

Burden-bearing  
 Pastor Sam Richards  
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 Texts: Galatians 6:2-5; Luke 22:61

On Pentecost Sunday we would do well to join the church worldwide in beseeching God **to send again His mighty Holy Spirit** so as to empower, reenergize his church. Two things about prayer immediately come to mind: first, **pray for one another that you may be healed. The prayers of a righteous man availeth much** (James 5:16) and, secondly, **the hearts of kings are in the hands of the Lord** (Prov. 21:1)

Perhaps you have heard of the strident voices, of politicians, activists and even seminary presidents, deriding “thoughts and prayers” as meaningless gestures (futile, a waste of time and breath). Especially after the tragic Uvalde shooting of children! I would call this “declaration” as one of frustration and despair (coupled with arrogant disbelief). But that criticism pales before this truth:

Disparaging “thought and prayers” is openly contradictory to the word and the clear counsel of God!

On top of its being cravenly *foolish*, . . . yes, it is craven to curry popular favor and public support by deriding the divine directive to pray: **pray always . . . pray unceasingly**. I remember Jesus saying, publicly: **My Father’s house shall be a house of prayer for all people**. (Isaiah 56:7) He never rescinded that directive. Paul writes (Ephesians 6:18-19):

**18 [a]With all prayer and petition [b]pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, [c]be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints, 19 and pray on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel**

**Therefore, prayer is not silly, useless or pointless. So we will pray for that is what God has appointed for us to do.** Acts 4:19-20 should represent our attitude:

**19 But Peter and John answered and said to them, “Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge; 20 for we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard.”**

Toward what ends shall we pray then? First, out of obedience; then, to effect healings; next, to effect a change of hearts in kings (governors, presidents, prime ministers, plutocrats, oil moguls, dictators and tyrants, prison wardens)—that they, whether consciously or not, might better serve the people of God over whom they exercise authority. This last seems a most timely rebuke of those in leadership who would interrupt prayers! Lastly we are to pray towards the ends of more perfectly loving our Lord, and faithfully following our Lord and that by this prayerful “burden-bearing”—as highlighted in our text—we be about **fulfilling the law of Christ**.

I have a confession to make—a “burden” for you to share. For five days straight, in my real time, just this week, my devotional times have been dedicated to a single verse, Luke 22:61. Now, the thing I have to repent of consists of my reaction to this repetition: I’m wanting to get onto some other verse, or verses, or a fresh place of meditation. I am guilty of trying to swallow before I have completely chewed my food! But the Lord, apparently, wasn’t done with me over this one verse: **61 The Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how He had told him, “Before a rooster crows today, you will deny Me three times.”** I can’t speak for you; I’m sure, but this “rough place” in my spiritual life—this *stuck-ness*? Or, this drive to just move on?—reinforces the fact that often *the problem isn’t that the Lord isn’t speaking!* No, the real problem lies with the listener, that is, with me. I’m not listening!

I remember, having a blow-out on the way to a ministerial meeting once; it caused me to be late. I was glad to have arrived safely and I apologized to everyone. But the convener took the occasion to publicly berate me. Apparently, he was trying to humiliate me while he held the mike: “You’re always making up excuses.” (You know, he probably had a point there.) After a few moments of this, I got up and left the meeting. I knew something *more than my being late to this meeting was going on*. So I went to my car, retrieved the damaged tire. I hauled it into the meeting and dropped it on to the floor. In the ensuing silence, I spoke, “Here’s proof of the incident that caused me to be late, my friends. I had hoped there might be some rejoicing that I was spared serious injury, or some relief that no one else was endangered by this road hazard . . . it seems to me that instead of trying to embarrass me in front of everyone, some love might have been expressed!

It would have been a prime moment for some “burden-sharing.”

As for being berated for tardiness in public with the intent of humiliating me, frankly, I was not “feeling the love.” So, addressing my colleagues, I asked, “Just what is going on here? Does this ‘behavior’ serve the better purposes of this meeting? Do we want to take everyone’s time so that one man can vent his spleen on another? Whose turn in the barrel will it be . . . next time? Is anyone safe where love and compassion is lacking?” Anger has a tendency to usurp the agenda—and the counsel to deal with complaints in private first is very, very needful. Vitriol and spite do not advance the Kingdom; but burden-sharing does.

Yes, perhaps, if I had left earlier I might have missed the object that punctured my tire . . . *perhaps*, I could have avoided the accident by carpooling, or using another vehicle. Too late for all that!”

The moment passed. But the Lord used the incident to call out an abusive situation and to change the atmosphere in that meeting; even if not changing the heart of the convener! But even that is possible . . . with prayer. I am not sure that the convener ever became kinder towards me; but I hope that others benefitted from what I did in handling that episode. In hindsight, with some sober reflection, I realize that my distrust of the convener may have provoked the incident. The man did not deserve that distrust. However, had he explored the matter—mutual burden-sharing!—the rather ugly business would not have unfolded as it did.

Now, back to real time and my devotions, as I was pondering Luke 22:61 for the third time, I was plunged into a selection for Pentecost Sunday. Imagine that! How is Pentecost related to Peter's denial?! Perhaps you recall that when the Lord engaged with Peter on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, at their breakfast meeting(!), the Lord asked Peter, *three times*, **Do you love Me?** And Peter, remembering that the Lord knows all things and that he had denied knowing the Lord three times, probably had an adverse reaction to the dread impact of the Lord's repeated question. Is that a damaged tire in your hand, Peter?

Could it be that I am just as obtuse, just as blatantly impervious to truth as Peter?! Very likely. (I do fear that this imperviousness may be true of me. Have mercy, Lord.)

