

**Praying the News****Session 1 Audio Script: Prompted to Pray | Janice MacLean**

Welcome to this small group study. I'm Janice MacLean, host of the Prayer Bench.

This is a series I've longed to write. A few years ago I was leading a retreat and my eye caught the cover of the bible of a woman sitting next to me. It was a soft covered Good News Bible. A black smudge was ground into the cover. At a quiet time I asked her about it. She looked at it almost like she hadn't noticed it before.

She laughed and said that she heard a sermon about praying with the bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other. Since that time it was her practice every morning to read the newspaper along with her morning devotions. The black ink of the newspaper left its mark on her bible.

I wonder what mark she made on the world?

That's an image that compels this series.

The other is an experience I had in Israel. I lived and worked with an order of Roman Catholic sisters. They were a small group who offered the hospitality of their peaceful gardens and their guest house to visitors and guests.

They also shared space with a group of cloistered sisters from the same order. Their work in the world wasn't so obvious to me at first.

As I got to know them a little better, and listened to their prayers in worship, I came to realize they were fully informed about events in the country. Their work was prayer. They read the newspaper, several versions, and by what other means I don't know, they knew far better than myself and the other sisters, what was going on in the world. They held it all in prayer.

They prayed the news from a heart-centered place. They knew the **real** world and they lived in it and their lives of prayer were aimed at making the world a more peaceful place, a more loving place.

That is the longing in me — to hear the news from a heart centred place; to pray the news as everyday spirituality.

The author and teacher, Richard Rohr, writes in many of his books, that everything that happens in the world is an opportunity to move us in love towards God and others.

Can listening to the news evoke such a movement in our heart? That is a core question at the heart of this series. Is prayer (understood in its largest dimension) one of the tools of outreach? Can listening to the news call us to live and act in faithful ways?

There are challenges today to praying the news.

In ancient times it would take weeks for news to travel across the land. Many have said that news travelled at the speed of a traveller. Sometimes news wasn't even "news" by the time it reached its destination.

Now, social media and the the 24 hour news channels bring us news as it is happening. We are always in the midst of news. I remember following with my eyes the constant flow of a news ticker offering headlines and the breaking news — and being startled to realize that I wasn't absorbing what I was reading. My eyes were mesmerized by the constant crawl of the news, but I made no space in me to feel the pain and hurting it was proclaiming. I was numb. That's not how I want to engage the world.

It is a real struggle to know how to be in touch with the world without hardening our hearts.

It is a real challenge to create space to meet with God in the midst of a hurting world.

How can we create space each day to meet with God in the midst of a hurting world?

How can the smudge of ink on our soul be the sign of our call to live and act faithfully in the world?

These are a few of the questions I invite you to bring to the circle of your conversation in this series, and to risk the spiritual practices that invite engaging the real world.