

**The Reverend Marjo Anderson**

**Lent 3 – Y PRAY, part 2: PAUSE**

**7 March 2021**

**Genesis 1.1-2a, 21a, 2.1-3**

**Exodus 14.10, 13a, 14, and 20.1-2a, 8-11**

**Psalms 23.1-2a, 3a and 46.10**

**Job 6.24**

**Luke 5.16**

**Salem, Bridgeport**

**“7 Reasons to PAUSE in Prayer”**

This Lent we are delving into the subject of prayer.

We began last week by looking at the Y (why) of “Y PRAY?”.

We pray because prayer can change things, it can change us, and it can change God.

And now we begin looking at the letters PRAY which stand for 4 things we do when we pray.

Today we’re going to talk about P for PAUSE.

There’s a story that Pete Grieg tells in his book How to Pray.

“The tranquility of a picturesque village street was shattered one bright morning

by the yelping of a dog and a strange metallic clattering.

Suddenly, a crazed greyhound came scrabbling around the corner....

Frantic with fear, the dog was being hotly pursued by one of those cheap chrome bistro chairs attached to the other end of the dog’s leash.

The chair seemed alive, like a dancing snake

weaving and flailing, striking and biting at that terrified animal’s rear....

A movement must have made that chair twitch, which had made the dog jump,

which had made the chair leap, which had made the dog scamper,

which had made the chair pounce, which had made the dog yelp,

which had made shoppers shout, which had made the dog run even more frantically,

pursued all the while by this terrifying piece of metal

and these crowds of screaming, grabbing strangers.

The faster the dog ran, the wilder the chair’s pursuit became —

the higher it bounced, the harder it pounced,

the louder it banged and clanged and zinged on the cobbles....”

Many of us live our lives like that poor dog.

We get attached to things – to people, to organizations, to expectations, to beliefs –

and our actions cause reactions which provoke our response

and we end up being “pursued” by irrational fears of our own making.

Many of us spend our days acting as if we were human doings rather than human beings.

We fill our days with activities,

and even when we stop our physical activity, the mental race continues.

But this is not what God intends for us.

Even the One who is eternally creating stopped to rest.

And if God needed to PAUSE, then how much more do we – who are created in God’s image – need to PAUSE.

But just in case God’s modeling of PAUSING isn’t enough for us to get the message, God actually commands us to PAUSE from our work in order to rest and worship.

As human beings we need to rest each night, we need a Sabbath each week, and during the day, we need to take time to PAUSE and pray.

Jesus certainly did.

The gospels tell us that he regularly PAUSED

and went away to deserted places to be alone to pray.

He PAUSED to pray before eating, before teaching, before preaching, before healing, before making decisions, before performing miracles.

Jesus understood that the secret to life was in following God’s will,

and the way to determine God’s will was to take time to PAUSE for prayer.

So we PAUSE because God did, because Jesus did, and because God commanded us to.

All of prayer itself is a PAUSE from everything else we are doing, but WITHIN prayer it is also important to PAUSE.

We PAUSE as we *begin* our prayer in order to greet God and acknowledge who God is and what God means to us.

I’m sure we have all experienced what it’s like to be greeted by problems or complaints the minute we walk on the door!

While we may be perfectly willing to help,

it would be so much nicer if we were first acknowledged as a person

who was loved and appreciated

BEFORE we were presented with a list

of someone’s problems and issues and challenges and complaints!

How much more than ought we to PAUSE to become aware of God’s presence, to acknowledge that God is God and we are not,

and to express our appreciation for all that God has done for us.

That’s why we read in *Psalms 46*,

*“Be still & know that I am God.*

*I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.”*

So we PAUSE as we *begin* prayer to acknowledge who God is and who we are before God.

We also PAUSE *in the midst of prayer*.

After all prayer is a two-way conversation.

I'm sure we've all experienced what it's like to get a phone call from someone who talks pretty much non-stop and maybe for as long as an hour and our end of the conversation consists of, "Uh-huh...yes...uh-huh..." and when the conversation is over we realize that the person didn't once ask how we were or how our family was doing or what was going on in our life.

God is the one who has every answer we need, but in order to hear the answers we need to PAUSE long enough for God to get a word in edgewise!

That's why Job said, "*Teach me, and I will be silent; make me understand how I have gone wrong*".

So we PAUSE as we *begin* prayer to become aware of God's own self, and we PAUSE *in the midst of* prayer to listen to what God has to share with us.

And we also PAUSE at *the end of* our prayer.

In Exodus we read that Moses said to the people,

*"The Lord will fight for you, and you have only to keep still"*.

If we are to take our worries and concerns to the Lord in prayer,

then we need to leave those worries and concerns with God and not take them up again!

If we ask God for help, then we need to PAUSE in what we're doing to actually let God help.

I'm sure we have all experienced times when someone has poured out their needs to us, and we see that there are ways that we could help,

but if the person refuses our help and then continues to complain, it doesn't help them, does it?

And when it comes to God, one of the things in which God delights the most is answering our prayers.

Think of it this way: a close family member or friend tells you what they want for their birthday and you go out and you buy that special gift for them

and then you find out gone that they've gone out and bought it for themselves.

How often do we do that to God?

We come to God and ask God's help with some particular problem

and then we proceed to solve it – or at least try to solve it – on our own.

And by so doing, we deprive God of the opportunity to give us joy.

So not only do we PAUSE to acknowledge God's presence,

and not only do we PAUSE to allow God the chance to speak for us,

we also PAUSE to allow God the chance to act for us.

And there's at least one other reason that we PAUSE in our praying:

because it's in the PAUSE that we experience peace.

*"The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.*

*God makes me lie down in green pastures.... [and] restores my soul."*

We PAUSE because God PAUSED. We PAUSE because Jesus PAUSED.

We PAUSE because God commanded us to PAUSE. We PAUSE to experience God's presence.

We PAUSE to allow God to speak and to allow God to act.

And we PAUSE to allow God's peace to enter our bodies and minds and hearts and spirits.

I hope you will take time this week to PAUSE,

to experience God's presence, to allow God to speak to you and act in your life,

and to receive the gift of a peace that passes all understanding. **Amen**