

Prayer with legs (Easter 4B; *1 John 3:16-24*)

On continuing to believe in prayer when others (quite reasonably) do not

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“Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action.”

It seems almost insulting to tell someone who is suffering that I’m praying for them, especially when I know that person is not a Christian. The words have been deployed so many times with no results—who in the world would believe in my offer of prayer as anything more than a platitude?

I’ve tried the other formulations: “you’re in my thoughts” or “you’ve been on my mind.” I’ve heard and received others. “I’m holding space for you.” “I’m holding you in the light.” “I’m sending good vibes.” I receive these words knowing those who say them are aware of their inadequacies and have the best intentions. They are appreciated. But it’s embarrassing to me as a Christian that those bromides seem more authentic than offering prayers.

“I hope to God nobody sends me any more prayers,” said Susan Orfanos in a live TV interview. Her son Telemachus was killed in a mass shooting in Oakland after surviving a mass shooting in Las Vegas. “I don’t want prayers,” she said. “I don’t want thoughts. I want gun control.” And who would blame her for speaking so honestly from her grief and frustration? We’ve experienced so many mass shootings, so much death, and so little action in response that the hashtag [#nomorethoughtsandprayers](#) now trends on Twitter with each new event. If that’s

what prayer is, people don't want our prayers anymore.

And yet I still believe in prayer, and I still depend on the prayer of others. I believe prayer isn't just a mental exercise, a self-help tool, another form of mindfulness or meditation, or a way to quickly dispense with my obligation to offer concrete help to those in need. Prayer inspires and sometimes demands action. That famous Frederick Douglass quote—"I prayed for twenty years but received no answer til I prayed with my legs"—reminds me to pray with my legs not just for devastating social issues of racial justice and gun violence but also for the everyday needs and griefs of my neighbors.

A couple of weeks ago, I came home to find a pan of lasagna on my front porch, left by a friend who was "just thinking" of me, and it felt like a miracle. That's a prayer that has legs, too.