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YOUTH SUNDAY "Prayer"

February 12, 2017

First Congregational Church,
United Church of Christ
Burlington, Vermont

From the 2017 Youth Sunday Worship Service Scripture readings – Youth Prayers – Youth Choir Anthem

THE GIFT OF THE WORD

INTRODUCTION: Our Scripture readings today are lessons about prayer found in the New Testament. We are using a contemporary translation called The Message.

NEW TESTAMENT SCRIPTURE James 5:13-15

Are you hurting? Pray. Do you feel great? Sing. Are you sick? Call the church leaders together to pray and anoint you with oil in the name of the Master. Prayer will heal you, and Jesus will put you on your feet. And if you've sinned, you'll be forgiven—healed inside and out.

NEW TESTAMENT SCRIPTURE Romans 8:26-28

The moment we get tired waiting, God's Spirit is right there, helping us along. If we don't know how or what to pray, it doesn't matter. God does our praying for us and through us, making prayer out of our wordless sighs, our aching groans. God knows us far better than we know ourselves, knows our pregnant condition, and keeps us present before God. That's why we can be so sure that every detail in our lives is worked into something good.

NEW TESTAMENT SCRIPTURE Luke 11: 5-10

Jesus said to them, "Suppose you have a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have no food to offer him.' And suppose the one inside answers, 'Don't bother me. The door is already locked, and my children and I are in bed. I can't get up and give you anything.'

I tell you, even though he will not get up and give you the bread because of friendship, yet because of your boldness he will surely get up and give you as much as you need.

"So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.

YOUTH PRAYER OFFERINGS

Instead of a sermon today, the 8th and 9th grade class would like to offer some prayers that we have written. One thing that most of us discovered is that it's hard to write prayers that are going to be shared with lots of people. A prayer can be such a personal thing - and it's hard to put those innermost thoughts into words and sometimes it feels weird to read them aloud. But we were willing to give it a try. We are going to offer our prayers interspersed with a sung response from the congregation. Please stay seated while you sing from New Century Hymn #398 (*Shadow and Substance*) in between our prayers as printed in the Order of Worship.

Thanks to the 8th and 9th graders for sharing these prayers and to our friend Seth Kleinschmidt who helped us write these prayers. Now I'd like to invite the Youth Choir forward to sing.

I offer this prayer about my place in the world.

Where is the line drawn between political beliefs, opinions and just common humanity? When is it crossed? Should it ever be crossed? How can I prevent that line from being crossed? In such a torn apart country, a war-torn globe? How am I supposed to make that big of a difference? I feel so small. I have to though. I feel the expectations and guilt crushing me, heavy, unapologetic. But I have to keep in mind, I have struggles too. Are they valid? Are they legitimate? Are they real? They feel real to me, but I question them. I hate to compare, but it is hard not to when millions are living without a roof over their head, or without food in their stomachs. On the other side of the world, safety is a privilege very few are blessed with. Yet, for me, these extremities never cross my mind. Who decides who lives these unimaginable lives. Where is my place in this world? Guilt, something so strong and present, but so looked over. Yet as I stand here feeling worried and guilty, I'm for sure grateful. I am grateful for what I have and the life I live. I am grateful for the love and joy that fills my life and the family, friends and loved ones that keep me going with a smile on my face everyday.

Amen.

- Galen M.

I offer this prayer for healing in our nation.

Many Colors, Many Genders, Many Beliefs, Many Loves, One Nation, One America. Yet lately, it has been feeling like a hundred Americas. Divided. Each state, each city, each citizen, with a different belief, neglecting every other idea that is not parallel with their own. The foundation stones of our country were laid down by immigrants. Our country's structure is stronger than steel, for it is made of acceptance. Our nation's veins run with the same color blood from different colored people. But we have fallen astray. God, please hear this prayer. Guide our nation, one that is broken, to see the light, to heal the divisions we have opened up with our unkindness. We have resorted to racism, sexism, and homophobia to hide our insecurities. God, I pray, help us see past the color of someone's skin, for what is inside is what matters. Let us see past the pronoun that has been branded on to them by our society to see their true identity. Let us not see who they love, but the love itself because that is what truly matters. Let us not be divided by our difference but instead embrace them. For we are one nation, and one human race. Amen

- *Helen W.*

SUNG RESPONSE SHADOW AND SUBSTANCE - VERSE 1

NCH #398

I offer this prayer about doubt and faith.

