

March 19th – Friday

Centering Breath Prayer: Forgetting what is behind...I press on toward the goal.

Loving God, once more we come together that I might study your word and learn from your Spirit so that I might press on toward the goal of Jesus Christ. Teach me and guide me away from the past which would hinder and toward your kingdom which awaits. In your precious name, I pray. Amen.

Scriptures: Philippians 3:10-14

Key Verses: Philippians 3:13-14:

(13) “Brothers [and sisters], I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, (14) I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus” (NIV).

Lent is rushing past and we are straining toward the cross at an increasingly rapid pace. There is no time left to wallow in the past, we must press on toward the goal. So, just what is the goal towards which we are pressing during this Lenten journey, this journey where love is triumphant? We have been spending considerable time being urged to leave the past behind us so that God may do a new thing within us. But, what is the new thing towards which we are moving? Motivational speakers and self improvement gurus will all tell you that without a clear goal, whether in business or in personal growth we are just spinning our wheels. There is an old joke which is told over and over: When asked the question, “Where are you going?” The answer is, “I don’t know, but I’m making good time.” Having a clear goal is just as essential for our spiritual journey as well. According to Jesus, our goal is the kingdom of God or the kingdom of heaven. Our goal is to live our lives within the kingdom which Christ rules in justice and mercy and grace. Notice, the kingdom of heaven is not something which lies after death, it is where we strive to live in the here and now, too. Eternal life is not just about life after death. Jesus meant for us to be a part of the eternal, abundant life within the framework of our daily existence.

Over and over again, Jesus tells stories about what the kingdom of heaven is like. He uses examples from everyday life; a person sowing in a field, a shepherd tending his sheep, a father with two sons, a fruit vine, etc., etc. These are not examples of life after death, they are examples of a way to live here and now. Our goal is not some pie in the sky, cloud sitting life after death, but a vital and vibrant life of mercy, grace and justice for all people life on this earth. The new thing God is doing may take many forms, but it is essentially reforming the structure of life so that we become like Christ. The kingdom of heaven is one in which love is the basis of our relationships rather than self interest and petty squabbling over things which can never satisfy us. It is not easy to enter into this kingdom on our own, we need Jesus to lead us and the way will take us to the cross. But the cross is not the goal, it is only a stopping place along the way. The goal is Eternal Life, not after death, though that is a part of it, but here on earth as well. Perhaps one of the reasons that so many Christians have not led vibrant, loving lives is in the eternal quest for life after death rather than life in the kingdom of God here on earth. Listen carefully to the words of the prayer which Christ taught to his

disciples: *“Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one”* (Matthew 6:9b-13). This prayer is a call to live in the kingdom of heaven on earth. We are not just marking time until we die and enter into Christ’s kingdom. Our Lenten journey isn’t about traveling with Christ into death. It’s about following Christ as a way of life on earth. This is the new thing (the Eternal thing) God is doing in our midst, bringing forth God’s kingdom here on earth and we are the tools and we are the citizens and we are pressing on toward the goal.

**Additional Scriptures: Matthew 6:5-15; Matthew 13:1-23; John 10:1-21;
Luke 15:11-32; John 15:1-17**

Questions for reflection and/or journaling:

1. What is my goal as a Christian?
2. How do I view the kingdom of God or the kingdom of heaven?
3. What do I mean when I talk of Eternal Life?

Suggestions for action:

1. Reread some of your favorite parables. Notice how many of them begin with *“the kingdom of heaven is like:”* or *“the kingdom is God is like:”*
2. Make a goal for your day, one which will help you move closer to living in the kingdom of heaven today.

King of Heaven, I do not totally understand your kingdom nor exactly how I fit into it, but I sit at your feet ready and willing to leave the past behind and to press toward the calling that I have in Christ Jesus. Help me to set appropriate goals which will lead me into your kingdom and help me to live there. In your sovereign name, I pray. Amen.