

“P.U.S.H.ing Through”

**First Presbyterian Church
Pastor Dave Carlson
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Old Testament lesson: Psalm 85:8-13

New Testament lesson: Matthew 7:7-11

A man was sleeping one night in his cabin when suddenly his room filled with light, and God appeared. The Lord told the man he had work for him to do, and showed him a large rock in front of his cabin. The Lord explained that the man was to push against the rock with all his might. So the man did, day after day.

For many years he toiled from sun up to sun down, his shoulders set squarely against the cold, massive surface of the unmoving rock, pushing with all of his might. Each night the man returned to his cabin sore and worn out, feeling that his whole day had been spent in vain. Slowly, doubts come ... and he thinks, “... Why kill myself over this? I’ll just put in my time, giving just the minimum effort; and that will be good enough.” ...

But first he decides to make it a matter of prayer

“Lord,” he prayed, “I have labored long and hard in your service, putting all my strength into doing that which you have asked. Yet, after all this time, I have not even budged that rock by half a millimeter. What is wrong? Why am I failing?”

The Lord responded: “... When I asked you to serve me and you accepted, I told you that your task was to push against the rock with all of your strength, which you have done. Never once did I (say) I expected you to move it. Your task was to push. And now you come to me with your strength spent, thinking that you have failed.

(But) look at yourself. Your arms are strong and muscled, your back sinewy and brown; your hands are callused from constant pressure, your legs have become massive and hard. Through opposition you have grown much, and your abilities now surpass that which you used to have. Yes, you haven’t moved the rock. But your calling was to be obedient and to push and to have faith, to trust in my wisdom. That you have done.

Now, my friend, I will move the rock.” “Your calling was to push,” says God. Pray. Until. Something. Happens – PUSH.

This is what Jesus is talking about in our New Testament lesson today, where he says, “Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you.” These are not one-time actions, but continuous. We are to live lives that are constantly and faithfully asking what’s next for me, O God? – lives that search out God’s wisdom and guidance, from sun up to sun down, lives that knock on the door of opportunity with confidence that God will open the way.

And through it all, we are to PUSH – prayer continuously until something happens, something from God – an unexpected blessing, a flash of insight and clarity, a pathway opening before us, leading us further along life’s journey.

All of life's difficulties and hardships can be overcome with one little PUSH – one little continuous prayer that has us asking, seeking, knocking expectantly; directing our thoughts, vision and actions toward God and God's will, God's way.

Praying is easy – “Lord, help me.” But to continuously pray is hard. Ask; search, search, search; knock, knock, knock. What does that look like? Continuously praying?

Let's look at each of the ways Jesus says we are to pray – ask, search and knock. Asking is what we think of as typical prayer – a conversation with God, listening expectantly. That's hard for us to actually spend time doing.

But prayer can also happen within our conversations with others, (and that can be a little easier.) When we ask others about important aspects of life, God often shows us the way in those conversations, if we stay mindful of God and listen for divine guidance.

What about searching – and finding. To search is to have our eyes and ears open, and our hearts and minds. Searching is active, not passive. We search with anticipation of finding something valuable, something important, maybe even something life changing.

If you were to live your life with your eyes open to all the possibilities, God would surely present you with a miraculous find – something wholly unexpected but oh so wonderful. Our problem is we like our comfortable lives, our predictable outcomes. And so we fail to open our hearts and minds to something new. PUSH through that – Pray, searchingly, until something new and wonderful happens, something from God.

Thirdly, Jesus says, “Knock and the door will be opened for you.” When we knock on a door, we are on the threshold of the unknown. And that's the hardest part. The unknown is scary. We get afraid of going through the unknown, particularly if things aren't so bad on this side of the door, where we are now.

To knock on a door is to be at the mercy of whoever's on the other side. Will the door be opened, or locked all the tighter? And yet Jesus says that if we keep knocking, the door will be opened to us, we will be granted entrance into the life God has out ahead of us.

All of these ways of praying – all of these ways of PUSHing forward in life – require something of us. Like the man pushing on the large, unmoving rock, we have to set aside our expectations and open ourselves up to the hidden blessings God has for us.

Like the man pushing on the rock, we have to set aside our uncertainty, pessimism, and doubt in favor of faith that God will use our effort to God's glory and our blessing.

Like the man continuing to push with seemingly no effect, we have to be brave – and vulnerable – enough to do God's work, to trust that the Lord is working in and through us. God will ensure the outcome, if we put forth the effort in faith.

And yet, how often do we go through life all effort and little faith, little vision for how God would have us be. It's like the guy hired to chop wood for a logging company. He set a record on Monday but was fired on Friday. "Hey, I'm the hardest worker you've got," the young man said. "I arrive first, leave last, and even work through my breaks. No one can swing an axe more times per minute than I can." The company foreman thought for a minute and then said, "You'd have done better if you would have taken a break and sharpen your axe."

Life is not all about effort. It's more about faith, living faithfully and trusting the outcome to God. Our faith tells us that God will bless our lives if we pray about doing the right thing.

Or as Jesus says, "Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for bread, will give a stone? Or if the child asks for a fish, will give a snake? If you then ... know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him!"

In other words, if we prayerfully PUSH through our hesitancy, our excuses, our doubts and fears, than God will bless our lives with goodness and mercy, love and peace, blessings and abundance.

Whatever struggle you're facing this week or whatever opportunity you are pursuing this year, don't let yourself get discouraged. PUSH through to that which God has for you though prayer – your burdens eased, your way made clear.

By staying in conversation with God through prayer, by keeping your heart and mind open to divine direction and guidance, by waiting with anticipation for God to open the way forward, we are assured that if we ask, search and knock it will be given, discovered and opened – for us, and for God's glory. Amen.

Pastoral Prayer

Holy God, we thank you for the example of Jesus who made prayer the bedrock of his life and taught us to do the same.

Through prayer, he received strength to choose faithfulness rather than give in to temptation.

Through prayer he remained connected to you and was sustained by your Spirit for the tasks of ministry.

Through prayer he healed, taught, forgave and called.

Through prayer he met the trials of life with grace, refusing to react in anger, blame or condemnation.

Merciful Savior, grant us a deeper desire for prayer, even now as we follow Christ's example by praying for those in need – the victims of these terrible hurricanes, and all those we know of in need of your comfort, healing, and peace.

In this and all our prayers, O Lord, we turn to you in confidence, knowing that you go before us, even having taught us how to pray, saying:

**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.**