

20.04.22 ZOOM PRAYER GROUP – OBEDIENCE TALK – Lynne Williams

Introduction: – The Patchwork Quilt

As I was preparing this talk, the Lord gave me an image of a patchwork quilt, which looked like one my grandmother made. The patches were gathered from various second-hand textiles being re-purposed into something new. Although faded and well used, and irregular in size and shape, that old quilt was surprisingly lovely! Preparing this talk on obedience has been like stitching a patchwork quilt. Bits and pieces were carefully chosen, with the hope they would help you explore your unique spiritual journey.

The Problem of Disobedience:

We all know the story of Adam and Eve¹ and their close friendship with God in the Garden of Eden. Sadly, we also know of their disobedience, when tricked by Satan, they ate from of the tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. They broke the one command given to them by God – Do not eat of the that tree! They poorly exercised their gift of free will, and were cast out of the garden. Now separated from God, they brought sin and death into the world.² (Romans 5:12)³ Sin and death are spiritual enemies which infect us (1 Cor.15:20-26),⁴ and are the root cause of our disobedience and continual sin.

The Israelites experienced many times of obedience and disobedience. You remember the story of Moses, urgently descending Mount Sinai, because the people were worshipping a golden calf.⁵ (Exodus 32:7-8)

How could this have happened after God had been so faithful to them, leading them out of slavery and drowning Pharaoh’s Army in the Red Sea? When crossing the desert, he provided food and water, a pillar of cloud by day and fire by night, and saved them from poisonous snakes. It was only by the intercession of Moses, that they were they saved from God’s wrath; those who repented lived and those who did not died. The survivors wandered in the desert for forty years, and not one person, from the generation that left Egypt, entered the Promised Land.

Why did they lose their faith and trust in him? When you look back at your life, could this be your story too? Have you had times when you have lost your faith and trust in God? ... times of obedience and disobedience? ... times of falling away?

¹ Genesis

² *“Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, ... death spread to all because all have sinned—”* (Rom: 2:12)

³ All scripture from NRSVCE unless otherwise noted.

⁴ *“²⁰ But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead. ... ²¹ For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. ²² For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. ... ²⁶ The last enemy to be destroyed is death.”* (1 Cor. 15:20-26)

⁵ *“... Go down at once! Your people, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt, have acted perversely; they have been quick to turn aside from the way that I commanded them; they have cast for themselves an image of a calf, and have worshiped it and sacrificed to it, and said, ‘These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!’”* (Exodus 32:7-8)

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I'd like to share with you a story about my brother and me. When we were young, we got along famously, but something changed as we were leaving childhood behind, and our interests began moving in different directions. We were a church going family, and I would call myself a cultural Christian, not a Spiritual Christian. In my head, I knew God loved me, but in my heart, I did not know this love, or his desire to have a personal relationship with me. My love for God was definitely not first, nor above my love for my family or myself. Clearly this was disobedience to God's law. How was I disobedient in my relationship with my brother? I didn't like his girlfriend – she came from a poorer family and lived in an apartment! I took his best, and nicest sweater, wore it repeatedly and lied about having it; I called him by a nickname he hated and could hurt him with words; he could hurt me with fists. As I write this, it all sounds like kid stuff, and it was; never-the less, my behaviour has had serious, life-long consequences. My sin was PRIDE. People and things had to be good enough. I had elevated myself above others and did not love as Jesus loved. I suffered from self-love.⁶ (Saint Maximus the Confessor⁷) My inability to love God first, and my neighbour second, has caused a family rift lasting more than 50 years. Although, I have made attempts to mend the situation, forgiveness has not been forthcoming. My past, selfish actions, have hurt my family; disobedience always has a price.

The Solution:

Many righteous people in the Old Testament were obedient to the Ten Commandments. When they prayed for the people, their prayers were heard by God, and he repeatedly rescued them. "... obey the voice of the LORD ... and it shall go well with you, ..." (Jer.38:20). When we choose to exercise our free will in unity with God's will, good happens.

