

The Power of Corporate Prayer

Rev. Dr. Kim Engelmann

West Valley Presbyterian Church

I want to talk this morning about the power of corporate prayer. Our prayers as a community, when we are unified together have power to change the world. Did you know that?

That's why it's so exciting to be a part of a praying church...

Now the first thing I am going to talk about is our unity...because the problem is that so often we are NOT unified...so before I talk about the power of unified prayer I want to talk about the "unity" piece of that in as lighthearted a way as I can...

I want to share with you the results of a recent Twitter survey that posed the question to leaders and pastors...what kind of issues divide your church?....And with that question it seems that the Twitter survey blew up...

Evidently, a lot of church leaders were eager to share about their fights, schisms, and conflicts

They were likewise eager to point out the absurdity of these issues. *I can't even believe some of this real...* but evidently it is...
One church reported that they had a huge division in their church over...

If a clock in the worship center should be removed (*A timely argument.*).

A 45-minute heated discussion ensued in one church over the type of filing cabinet to purchase: black or brown; 2, 3, or 4 drawers (*An official cabinet meeting of the church leadership.*).

There was a fight over which picture of Jesus to put in the foyer (*I just want to know who took the pictures.*).

A big church argument over the discovery that the church budget was off \$0.10. Someone finally gave a dime to settle the issue (*This is ten times more important than the church missing a penny.*).

A dispute in one church arose because the Lord's Supper had cran/grape juice instead of grape juice. (*A juicy discussion I am sure*)

Major conflict in one church when the youth borrowed a crockpot that had not been used for years (*The discussion slowly heated up over time*)

An argument over who has the authority to buy postage stamps for the church (*The members were licking their wounds*)

This last one...can't believe this is real...

A disagreement over using the term “potluck” instead of “pot blessing” (*This issue is very serious. Good luck trying to resolve it.*)

These are just some of the issues that were shared. Can you believe it? This survey just happened!

And you begin to think...good grief! Don't people have anything better to do? Is this really what the church has become?

A place that has an undercurrent of resentment and discord stemming from arguments such as these that don't amount to a hill of beans?

If these kinds of things can create divisions among us, and cause resentments to build, we need to regain our focus. We need to remember why we exist as a church...

Now in contrast to this

Ken Wallis is a member here and has been for many years. And he came and shared a story with me that I kept thinking about. I want him to share it someday with all of you better than I can – but I will share it briefly with you today.

Ken was elected president of the CDA – the California Dental Association – which is a huge honor and tremendous responsibility comes with it. He told me that the CDA actually leads the ADA in its resources...so you can see the scope of this.

He also told me that the CDA is a group of people who have all kinds of different opinions about everything; the group is full of different agendas, and they are highly competitive with each other; it's a difficult group to lead – they can't agree about a whole lot too often.

But Ken has always tried to share his faith in this context and be faithful to the gospel.

Well, it just so happens that Ken is at this four day event where he will be installed – at the CDA building in Sacramento and a lot of festivities and meeting were planned..., when one of his colleagues who was in a prayer group with Ken, another Christian dentist, named Steve, had a heart attack and died.

And Ken is the one who finds him first, in the bathroom lying on the floor, , Ken is the one at the hospital there praying for him as the doctor's try to revive him; Ken walks with the family through the shock of Steve's death, prays for him and the family, and is there for them every step of the way... etc.

Most of the ceremonies are cancelled because of this tragedy...and Ken is simply asked to give a brief speech before he is quickly sworn in. When Ken gets up to speak he Here is an excerpt from what he said... ***I haven't really had time to consider how this experience is relevant to our purpose here as leaders of CDA, but I am certain that it somehow relates to the support we provide one another. The strength of the bonds we create when we unify with each other, when we work together for the***

benefit of those with whom we share this short time on earth.... We can't do it alone.

This speech caused the entire body of the CDA to rise to their feet in unison and give Ken a standing ovation. These aren't Christians. But life and death issues...bring us together...to work together...to value each other...to share a common bond.

Guess what Ken is planning to do with the CDA next time they meet? He is planning to have a joint prayer meeting in honor of his colleague, Steve, at the State Capital Building which is right across from the CDA building.

And people who can't agree and most of whom do not believe in Jesus, are going to come together in unity and pray.

