

**PENTECOST:
A TIME TO EXPERIENCE GOD'S HOLY SPIRIT ALIVE AND ACTIVE**

Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost

Proper 21

September 27, 2009

Numbers 11:4-6, 10-16, 24-29

Psalm 19:7-14

James 5:13-20

Mark 9:38-50

Prayer of Relief

As a pastor, I pray a lot – I have to, it's my job! Very seldom, however, do I experience the blessing of an immediate answer to my prayers. As a matter of fact, in my sixteen years of praying, there has only been one occasion when I experienced an immediate answer to prayer.

As a teenager, I participated in a mission trip to Houston, Texas, and we were replacing a roof on an elderly woman's house. It was August – the hottest month of the year in Houston! It felt like a sauna as we tore old shingles off her house and put them in a dumpster. At one point, I had to bend over and put my hands on my knees to catch my breath. As I did, sweat ran down my face and started dripping off my nose – did I say it was hot? I looked around at my co-workers in mission, who were all in the same shape, and I prayed a short, but incredibly sincere prayer, “Lord, we need relief! Please just send a small breeze or something!” As soon as I stood up from my stooped position, a cool breeze hit me right in my sweaty face. My sweat nearly turned to tears.

In all of today's Scripture passages, there are prayers for relief – Moses asks God to relieve him from his burden of responsibility, the psalmist praises God for the strength that comes from trusting in the law of the LORD and the relief that comes from God's Word, James encourages his readers to pray for relief and healing, and finally, Jesus says it is better to be relieved of certain things than to let them pull us into sin.

As our country, along with so many other nations around the world, desperately tries to pull its way out of a financial crisis that has debilitated the world's economy and left millions of hard-working people without jobs, I cannot think of a better topic to address this situation than God's divine relief. As families struggle with debt, foreclosure, unemployment, poverty, and the quest for justice, they find themselves with their hands on their knees trying to catch their breath as fear runs down their faces and drips off their noses. Lord, we need relief! Please just send a breeze or something!

As James reminds us, prayer has a powerful effect! In the words of the psalmist:

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart
be acceptable in thy sight,
O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.
(Psalm 19:14, *RSV*)

This week's Reflection was prepared by the Rev. K. Jason Coker, pastor of Wilton Baptist Church in Wilton, Connecticut. Visit www.wiltonbaptist.org to learn more about the ministries of Wilton Baptist Church. Rev. Coker is an ordained minister with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

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This week we remember to pray for the work of the Bible Societies in: Costa Rica – With thanks for God's help in distributing Bibles last year, and with prayers that God will bless the lives of Costa Rica's children and young people through the Bible Society's work in schools and colleges; **El Salvador** – With thanks for God's constant provision and protection, and with prayers for a peaceful campaigning season as the country prepares for elections and that God will lead the people to accept the results peacefully, and with prayers for sufficient income to enable the distribution of God's Word; **Nicaragua** – With thanks to God for all the children who were reached by the *Child Beggars* project, and with prayers for resources to enable the distribution of Scriptures to every church requesting them, and for resources for the launch of the revised Miskito Bible, and with prayers that God will bring hope and comfort to the children and families blessed by the Children with Cancer projects, and that God will bless the government and give the country social stability.

Activity Corner: "Prayers of the Heart"

Supplies needed: Bible; 8-1/2" x 11" red construction paper; heart pattern (approximately 3" x 5"); pens or pencils; scissors; basket or bowl.

Read the following prayers from the Bible: Numbers 11:11-15; 1 Chronicles 16:7-36; 1 Kings 3:5-9; Daniel 9:3-19; Jonah 2:1-9; John 17; Ephesians 3:14-21. What did Moses, David, Solomon, Daniel, Jonah, Jesus, and Paul pray for? Which of the prayers ask for God's help? Which prayers express praise and thanksgiving? Distribute sheets of construction paper and ask members of your household to cut out two or more hearts. Invite them to think about what they wish to pray for and to write the "meditations of their hearts" on the paper hearts, encouraging them to consider things they need to ask of God, things they wish to thank God for, and prayers for those in need. Place everyone's prayers into a basket or bowl and then gather for prayer, using the prayer petitions written on everyone's hearts. Conclude with the prayer that Jesus taught in Matthew 6:9-13.