St. Paul teaches that the Mosaic law, (Ten Commandments), is not able to justify us before God. Only faith in Jesus can do that.⁸ (Gal. 2:16) So, God, in his love,⁹ (1 John 4:10, John 3:16), sent his Son, Jesus, to become flesh, and die for our sins (Rom. 8:3), on the cross¹⁰. (Phil. 2:8)

Disobedience leads to sin and death, but the obedience of Christ leads to righteousness and eternal life.¹¹ (Rom. 6:16)

Our Participation:

We have a choice to accept or reject the fruits of Christ's obedience; Jesus has opened the door for us to renew our relationship with God, "*For freedom Christ has set us free. ...*" (Gal. 5:1). Obedience born out of love, is the key to becoming like Christ, and in Christ we are free!

⁶ Saint Maximus the Confessor⁶ states that "desire, pure of the passion of self-love, ought to be driven by yearning for God alone," for "[I]ove alone, properly speaking, proves that the human person is in the image of the Creator."

⁷ www.britannica.com › Saint-Maximus-the-Confessor

⁸ "... a person is justified not by the works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ" (Gal. 2:16)

⁹ "In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins." (1 John 4:10), "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life." (John 3:16)

¹⁰ "He humbled Himself, and became obedient to the point of death, even the death on a cross" (Phil. 2:8).

¹¹ Do you not know that if you yield yourselves to any one as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? (Rom. 6:16)

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Jesus was asked, *"Which commandment in the Law is the greatest?" (and he replied): "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the Law and the prophets."*¹² (CCC# 2055)

Christian Obedience – A Call to Holiness:

Saint Peter writes, *"for it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy."* (1 Peter 1:16)

Pope Francis, in "Rejoice and Be Glad,"¹³ challenges us to re-think holiness. He writes that the Lord has chosen us, *"to be holy and blameless before him in love."* (Eph. 4:6) Holiness ... is the fruit of the Holy Spirit in your life... We know we are living the divine life when we experience...¹⁴ *"... love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. (Gal. 5:22-23)*

They Will Know We Are Christians by – The Fruit of the Spirit¹⁵

"we are the aroma of Christ to God ... (2 Cor. 2:14-17)¹⁶

David M. Knight in *The Way of the Spirit*, writes that if we are living authentically, people should feel the aroma of Christ in our presence. Do others, your family, friends and strangers see evidence of the Fruits of the Spirit in you? – in all that you think, say and do?

When evaluating our lives as Christians, our first question should be, "Is the fruit of the Spirit visible in my life? Do people see me as loving? Do they sense an underlying joy in me, even when things are going wrong? Am I at peace with myself and seek peace for others? In this way of questioning, each one of us can examine our life, meditating upon each Fruit of the Spirit. We Pray, Meditate, Listen to God, and Do what he asks of us. This is holy obedience.

"As Christians, we ... may also evaluate our lives by ... the New Law of Christ, ... the Sermon on the Mount," (Matthew, chapters 5-7)¹⁷ a set of ideals that invite us into God's way of thinking and loving.

¹² Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) # 2055

¹³ <https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2018/04/09/top-five-takeaways-gaudete-et-exsultate>

¹⁴ Knight, David M., *The Way of the Spirit – Using the Gifts, Showing the Fruits*, Twenty-Third Publications, New London, CT, USA, 2021. (p.1-2)

¹⁵ Knight, David M., *The Way of the Spirit – Using the Gifts, Showing the Fruits*, Twenty-Third Publications, New London, CT, USA, 2021. (p.46-50)

¹⁶ *"But thanks be to God, who ... through us spreads in every place the fragrance that comes from knowing him. For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing; to the one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. Who is sufficient for these things? For we are not peddlers of God's word like so many, but in Christ we speak as persons of sincerity, as persons sent from God and standing in his presence."* (2 Cor. 2:14-17)

¹⁷ Knight, David M., *The Way of the Spirit – Using the Gifts, Showing the Fruits*, Twenty-Third Publications, New London, CT, USA, 2021. (p.48).

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We are to translate these ideals into action, and evaluating/re-evaluating how we are doing. For example, take the Beatitude, *“Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.”* (Matthew 5:4) When someone is mourning in my parish, how do I, representing the eyes and hands of Christ, comfort them? Do I send a card? Phone? Visit? Have Father say a mass? Which of these action(s) is most appropriate? How can I do better? I will never be a perfect servant of Christ, but I trust that he will bless me for trying.

