

Luke 3:21-23 John 13:12-17 Sermon *"A Good Example Is Worth a Lot!"* by Michael R. Burkley 7/17/22

The Rev. Glen Knecht was my pastor when I was in college. He was about 45 years old then, and I remember thinking that he was an older man. Viewpoints change! But the example of Glen Knecht has touched me and trained me to this very day. Two things might seem to be small things, but they have had large implications in my life. First, I saw that whenever he talked with a child he treated them with respect and listened to what they had to say. That impressed me because, frankly, people don't always respect and listen to children. That example can easily be expanded to include every person. Now I don't always do that. Sometimes I'm distracted, sometimes I forget and sometimes I'm being a jerk and that makes a tremendous, negative, difference in the relationship, but when I do remember to respect and listen that makes a positive difference.

The second example is one I saw while I was with him when he was putting gas in his car. He stood by the side of his eight-year-old daughter as she put \$5 of gas in the tank. He told her to stop pumping when the meter was at \$4.95 cents. He told his daughter that he would rather give an extra five cents to the station than risk going over and taking more gas than he was paying for (this was when gas was less than \$0.60/gal and before credit cards that charged the exact amount you pumped). He then gave his daughter the \$5 and asked her to take it in to the cashier and not ask for any change. Now that seems to be a little example, but I've seen the implications of it far beyond pumping gas. I try to go out of my way to give more than I'm required, to help someone a bit more than I need to and to honor others by giving them responsibility. I don't always follow that example, but his example is always there as illuminating my path and a light to pass on to others.

We learn best by example. Benjamin Franklin once wrote, "Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn." What can we do to change listening to this sermon into being involved with it? We learn best, with a learning that changes our lives, if we not only have a good example but also follow it.

That's why Jesus said to so many people, "Follow me." He wants us to learn how to live. On the night that he was betrayed, in John 13 we read that Jesus "took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet..." Later he said, "Do you understand what I have done for you?... You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you" (John 13:12-15).

Jesus wants us to live, not just exist, so he wants to involve us in his life, in following him. To his disciples, it would have been perfectly clear, whether they liked it or not, that Jesus' example was not just about washing feet, but about living life. A disciple was to learn from the master, to walk through life like the master, to talk like the master, to become like the master, and that's what Jesus wanted for them and for us. He wants us to live the principles that guided his life because they are the ways to truly live. Have you committed yourself to following Jesus where he leads?

One of the defining principles of Jesus' life was the importance of prayer. Throughout his ministry we see Jesus praying: praying at the very beginning of his ministry as he was baptized and praying even beyond his resurrection, giving thanks to God in prayer as he broke bread and gave it to the two disciples of Emmaus. Scripture teaches in Hebrews 7 and 1 John 2 that Jesus is praying for us this very moment. Jesus was always a busy man, but he was never too busy to pray. His prayer is an example for us so that we should pray as he has done. So when did Jesus pray? Can you think of any time he prayed?

He prayed at his baptism: we read in Luke 3, "When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased" (Luke 3:21). Why do you think he was praying then? I think it was preparation for the testing that was coming; it was about preparation for the Cross. Praying as we take up our crosses and follow him is a very good thing, in fact, a necessary thing.

Jesus often suffered from the plague of being popular, not so much for who he was but for what people thought he could do for them. Being well-known and powerful brings a need for prayer, too. Mark records, "Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. Simon and his companions went to look for him, and when they found him, they exclaimed: "Everyone is looking for you!" (Mark 1:35). Luke writes that, "Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed" (Luke 5:16). Before he fed the 5,000 he thanked God for the food he was about to serve, and afterwards, he went aside to pray because the people wanted to make him their king – by force (John 6). When everyone around us thinks we're great – that's a time for prayer, because without prayer, pride comes before a fall.

Jesus spent a night in prayer, in prayer for guidance, just before he chose the twelve apostles who were to go out and change the world. Luke 6 records, “Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God. When morning came, he called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them, whom he also designated apostles” (Luke 6:12). In the months ahead you are going to be slogging through the hard work of preparing for the future ministry of this church. Now is the time to pray for those who are leading you through this time of preparation and for those who God knows will do so in the future.

Jesus praised God in prayer. In Luke 10 we read, “Jesus, full of joy through the Holy Spirit, said, ‘I praise you, Father, Lord of Heaven and Earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned and revealed them to little children’” (Luke 10:21). Do you want to do something wonderful? Walk around your home; look at the people you love, mementos, pictures; think of all the blessings you have and have received, and give praise to God, from whom all of those blessings come. Likely you’ll be laughing and smiling and crying and standing in awe of God by the time you’re through. All of us have more blessings than we count, if we choose to count them.