God, I am in doubt. I often find it hard to believe. So many discoveries that humans have made about the universe, seem to call you into doubt. Was it you who created the universe or a reaction of elements? Was it you who put life on Earth or was it the force of evolution? What about the many other religions that people practice? Are you their God too? We don't need you to explain how we came to be or why the stars shimmer above us. So how do I know you are there?

Help me to find you, God. Help me know that you watch over me every day and night. Help me know that you guide me through life. That you show me opportunity in each step that I take. Help me know that you shine an everlasting light through the caverns of life. Without you, God, the tunnel would be pitch black. Help me know that I would be lost without you. Help me know that you are always forgiving. We go through life imperfectly, flawed, always tying weights to our souls. Help me know that I can come to you with a burdened heart and know that you will always understand. You will always cut the weights loose, you will always forgive me. These days I find it hard to see you in my life, please help me know that you are my guardian.

God, I'm sure you know how hard it is to believe in you in a world like this. With a scientific answer to explain just about everything, I find it very difficult. I will keep my heart open to you. I need you to help me know that you are there. Help me know that you are always there for me. Please, help me keep my faith.

Amen.

- *Ethan H.*

SUNG RESPONSE SHADOW AND SUBSTANCE - VERSE 2 NCH #398

I offer this prayer about death and what comes after it.

I hope there is a place we can go after death, once the struggles of our lives are over

I pray that heaven is real,

That once we have finished in this world, there is somewhere else that we go

Death is so abrupt, and in some cases, so unfair

It strikes so many people that have barely lived

It leaves so many lives unfinished

I pray for those who die so unjustly

that they get a chance to live on in a better place

I pray that a child who starved to death, will get a chance to eat to their hearts' content in heaven

I pray that all the soldiers who died defending our country, will get to know peace

That those people who suffered from diseases, get a chance to be healthy and fit

That Martin Luther King Jr. and President Lincoln's lives did not really end when they were shot because of the good they did

I pray that all the children who lost their lives at Sandy Hook get to grow up

That the 6 million Jews who died in the Holocaust, are in a place where they are accepted and loved, regardless of their religion

For these people, and for all of us here today,

I pray

Amen

- *Maggie B.*

I offer this prayer about how hard it can be to find God:

God. Who are you? What are you?

I constantly feel that I am playing a game of hide and seek with you. You are always the hider and me, the seeker.

Every time I think you are found, the rug is pulled right out from under me.

Are you the 100 on my math test? Or one of the bright stars on the canvas of the night sky?

Each time I try and bring this endless game to a stop, I am lost as to what I should call you.

What is your rightful name?

Should I call you Lord?

Father?

Almighty?

I do not know.

But even in my uncertainty, I will keep calling out for you.

Even in my bewilderment, I will keep seeking you.

Maybe you could let me find you one of these days? Maybe you could even hide somewhere a little more obvious?

Amen.

- *Bernadette K.*

I have adapted these words from the UN Environmental Sabbath Program.

I offer this prayer for the earth:

Great Spirit,

Creator God,

Give us hearts to understand;

Never to take

From creation's beauty more than we give;

Never to destroy carelessly for the purpose of our own greed;

Never to take from her what we cannot use;

Never to forget that we also can add to earth's beauty.

Give us hearts to understand that to destroy earth's music is to create confusion;

That to bulldoze her mountains is to blind ourselves to beauty;

That to pollute her gentle wind is to take away our own breath;

That as we care for her, she will care for us.

That as we care for Your creation, You will care for us.

Amen.

- *Emma B.*

SUNG RESPONSE SHADOW AND SUBSTANCE - VERSE 3

NCH #398

ANTHEM

DOWN IN THE RIVER TO PRAY

Youth Choir