

## **The 360 Degree Prayer by Patty Friesen**

**First Sunday of Advent, December 2, 2018**

The first Sunday of Advent always reminds us to watch and wait for the coming of Christ, for the first time and for the last time, to redeem all of creation. Scripture tells us our posture for this intense watching and waiting is one of prayer - Luke 21:36, "be alert at all times, praying," and in 1 Thessalonians 3: 12 "Night and day, pray earnestly." This is what we call the 360 degree prayer: praying for all creation and the whole world in an eyes wide open, hands open, head up and turning 360 degrees like a local snowy owl on a telephone pole on a winter day.

I often pray only 5 degrees, head down, hands clenched, praying for me, Patrick, our families and our churches. That's all I can usually handle. When Sahar and Tarek were here last month talking about the apartheid in Israel/Palestine - I have to confess to thinking - this is so far removed from my daily concerns. I don't even know how to pray for justice in Palestine. Today's scripture calls us to a courageous posture as we pray for the world, to lift our heads and stretch our tight necks around to 360 degrees of prayer. What we pray for in private and in public worship reflects what we believe in God's scope of activity in the world. Praying for the world makes us ache for what God desires in Jeremiah, Luke and in 1 Thessalonians and re-aligns our daily work in our families and jobs with God's daily work in the world. When we pray small, we act small and receive small things.

The Christian Church has traditionally had 360-degree prayers as in the prayers of St. Clement of Rome in 60 A.D. where he prays for all nations, all of creation, for the animals, for peace for the world and for the sick. I have copies of these ancient prayers

on the back table. In 310 A.D. when the Council of Nicea was writing the New Testament and Paul's Epistles, their prayers began large with praying for creation and then onto the church including all the church leaders, for everyone involved in worship, readers of scripture and singers. Then they prayed for virgins, widows, orphans, married women and pregnant women. They prayed for the sick and those who were traveling and those in prison. They prayed for their enemies. Their prayers were long but they believed they were important to change the world.

We need these ancient Christian frameworks of large prayers for the world because they help us pray for the long haul. Prayers for the world place us within our Christian history of changing the world. Early Christians prayed for centuries for the end of the persecuting Roman Empire and then Emperor Constantine converted to Christianity – something they could have never imagined possible. Quaker Christians prayed for decades for the end of slavery in the US and then worked to make it happen. Eastern Orthodox Christians prayed for decades for the end of Soviet oppression and when the Berlin Wall came down in 1989, the whole world was shocked. South African Christians prayed for decades for the end of apartheid and when Nelson Mandela was released from prison and voted in to the presidency in 1990, the world was shocked again by the power of Christian prayer and action. With our Palestinian Christian and Israeli Jewish friends, Tarek and Sahar, who were here last month, we pray for the end of apartheid in Israel/Palestine and that will take decades as well but it will happen because God wants it to and we pray and work it into reality.

As an attempt to reclaim a larger way of praying, Mennonite Church Canada printed these books of Anabaptist prayers that include daily scriptures, songs and

prayers that begin with our own souls and families and work outward to the church and our neighbours and end with the world and creation. This is a bit of a different direction from the ancient prayers that began with outward with creation and worked inward but I need to begin with prayers for myself to get into the calm openness I need to pray for others.

I take it for granted in church that we think and pray for others around the world while most people around us are not exposed to the tragedies of the world. My hip young hairdresser went on and on the other day about her hair conference where they learned about the problem of clean water in Africa. “Did you know they don’t have clean water in Africa?” “Yes,” I told her. “Where did you hear about that?” she huffed. “I probably heard about that at church.” “Well, I didn’t know about it,” she puffed, “and I’m going to do something with my life more than hair.” I said, “That’s great. I think we find our purpose and meaning in life in working along others to make positive change.” She said, “What have you done?” I said, “I worked in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina, painting a church and cleaned up after a tornado in Minnesota.” Who did you go with, she inquired. “We have a church agency called Mennonite Disaster Service that I’ve worked with. There’s a group of older Mennonite men from my husband’s church are going to Puerto Rico this spring if you want to go.” “That’s great,” she said. “I’m a farm girl. I can run a chain saw!” So we’ll see if my tattooed young hairdresser ends up going to Puerto Rico on MDS with a bunch of retired farmers from Nutana Park Mennonite.

The needs of the world are waiting for our prayer and action and we’re waiting for purpose and meaning. It’s where the needs of the world meet our joy and purpose that

lead us to prayer and work. To prepare us for communion and Jesus' prayer for the world, let us join together in the 360-degree prayer #720 HWB...

Invite deacons forward to serve all who desire to join Christ's prayers for the world with gluten free bread and grape juice

Communion Prayer: God our provider, you have prepared this table for us. In the gift of Jesus, you turned starvation into salvation. We are here because we are hungry for your life. Nourish us, O God, with your life-giving love. Pass bread by offering the peace of Christ for your neighbour. Hold and we will eat together. We come to your table to partake of this cup of blessing. Fill us, O God, with the power of your presence. As we eat and drink, may we be revived and refreshed and strengthened to live as your disciples in the world. Amen.