavenly Father through Jesus. The Holy Spirit takes these thoughts and prayers, cleansed by Jesus blood, and presents them to our heavenly Father according to his will.

During our low moments in life when our prayers seem so weak and feeble. Satan loves to attack and accuse us. He shames us and belittles us and cackles at us with laughter for our weak and feeble prayers. He suggests our heavenly could never hear a prayer like yours or mine. But then, the Holy Spirit helps us. He comforts us. He takes us to the cross and shows us we are forgiven and we have peace with God and as Romans 5 says we "access into this grace in which stand." Then we can turn on Satan and say, "You are my enemy. You are full of lies. I am a dear child of God through Jesus. I have been baptized in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Yes, these groans and sighs of mine are weak and feeble but they are coming from someone who has been baptized in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. My Holy Spirit is taking these prayers and offering them to my heavenly Father. They are beautiful prayers."

How many sighs and groans did you have this past week? How many sighs and groans rise up from in one lifetime here on this earth? What a comfort it is to know our Comforter, the Holy Spirit is interceding for us! Amen.