Prayer – Why does the Christian Pray?

Three holy people have said this about prayer:

In a homily, Father Henk Van Meijel¹⁸ gives this advice. When praying ask yourself, “Am I praying from my heart and soul? Is my prayer about a loving relationship with God? Is God the source of all I’m doing, thinking and breathing? Does my relationship with God flow from the inside to the outside? ...If we have a deep prayer life, we become a sign pointing to God, and his presence within us. Wherever we are, people will see who we are and we do not have to explain; they will trust us. They will come to us and ask, but if we have not deeply internalized that God is first, then it’s all external and then people will say, “Oh well, he’s a Catholic and goes to church! But, if it comes from the inside, we become magnets and we evangelize.” Concluding, Fr. Henk says, “It’s so simple and so hard to do.”

Saint Mother Teresa of Calcutta says this of prayer¹⁹: “God speaks in the silence of the heart and we listen and then we speak to God from the fullness of our heart. This connection is prayer, a oneness with God, A fruit of prayer is deepening of faith. The fruit of faith is love. The Fruit of love is service and the fruit of service is peace. That is why we need to pray to have a clean heart. If we have a clean heart, we can see God. When we see God, ... we come to love one another. That means, we see, and we look, and then we give our hands to serve and our hearts to love; ... that’s the beginning of holiness.”

Pope Francis²⁰ teaches that the cloud of witnesses²¹ always surrounds us – (Hebrews 12:1) “Each time we join our hands and open our hearts to God, we find ourselves in the company of anonymous and recognizable saints, who pray with us ... Their intercession is their most exalted service to God’s plan. We can and should ask them to intercede for us and the whole world. ...Trust in the intervention (and protection) of all the saints in heaven and on earth. (They) are holy people of every day life, ... who live a life of holiness, ... (praising) God with their lives. Saint, Basil said, the Spirit of God dwells in them and they are called his temple.”

¹⁸ Salt and Life TV homily, 2021.03.10

¹⁹ Mother Teresa – The Legacy, film by Ann and Jeanette Petrie, Salt and Light TV, YouTube

²⁰ Pope Francis, General Audience, Salt and Life TV, second week of Easter 2021

²¹ *“Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us,”* (Hebrews 12:1)

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A Testimony to Prayer

“... Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, ‘Out of the believer’s heart shall flow rivers of living water.’” (Jn.7:37-38)

I lay claim to this scripture as I tell you this story:

In the early hours of July 20, 2020, I received a phone call from my daughter, Carley, who at twenty-seven weeks pregnant, was in labour and soon to be medevacked to who knows where – Calgary, Kelowna, Vancouver? I immediately sent out an email requesting prayer. Meanwhile Fran Fagan was tiredly pacing the floor of her apartment in Victoria, asking the Lord – “Okay, what do you want of me, why am I staying up and not going to bed.” Then, ‘ping’ she receives my email and we began to pray the Rosary. Oh, what peace overflowed my spirit as we prayed together and joined our prayers to those of the cloud of witnesses – what power, what strength, what love, what grace, what unity in Christ overflowed as we interceded in one Spirit for the life of baby Ophelia.

God answered our prayers! The outcome was awesome! Carley was flown to Vancouver and a tiny baby girl was delivered at BC Women’s, the best equipped BC hospital for premature babies. There they remained for three months receiving outstanding care.

Here’s something truly amazing! A few hours after Carley called on July 20th, I awoke with a start and the certainty that the baby was a girl and that she had just been born. Carley called within minutes to confirm the news!

Conclusion:

I have been collecting an assortment of experiences and memories in my life, just as a quilter gathers pieces of fabric to make into a quilt. The patchwork quilt of my life is not perfect. It includes many patches of obedience and disobedience, and is a little worse for wear. However, I have learned over time to choose with care how I make my quilt, and with the help of the living presence of the Holy Spirit within me, and saintly friends, my quilt is becoming less tattered and more lovely with each day my eyes and heart stay focused on loving of the Lord.

To God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be all glory, honour and praise. Amen!

“Take delight in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart.” (Psalm 37:4)

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