Notice. When it's a matter of life and death suddenly differences dissolve. Everyone gets on the same page. There's a general consensus: People say this is important. This is what matters. And they come together.

Now, I firmly believe that the church is in a life or death business all the time. Ken said to me, "You know this really puts a lot in perspective." Then he looked at me and said, "You deal with life and death all the time." And I said, Yeah...the time we have is so precious and important. We waste time being divided, when God longs for us to be united.

And if people who don't know God can be united when it comes to life and death, how much more can we be united as a church through the power of the Holy Spirit, because I believe the church is in a life and death business all the time.

Let's read now about the early church. The parentheses are the 5 core values of the church...(Todd keep in the values on the screen)

Acts 2:1, 44-47

When the day of Pentecost had come they were all **together** in one place...(Holy Spirit comes when we are all together...creates the church and now look at this description of the early church..) They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread **and to prayer**. ... All the believers were **together** and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had a need (**mission & service**). Every day they continued to meet **together** in the temple courts (**intentional faith development**). They broke bread in their homes and ate **together** (**radical hospitality**) with glad and sincere hearts, praising God (**passionate worship**) and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

That is really the most composite picture of the early church that we have... Sums up our 5 core values right here at WVPC – showed you that in the slide. We're doing okay there.

But that word together...together...together...together...runs like a refrain....through here....this description of unity in the church.

And we see howunity in the church ushers in the Holy Spirit...it's a magnet for his power...

Now notice what the people in the early church devoted themselves to. **The teaching and the PRAYER**. And I want to focus on the prayer here.

Why prayer? Because when we pray together with real unity in our hearts, ... together....together...together...miracles start to happen. Mountains start to move. We cannot be stopped when we are unified in prayer as the church of Jesus Christ. Lives are changed. Healing happens.

When we are altogether in one place...in mind and heart...loving one another, forgiving one another...the Holy Spirit comes in power....unity is this magnet for Gods presence....and our prayers of unity together tear down spiritual strongholds...our prayers together as a church usher in that same power of God that we read about in the NT.

This is an amazing calling for the church! Why would we ever want to destroy this because of clocks and budgets and crockpots?

Those resentments and divisions or score cards that we hold against each other are like a clog in the pipe of our corporate prayers....

Where the Holy Spirit might want to move through our pipeline here at WVPC, and dispense his power...he gets stopped, or clogged up by the stupid stuff in us that keeps us at arms length from one another. Unity brings the Holy Spirit right into our prayers. Disunity not only separates us from each other but from Him as well.

So we have this choice.

We can stubbornly hold onto our resentments and grudges, divisions and chips on our shoulder....or we can make amends, resolve it somehow with the person directly; (and BTW studies show that half the time the person who we think did something to us to slight us or offend us...50% of the time that person usually doesn't have any idea they have hurt us).

Most times people who have offended us are so sorry, cause they didn't know. People are people. Talk it out and let it go) And if you can't do that resolve it prayer...or find someone who can process through it with you and give you some advice on how to let it go.

Our unity is too important to sacrifice it on the altar of our own making.

Now I want to publicly confess to all of you...

You know this past week I realized in myself I was harboring some resentment against some people who had left the church when we made the denominational transition. You know I would think, couldn't you have hung in there with us on this? *I was there for you* ...and I could list multiple times I had gone out of my way to be sure that I was there for these people. And all I could think of was...Couldn't you have been there for me? For this church? But in prayer I realized...uh huh. Not okay. And I was deeply convicted that this was a wrong attitude to have.

So I wrote to some of these people and wished them well, and as I did that I was released from so much pressure and a kind of latent heaviness lifted off of me.

So work on it ...so you can let it go too; Because a church unified and in prayer is the most powerful force in the world.

Last Thursday night I had an amazing experience. The SUM students invited me to a gathering off campus where they wanted to gather to pray. These are students many of whom a year ago were involved in street gangs, drugs, sex, violence...and who met Jesus and now attend the Bible College where I teach a class or two each Fall. The school keeps its tuition low so that they can attend.

As they gathered for prayer, it was the most amazing thing. They came in all different shapes and sizes, and sat in a circle and without being led, they spontaneously began to praise God in song.

