

## SHAPED BY SCRIPTURE

### *Prayer*

Philippians 4:4-7, 11-13

July 27, 2025

I think God has a marvelous sense of humor. But I have to admit that sometimes I do not appreciate it. Let me explain. Today we wrap up a 9-week summer series *Shaped by Scripture* that began May 25 when our Senior Pastor, Chris Henry, departed on sabbatical, and wrapping up today, July 27. Our Senior Pastor returns next week. Now this is not about Chris Henry or his sabbatical. It is context.

This summer we have looked at scriptures and how they shape our lives. Our goal as a staff was to share with you the scriptures that have shaped us, the ones that we see reflected in your lives and of those around us, the ones that point to the holiness of life itself and the call of God on our lives.

We wanted to share with you what we love. We wanted to share the faith. You know, as people, we all share what we love. When we see a great movie, experience a wonderful restaurant, a nice glass of wine, a fine new coffee shop, a new book or author, a challenging bike trail. We want to share it all with one another. We want to share what we love.

Pastor Madison shared with us her love for the congregation at First Presbyterian Church in Ocala, Florida, where she grew up. She was nurtured, formed, and taught about faith—ultimately resulting in her own gift of faith and call to ministry. Madison taught us that “scripture shapes individuals, and it also shapes Christian community, the church. In 1 Corinthians, Paul says, ‘There are many members yet one body.’ He offers us a vision of the church that, like the human body, is made up of many parts, each worthy on its own, and each vital to the whole.”

Pastor Tom, when he preached, shared with us his love of Pentecost, and somehow that matched his love of Footsteps of Faith—high school students traveling, following the footsteps of Paul. We learned how they have the space and the time to have an intimate encounter with the Holy Spirit,

following a near miss on a boat ride, a boat that almost sank. He offers us a vision of Pentecost in their midst. A sharing, once they were back safely on shore. A sharing, tenderness, laughing and crying, of the experience.

1 Corinthians and Acts are just two of the scriptures that were discussed in this summer series. The energy was contagious back in May as the pastors gathered and thought about which scriptures had formed them. They hoped to share what they love with you, the people they love.

I was excited as well and quite confident that I knew the two scriptures that I would preach on. They center on prayer. I just didn't know I would need prayer so much!

The first scripture is from Philippians. I was first introduced to the writings of Paul while in a high school Bible study led by Young Life. I didn't go just for the Bible study or the snacks or the fellowship...there also might have been a cute boy.

But, Paul allowed me to see that prayer could be real. God was as close to us as our breath. God was dynamic and vital. Prayer was suddenly real. Prayer brought comfort. It may not have changed things, but Christ was there.

Life was turbulent for me as a 15-year-old. Weeks prior I had come home from school to our house smoldering like a pan with a lid. There were firemen everywhere, tromping through what was left, attempting to put out the flames. The stress of that resulted in our parents separating and my brothers and I living in a small apartment with my mom. Prayer gave me a place to wonder, to escape, and to rest.

I came to see that the Holy Spirit speaks to us in prayer, and it is simply a conversation. This conversation with God doesn't just happen in a formal setting—you know, when you're kneeling or sitting, head bowed, eyes closed, reciting formal prayers, such as the Lord's Prayer or one of

the Psalms. That kind of praying is central. In fact, we are bodily creatures, and what we do with our bodies matters. The habits that we form in our lives, and those habits that form us, matter a great deal.

But our conversation with God is not limited to formal prayer. It is also part of our daily consciousness, part of our inner life, of our waking and our sleeping, day by day.

The second scripture was in the Book of Job. Job shows me what tenacity in prayer looks like. I still smile as I recall the looks some of you have given me when you ask me, "Karen, what is your favorite book in the Bible?" And I say, "Job." It does sound strange to love a scripture that portrays the outrageous suffering of a man who loses everything—his wife, his children, his livelihood, his friends. And yet for most of Job's journey, he keeps praying. And God doesn't even answer. I love this. Job keeps praying, complaining, asking, "Why?" Job persistently seeks God. His faith is so strong. Even when God responds, Job's faith is so strong in spite of it all.

