

Newsletter Reflections for May

The Presbyterian Outlook is a magazine which gathers information about the denomination—about what is happening in our congregations—about mission work within our neighborhoods and the world—about issues of concern to local congregations. Near the end of each issue there is a section called “benedictory” where various Presbyterian ministers and leaders reflect on topics of concern. In the April 16th edition the title of this article was “Thoughts and Prayers”. This article caught my attention because of the frequency that phrase is used as a response to something seen or heard, or a conversation with someone. The opening words were this: A lot of how we express ourselves as people of faith can be summed up in that simple phrase “thoughts and prayers.” That obviously is a statement that applies far beyond this collection of people of faith who call ourselves Presbyterian. It is an almost universal response in all Christian communities. I frequently say it, and frequently hear it said to me and to others. Every Sunday we publish a list of folks who have requested our thoughts and prayers for a difficulty they are facing. Thoughts and prayers are an important part of our vocation as disciples of Christ. They are expressions of the love we are called to feel for one another. However, do we sometimes say this too easily? Do we follow through so that these promised thoughts and prayers are a part of our daily conversation with the Lord? These thoughts and prayers for individuals should bring to mind a host of the needs and hurts of those for whom we pray. In our thoughts and prayers do we seek God’s guidance in how we may act to ease those needs and hurts; how we may demonstrate our care for them? How much more powerful could these thoughts and prayers be if they led to acts of caring and compassion for the subject mentioned in the prayer? Thoughts and prayers should not be incidental things which we lay before God and leave there. But they should instead form the basic ingredient of our Christian behavior—of our caring for one another—of our witness to the love God has for each of us and the whole world. If the promise of thoughts and prayers goes no further than their utterance as a phrase—are they not forms of hypocrisy? This phrase has become a refrain in the public sphere as the response to the brokenness of this world—to everything from natural disasters aggravated by changing climate and weather conditions to the violence in our neighborhoods and schools. When these words are said so easily and we do not seek God’s guidance for a remedy to the pain and suffering seen and felt; when no change in behavior occurs in how we address the hurt suffered; have we really taken an opportunity to have a conversation with God about how our actions have contributed to an event or how God is calling us to witness to the way God’s kingdom on earth should look? Our thoughts and prayers—our conversations with God—are the beacons that point us in new directions and illuminate the possibilities that come when, with God’s help, we think of a different way of being...and we pray ourselves toward the living of it. As this season of Easter draws to a close and we remember the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost, we recall that the disciples spent their time in unceasing prayer. They prayed over all the events of their lives. They prayed for the Spirit’s guidance and the Spirit was active—changing their attitudes and up-ending their preconceptions about God. Perhaps our thoughts and prayers should be less of a “to do” list

for God and more of an invitation for God's Holy Spirit to actively move within us and direct our thoughts and actions toward witnessing to God's way of love and acceptance; of caring and doing; and allow that light to shine through us.

Shalom, Pastor Libby