I don't know what it is about people who have seen and experienced the under-belly of life; people who know they need the Lord. Who come to him with no pretense, or false assumptions about their own rights and their own worthiness.

Maybe it's because these students know that they need God so badly and they know that without him they would be dead...maybe its that kind of perspective, that I was talking about before, that life and death kind of desperation for God, that purifies their unity, that keeps them focused on God and not other things.

They began to sing their prayer...heaven come down....and then they sang the Lord's prayer together. The cadence rose and fell and it was indeed nothing short of a vocal symphony of prayer.

That word symphony is present in the scripture we read this morning.

"If two of you on earth agree about anything there I am in your midst..."- the word AGREE means **"to sound together"**... Jesus knew His audience was familiar with music, and they appreciated the different instruments used in the synagogue service.

So Jesus used a word that came from the world of music to explain the primary condition of group prayer—**Our English word symphony comes from this word.**

When musical instruments of differing tones and pitches play together in a symphony, they must *"sound together"* or symphonize to create a unified sound. And so it is with group prayer, where the differing wills and ideas of two or more believers must symphonize as one sound to God.

George Buttrick said on his classic book on prayer..., **"Corporate prayer is not an aggregate** (in other words just getting people in a room) **it is a symphony.**(when because of our unity we blend seamlessly with one another using our gifts and Holy spirit inspired words to build up the body).

That night as this symphony of unified prayer took place with these former drug addicts alcoholics prostitutes...Lives were changed ...the Holy Spirit was palpable...and people were real with one another...and they were unified.

Because they knew that they either came to seek God as one body...or they were dead on the streets.

That's why I go up there and teach a class or two every fall. I need to keep myself real, and humble...and I need to know that I am just as desperate for God as the next person. And that without God's amazing grace...I'd be dead too.

The church is in the life or death business.

When we recognize that, then the urgency and devotion to united prayer becomes the major mission of the church. We may have differences but we are unified to save lives and that trumps everything.

Our unity together, especially our unity in prayer is the engine that drives everything else

How many will die without the saving knowledge of Jesus?
How many will lose hope because they have never experienced God's grace?
Did you ever see EMT's arguing about a difference of opinion while they are trying to help someone breathe? No. The cause at hand is too great.
Too urgent. Too important for stupid stuff to get in the way.

So with us. As we join together in prayer in the days ahead lets do it as unified body of people...(if there is anyone you need to forgive or have a conversation with do it) cause the stakes are high and corporate prayer is so powerful when we are unified. Satan hates it...because once we are truly unified and connected in prayer nothing can stop it, and things start to happen.

Nothing can stop the power of the Holy Spirit let loose by the people of God.

I gotta tell you...I'm so proud of this church because I know many of you do engage in prayer meetings and prayer groups throughout the week. I am just here to remind you not to let petty resentments and old or new grudges ruin the power of those prayers.

This past Tuesday we had nine people at early morning prayer in the cold...at 6:30am – and I wasn't one of them – I egged out - to pray for the cards you fill out here on Sunday mornings. Tom Mancebo has been there every single Tuesday morning praying for you for the past 7 years since I've been here.

And in the past 7 years, I've never heard him say a disparaging word about anybody. He loves you all. Often he'll be praying for someone on a card that he is holding...he doesn't even know the person...but I do.

And I know the details of a situation that I can't talk about. And Tom will pray in the power of the Holy Spirit to exactly that person's situation as if he knew the details. And it freaks me out...

Sometimes I'll say, to him, "Tom do you know this person?" And he'll shrug and say, "No. Pastor Kim I could barely make out the name on the card, but I know God knows this person." And all I can think is Tom you have no idea what you just said.

Before the service on Sunday I meet with some women to pray in my office for the worship service. The same thing happens there. Marva Prow leads our prayer session and inevitably she will pray in a way that just clinches it. The Holy Spirit is present.

And friends, since you have been praying for me in the daily reminders to pray that Todd has sent out, know that I have turned a corner. I feel your prayers. I feel energized and renewed and enthusiastic. (don't pray too much because I might get too enthusiastic for you – sometimes I need to calm down)

We are in the life and death business; let's rededicate ourselves to be unified in prayer, the most powerful force in the world.

Let's pray.

AMEN