I hoped to share with you my love of these scriptures because I hope that you would love them too, that you would dig around and find the scriptures that speak to you. Now I know I need to pray. I'm a pastor. I'm a Christian. I'm a woman. I'm a mother. But I didn't realize how much. Prayer provides connection. The space, the time, and the language of prayer connects us to God, to ourselves, and to others. Some of the most sacred moments happen with you when you ask for prayer. Last Sunday, I was walking back to my office thinking, "It's a wrap." And I heard someone say, "Pastor, can you pray with me?" I turned around, and this gentleman said, "I've lost my job. Might you pray with me?" United in Christ, we offered our prayers, our concerns, the burden that he was carrying, and it was there we found hope and grace to move forward. Prayer with you is a gift.

I trace prayer to the mystery and holiness I found at the kneeling bench next to my mom and dad at St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Evansville, Indiana. God planted the seeds of faith in so many ways. My maternal grandmother, Mamal, was a remarkable woman. One summer day, I was headed to the neighborhood pool on my royal blue

Schwinn, and I stopped at Mamal's house, taking the steps of her front porch two at a time, opening her front screen door.

The sun was streaming in on her red hair and her immaculate pencil skirt, and her linen starched blouse was in place. Her shoes were kicked off after a day of long, long work. She worked at a department store downtown, in fine leather goods. She sat still in an upright chair with her eyes closed and her hands gently resting on her lap.

Are you asleep, Mamal? The radio and the record hifi were silent.

*No honey, I am praying,* she said with her eyes closed.

Are you tired?

*A bit.*

Aren't you lonely?

*No, I am with Jesus. We are resting. He helps me figure it all out.*

I was relieved and satisfied that she was happy, so I shouted, "I'll be back," and ran out the screen door, letting it bang behind me, off to the pool.

*I love you, Karen. Have fun.*

I learned so much about faith from my red-headed grandmothers, especially Mamal, my dad's mom. Her life wasn't easy. And yet, she always shared what she loved. She loved to share who Jesus was at the core of her being. Her spunk, intelligence, determination, and love sparked a lot in our family. And still she shared. She was always present. She made space for the ones she loved. She loved us.

*Rejoice in the Lord always: again I will say, rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near.*

Paul invites us to let our gentleness be known to everyone. In other words, let us be yielding, kind, and gentle as we approach God and with one another.

*Do not be anxious about anything.* This word in Greek for anxiety translates to "a divided mind" or to have a harassed mind. There is a wholesome anxiety grounded in our concern and care for others, but there is also a

destructive anxiety that is grounded in our lack of trust. Paul is encouraging the Philippians to bring what is on their hearts and their minds directly to God. The emphasis is on the act of prayer. It's focused on or toward the one to whom we pray, rather than on us getting prayer just right. (Palmer, Lectionary Commentary, p. 370)

Friends, I had hoped to share this love of prayer with you this summer. That we would be able to live into Paul's words together. *I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength.*

What I didn't expect was how much I would need to pray! God's sense of humor nudging me gently to not only share what I love in scripture, but to do it. To live into that practice.

Summer here at Second Church has been a whirlwind. It always is, but this summer, especially so. Since the beginning of our summer series, *Shaped by Faith*, we have been in a season of transition and change. We have had 12 member deaths and 8 nonmember deaths. In other words, we have helped families say goodbye to 12 people. We have celebrated their lives and our hope in the resurrection. But one week we had five funerals, and on the weekend, we had two more.

We had the usual building challenges with summer storms causing loss of air, loss of electricity, and loss of sound. And even loss of water a week later.

I knew that it was going to be a time of challenge and transition. The leadership books all counsel about a rate of change being too rapid or too high. But this summer, our long-time Director of Finance and Operations, Martha Nommay, retired. We welcomed Bill Newell as our Director of Finance and Bianca Baird as our new Executive Director. Kacy Naab came on board as the new Director of Children's Circle Preschool. Our children and family associate pastor, Sara Dorrien-Christians took a new position at a new church

I needed prayer. I was tired. I am tired, and understood for the first time the reality of chronic pain, and the challenge of steroids, which made me want to bite you all. My grandson, Kai, who is five, came to visit for the summer to attend VBS. Of course, like all of you

grandparents, I longed for his visit from San Francisco, but he has all of the energy and zest of a five-year-old boy. *I needed prayer.*

Yes, there have been many challenges this summer, but there have also been many gifts. Perhaps the biggest is rediscovering my need for God and my need for prayer. I hope with Paul that I can share that love with you and encourage you to seek out that same conversation with God. To share your true anxieties and care for others.

Friends, may we know the tenacity of Job, and may we always share the things we love with one another, beginning with prayer.