Then, in my first reading for reflection re Pentecost, I read a C. S. Lewis selection from his famous sermon, "The Weight of Glory," stressing a critical truth when it comes to being the church; he wrote that "the structural position of **the humblest** Christian," is "**eternal and even cosmic.**" I must remind you that this reading is being taken against the backdrop of Luke 22:61. "We will outlive the universe," Lewis writes, because "we share in Christ's immortality." *Have you ever wrapped your head around the fact that you will outlive the universe?* The universe will not go forever and ever; it will end and you will be still standing.

Let's ponder that fact as we begin this exploration of the "burden-bearing" which characterizes our life together as the body of Christ. The Christian servant lives forever. The universe, the world around us (that we assume will certainly outlast us), our culture, our nation, our social collective reality, these things are, by way of contrast to us, all merely mortal. **They will all pass away, we shall not.** There will be a new heaven and a new earth that we shall be a part of all that—but this universe, all of this, will not exist anymore.

All this "seeming significance," friends, "is transient." It has the appearance of endurance, but it has an appearance only. Take for instance the feature of cemeteries—they are ubiquitous, found throughout the known world; but they will be no more in the age to come.

Every culture, all customs and norms, all institutions, nations, even the human race and all biological life is headed for the dustbin of extinction—but we, Christians, we shall be alive forever more and that in "perfected glory with Him" *in the midst of whatever is coming next!* Now that should be bracing, invigorating, quickening to our spirits. But this perspective alters everything about how we relate to this present world order—if we let it sink in! After all the sound and the fury of this life, we, Christians, shall still be standing; therefore, let us usher in the certain future by fulfilling **the law of Christ** in mutual burden-bearing.

So, back to **the Lord turned and looked upon Peter**. We are now at Wednesday morning and the fifth reiteration of Luke 22:61. We are pondering this: what the Lord knows. What does the Lord know as He **looks upon Peter?** The all-powerful, all-merciful and omniscient Lord, He **looks upon Peter**. Surely, He has more pressing things upon His mind, like being arrested and headed for trial and crucifixion—but He

takes time, and **looks upon Peter**. *Jesus knows everything that Peter ever said, and did and meant.*

Implication for you and me: Jesus pays more attention to what we say and do than we do! He knows and hears all those who are scoffing at prayer and belittling the word of God; they mock “thoughts and prayers,” but Jesus does not! But He has heard all of me, and all of you, too. Okay, that’s quite sobering—every thought, lust, desire—all of it?! YES. However, here is the amazing thing: despite knowing all that Peter said and did and meant, **He does not disown the wretch!** Casting Peter off would be totally justified . . . never looking upon him again would be okay.

Despite the fact that Jesus had looked upon Peter frequently, and knew him thoroughly (**search me, O Lord, and know my heart**), and despite the fact that Peter has just completed denying **any knowledge of Jesus** for the third emphatic time(!), despite the fact that Jesus had warned everyone (**everyone who denies Me, I will deny before the Father**) . . . despite all that, Jesus chose to not forsake Peter (**I will never leave, or forsake you**). **Here is a precious observation: it is never the Shepherd who gets lost, or wanders off . . . that is what the sheep do.** By His grace, the Lord never deals with us according to how we deal with Him.

*Does this inspire confidence in you? It does in me! I have learned that His grip on me is firmer, more reliable than my grip on Him! Jesus is our strong Deliverer . . . praise God!*

Making application of these vital truths, I declare to you, that the church, on its pilgrimage is not deserted, abandoned, or forgotten by God—He does not allow that! We are never “totally in the dark” so to speak. **His love forbids it!** We are in the Kingdom of God now, and we are on our way to becoming the Kingdom of God later, in all its fullness. We look backward to the decisive victory on the cross, and we look forward to the full, and final victory which lies ahead. We yearn, and seek and pray for that day!

For a season, we wander in and through this world of affliction, of pain and death, of tyranny and of liberations. We live in the shadow of the valley of Death . . . it is the shadow only, for death has already been vanquished and its final doom is sure. We are leaving this behind! The everlasting dawn is breaking on us, and the risen Kyrios is already seated on His throne in heaven(!). We, with the eyes of faith, see all this—it’s unfolding before us . . . it is the completion of all things, a divine work of entire transformation *touching on us individually, and corporately*. Just as Peter’s denials, though faithless and cowardly in themselves, actually pushed the divine plan forward!

Our timid follies, our missteps and even our sins **intended for evil, turn out to work for good**. Again, praise God! This is better than it could be.

Those who trust in their own devices, those who trust in smoke and mirrors, who deride our faith (yes, “mocking thoughts and prayers”) will be amazed when, at last, the hidden ruler of this present world order is made manifest to all. When He appears and declares His sovereignty over everything—down to the least molecule, quark, quasar and electromagnetic impulse (1) from the least to the greatest—it will be so soon.

It will be so, but how does this proceed? Through the preaching of the word. Therein lies the power to forgive sin as well as the power to constrain sin—to be forgiven and to walk in holiness. The power to renew a man and the power to bring about the consummation of all things lies, it all lies in the preaching of the word *which it is my privilege to do*. The gift of baptism, as a sign of membership in the end times kingdom is preached . . . the burying of the old man, and the raising of the new, resurrected man as part of God's new creation (which begins now and extends to fulfillment), also preached . . . the significance of the Lord's Supper (our present participation in that Marriage Feast of the Lamb promised and yet to come) is shared amongst the heirs of the kingdom coming, all of these are brought forward by the preaching of the word which convinces us regularly and truthfully that the **love of God is both with the church and in the church from now on and forever.**

**Amen**