Jesus prayed with his disciples so often that they asked him how to pray. He taught them, and now we have the Lord’s Prayer (Luke 11:1). Have you ever asked Jesus to show you how to pray? Susan and I have always had the hardest time praying together. But in the past couple of years we’ve decided to start our prayers by praying the Lord’s Prayer. With a good start like that it’s easy to go on to a good finish, and we’ve found that the more we practice the more we really appreciate prayer and pray.

Jesus gave thanks to God in his prayer before he raised Lazarus from the dead (John 11:41f). Have you ever thanked God for raising you from the death that sin has brought you to? Have you prayed in trust for others?

Jesus prayed for the unity of his disciples in John 17, and he prayed for us. John records, “Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name--the name you gave me--so that they may be one as we are one” (John 17:11), and, later, “My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you” (John 17:20-21). Do you think that the church would be more united today, that we would be more accepting, more at peace with each other, with those close and those far away, if we made our unity in the midst of our differences an important part of our prayers? Let’s try it out!

He prayed for Simon Peter. He said, “... I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers and sisters” (Luke 22:32). Have you ever prayed for someone that they might come back to God, might recognize again what God has done for them? Maybe God will answer your prayer as he answered Jesus’ prayer for Simon Peter. Pray!

Jesus encouraged his disciples to pray for themselves as he prayed out his cry of pain in the Garden of Gethsemane just before the soldiers arrested him. Luke records, “On reaching the place, he said to them, ‘Pray that you will not fall into temptation.’ He withdrew about a stone’s throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed, ‘Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done’” (Luke 22:39-46) Now, we’ve often prayed that God would get us out of a mess, but, maybe we can learn from Jesus how to keep from getting into them in the first place and how to pray in the midst of our messes, “your will be done!”

Jesus didn’t just pray for people who liked him. He prayed for his executioners as he hung on the Cross, “Father, forgive them” (Luke 23:34). Have you ever prayed that God would forgive someone who’s hurt you? Jesus gave us a good example to follow when he prayed for those killing him.

But then on the Cross he prayed a prayer that you and I will never need to pray, because he prayed it for us. When we trust in him we will never be forsaken by God because Jesus put himself in the situation where he cried out to God on the Cross, “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me” (Mark 15:33). Somehow, he was willingly forsaken by God so we could be accepted by God. Let that love sink into you.

And even more, after that, at his death Jesus called out with a loud voice, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit” (Luke 23:46). Someday we will die, and when we face that time, when Jesus comes to take us home with him, may his prayer be ours.

Jesus is our Lord and Master. He has given us the example to learn from, his example of a life dedicated to God in prayer, prayer in all kinds of times and in all kinds of places. Jesus wants to involve us in a life of prayer, so that we will learn to be like him: learn to live in such a way that our church might prosper and people see the power of Jesus praying and loving through us. He gives us his good example, and that’s worth a lot. Pray!

**\*AFFIRMATION OF FAITH**

I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth; And in Jesus Christ, His Only Son, our Lord; Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; He descended into hell; the third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God, the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen

**\*DOXOLOGY ~ #592 (blue)**

**\*OFFERING PRAYER**

**\*HYMN #398 (RED)** *"Sweet Hour of Prayer"*

SHARING OUR STORIES

JOYS AND CONCERNS

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE AND THE LORD'S PRAYER

*Our Father, who art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom Come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen*

**\*SENDING HYMN #403 (BLUE)**

*"What a Friend We Have in Jesus"*

CHARGE AND BENEDICTION

Charge and Benediction

My charge to you is to Pray. Begin with prayers of thanksgiving and then see where those prayers lead you onward. And now,

*May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.—Romans 15:5–6*

Amen!

Hymns

*"Christ is Made the Sure Foundation"* #417 (Blue)

*"Sweet Hour of Prayer"* #398 (Red).

*"What a Friend We Have in Jesus"* #403 (Blue)

Ann,

If you would send this out along with the worship invite I would appreciate it.

If I've forgotten anything please let me know.

Thank you!

--Michael

Examples are powerful things. If you kick a chair in your bare feet and curse because of the pain while a three-year-old is watching, guess what that three-year-old will do! If you have someone important in your life go out of their way, time and again, to help someone, it's a good bet that you'll go out of your way to help as well. If you want to learn to play tennis, play with the best tennis player you can find. If you want to learn how to paint, watch a good painter. An example, good or bad, is a powerful influence in our lives. That's why it's important to focus in on the good examples in our lives. If you want to

learn how to pray, I know of no better example than Jesus. Have you ever wanted to pray more than you do, but don't know the way? Come this Sunday to worship with us!

-Michael