

April 1, 2018

Wow!"

John Wesley United Methodist Church

Mark 16:1-8

Rev. Rebecca Mincieli, 508-548-3050

Let me paraphrase today's scripture lesson for you. Three women are heading to the tomb where Jesus is buried, knowing they are going to need some serious help in order to move the stone away from the entrance. But when they arrive, to their surprise, they found the grave already open, and a strange man sitting alone inside, who tells them Jesus, who was dead, is now alive, and then he gives them some instructions. Given these bizarre circumstances, the women quickly thank the man for the information and withdraw from there as fast as they can! Probably thinking, "this guy's too weird!" And because of their bewilderment and shock at what happened, they said nothing to anyone because they were afraid. Wow, what a story!

You see, when I read the scripture for today, and I reflected more deeply on what those women might have been thinking and feeling, a book by Anne Lamott came to mind. It's entitled, *The Three Essential Prayers... Help, Thanks, Wow*. Isn't that a great title? Because it embodies in just three little words, not only the basics of what we should pray, "help, thanks, and wow", but I think it actually embodies much, much, more. In fact, I think it actually embodies our very lives, and all that we go through on a daily basis.

As a personal example, and I'm sure all you parents and grandparents will identify with this – a few weeks ago my husband and I agreed to baby sit for our two grandchildren, Cora, age seven, and Ollie, age five. When we got to the house, their parents greeted us by saying right up front, “Good luck, Cora's sick, and Ollie couldn't get to sleep last night.” And I said that first prayer... “Help!” “Help me, Lord get through this day!” I was tired after a very long and busy week, and a quick look at the kids reinforced my fears. Cora's eyes were heavy and glazed over by her head cold. Snot was running down from her nose, her dress was stained with food from lunch that she had refused to eat and pushed away, getting it all over herself. She was a mess! And Ollie was no better. He was running on pure adrenaline. His hair was all askew because his parents tried to get him to take a nap, but all he did was toss and turn in bed. And you all know that agitated look on an overtired five year old that's just one instance away from a meltdown, don't you? Yes indeed, help!!

So the parents left for their day out, and we started playing with the kids. And despite our initial fears, our time with them was special. We colored. We took a walk around the neighborhood. We made some snowballs. We had a fun dinner, just the four of us, and we all thoroughly enjoyed our time together. The parents eventually came home, and that's when Ollie had his meltdown, so we weren't blamed! We got the kids bathed and in bed, then the four adults had a glass of wine together and talked. And driving home that night I said the second prayer – “Thanks!” “Thanks, Lord for the help!” Thanks, for my grandchildren! Because not only had it been a wonderful day, but also because fresh on my mind was the shooting in Parkland Florida, and the lives of those young teens snuffed out. And I thought about what those parents and grandparents must be going through now, and will continue to go through. I remember something very profound a grandfather said after the Sandy Hook elementary school shooting a few years ago. One of his two grandchildren died in that tragedy. He said the entire family is still doing their best to cope, to get on with their lives, but the pain and sorrow of that fateful day remains through constant little reminders. Like this one... he said that every time the parents and their one remaining grandchild come to visit, his heart breaks. Because it used to be that when the car drove up, and their children and grandchildren got out, they would hear first one, then two, then three, then four, car doors slam closed, and smiles would cross their faces as they anticipated everyone running into the house. Today, they hear only three doors slam closed... and all I have to worry about is some snot and a meltdown. Yes, Lord, thanks!

And so at the end of the day, I was once again made aware that every one of our moments on this earth is precious, a gift. And because there is that certainty of death, it makes life even more precious still. So Lord God – for the miracle of life and for little children and for love and for the many blessings we all enjoy – Wow! Can we all say that third prayer... "Wow!"

Help, thanks, wow! Let's examine these three little prayers further for a moment. I think for the most part, we don't genuinely take to heart the "help" prayer. Even though we all need help. Author Lamott says, “'Help' is the hardest prayer, because you have to admit defeat. And you have to surrender, which is the hardest thing for any of us to do, ever.” But remember, even Jesus himself said, "In this world you will have trouble." So there you have it – no one is going to get through this life without trouble of some kind. But, when we can surrender and truly give our lives and our situation over to God, we will find that opens us up to a power greater than ourselves. It opens us up to the power of Jesus Christ who said, "Take heart, for I have overcome the world." And that's the key message of Easter. Christ

overcame all the darkness in this world, all the sin and evil and death. He was hated, betrayed, he was beaten and hung on a cross to die. Yet in the end, he rose and proved to be the victor. Think about that. Because what it means is that there is no power on earth greater than Jesus Christ. And he is there, offering to help us. "Come to me, all who are weary and heavy burdened, and I will help you overcome the trouble and the darkness." When you are mired in grief, Christ will be there to help you. When you need the grace of forgiveness, or the strength to forgive, he will be there to help you. When the road ahead is uncertain, he will be there to help you. Yes, when you pray that word "help," he will be there for you and will help you get through.

Now let's look at the "thanks" prayer. The bottom line is that thanks, gratitude, is a central message of the Bible, because we should want to always give "thanks" to the One who has given us all things, including our very lives and our families. As Lamott grittily puts it, "Gratitude, true thankfulness, makes us stop from becoming a jerk. When you are aware of all that has been given to you, in your lifetime and in just the past few days, it is hard not to be humbled (and thankful)." You see, "thanks" gives us the proper perspective on life. Pastor J. Ellsworth Kalas writes, "I am grateful for sunshine, because I've known the rain. I am grateful for friendship because I've experienced loneliness. I am grateful for laughter because of the many tears I've cried. I am grateful for my spouse because I know the emptiness of being on my own. I am grateful for each and every day I'm alive because I have seen death. I am grateful for all that I have because I realize I have enough." And so, on this Easter morning, let us give thanks to God who has given us our very lives and all its joys and blessings. And who loves us so much that he would even send his son to die for us, so that we can be assured of eternal life with him in heaven.

And that leads to the final prayer – wow! Which is my personal favorite. And it's the reason I associate it with today's Scripture lesson. Wow! You see, Mark's gospel may appear somewhat anti-climatic, or even be disappointing for some of us. His narrative includes no shouts of "He is risen," no disciples running to the empty tomb, and no reassuring appearances by the risen Christ himself. All we have is a mysterious man, an angel of the Lord, sitting in an empty tomb who announces the resurrection and then issues two commands to the frightened woman: don't be afraid, and go tell the disciples they will see Jesus in Galilee, some ninety miles away. And then the story ends with the women leaving the tomb and disobeying his commands. But here's the rub, here is the "wow" factor as I see it. I think St. Mark intended to leave the ending just like that because he wanted to draw you and I into the story. There is

no proper ending on purpose. Because it begs the question – what happens next? What happens next? Will we, like the women, run away – thinking this resurrection story has no relevance for either our earthly or eternal lives. Or will we follow Jesus to Galilee, which is really a metaphor for the way in which we are to live our lives? Will we follow the One who has the power to help us overcome the difficulties we face? Will we follow the One, who assures us that with God, all things are possible? Will we follow the One who promises to give us a peace that passes all earthly understanding? Will we follow the one who wants to give us new life, abundant life? Yes, if there is to be an ending of the greatest story ever told, you and I are the ones that are going to have to write it. Wow!

And, Amen!