

The City Church, New York

The Prayer of Thanksgiving and Intercession – Sunday December 18, 2005

On this day in 1904, in India, despondent yet desperate, a 14-year old Sikh ripped up and burned a Bible. Then he cried out: "O God, if there is a God, reveal yourself to me tonight!" He'd planned to kill himself if he had no answer. All night he wrestled in prayer. And then, there was Jesus, comforting him with nail-scarred hands. When he told his parents about this, he was poisoned and expelled with a curse. Until he disappeared somewhere in the Himalayas, a quarter century later, Sundar Singh wandered the Indian roads serving his Savior. "Prayer," he said, "is not asking God for things; it's desire for God Himself."

Let us pray.

Lord: Do we desire You – You, Yourself? We admit that not many of us have wrestled with You as did this young lad of India. We're challenged by the witness of his wrenching demand to know You or die. Give our hearts such hunger. We rejoice in Your clear answer to his heart's cry – coming to him in that dark night of his soul. And we thank You for his response, borne under persecution, the likes of which, we, here, know nothing. Support all who still do live under oppression for their faithfulness to You.

Thank You for coming to us all, in the flesh of our flesh and bone of our bone. Yet though the world was made by You, it refused to recognize You. Your own people didn't welcome You. We, too, are so slow to welcome You. But we're grateful that, to all who do welcome You, You "give the right to become children of God" – born anew.

During these days of Advent, help us to welcome You into our everyday lives more seriously than we have yet done. Help us to more fully realize that nothing at all can really matter to us unless You matter to us and that, if You matter to us, nothing that may ever befall us really matters. Give us ears to hear anew the "glad tidings of great joy to all the people" – Your Good News of the truest "peace on earth and good will to all."

We pray for all in need here in this congregation as well as for all with whom we deal in our workaday lives. May we faithfully relay Your compassion as we encounter each person who is – according to Your own heads-up – Yourself, in disguise. May we treat each one as we want to be treated and as we say we'd treat You, at least if You didn't keep showing up in all those distressing disguises. Lord, we believe; help our unbelief.

We pray our prayers in Your name, adding the prayer You taught us to pray, saying:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day, our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.