

## *Let us pray!*

*Psalm 85; Luke 11: 1-13*

Prayer. Prayer is like water for the soul. It nourishes us, sustains us; it protects us and brings us into balance. I do remember that one of my greatest fears of deciding to go into ministry was that I would be asked to pray. I remember thinking I don't know how to pray. Yes, my grandmother taught me to say grace as a child, but for people to listen to me pray was very intimidating. In fact, many of us don't pray because we think we can't or our efforts are deeply flawed, but that is not the case. Let me tell you, asking a group to pray or asking one person to pray can silence them like nothing else. But you all demonstrated today that you can all pray, and it is not as complicated as you all make it out to be. What alleviated this fear for me was the fact that the disciples were also unsure. To hear the followers of Jesus had to ask the question, 'Jesus, teach us how to pray and so today's scriptures do that for us.

The truth is that the Lord's Prayer that we have been taught that we have said so many times it has almost become rote is for human beings. "It doesn't require anything from us that we do not already have or are capable of. It is a prayer for creatures in need"<sup>1</sup>; simple as that. So, what is prayer? It is said that in prayer we open ourselves to God and this process is one of liberation and awakening Prayer is the act of human beings who know how hard it is to be human. Prayer is the process of self-giving and being set free from isolation. When we pray, we enter relationship with God, and we are no longer alone. It's a dialogue with God, with the Divine Presence, with the Great Spirit and at its core prayer is longing, it is desire and it is an impression of our deepest aspirations, joys, and sorrows. Now, let me tell you there are a lot of quotes about prayer and I would like to share some with you from some famous people.

Kierkegaard said, 'Prayer does not change God, but it changes him or her or they who pray.'

Stella Tyrell-Mann says, 'No sincere prayer leaves us where it finds us.'

Mother Teresa says, 'Prayer is the mortar that holds our homes together.'

Marian Anderson says, 'Prayer begins where human capacity ends.'

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<sup>1</sup> Douglas John Hall, *Feasting on the Word*, Year C, Volume 3, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), p. 288.

Finally, from Abraham Joseph Heschel who says, ‘The purpose of prayer is not the same as purpose of speech. The purpose of speech is to inform, the purpose of prayer is to partake.’

The scriptures inform us that prayer is an essential part of Jesus life. When you think about it there is story after story about how he wanders off to go pray before he does something. He did that before he fed the 5000, he did it before he was arrested, he even prayed before death. When Jesus taught the disciples how to pray, he broke it down into just three basic parts:

1. The first thing you must do is reach out to God. Now when he was reaching out to God, he wasn't saying that God was unattainable, he used the words, ‘Our Father’. He used that parental indication of an intimate relationship, one we have with someone we love, trust and care for. When we pray, we are praying with a friend, with a loved one and we are no longer alone. That is how prayer starts; simple acknowledgement that we are with our friend or a loved one.
2. The second thing Jesus instructed the disciples to do was to acknowledge that they are not alone in this; that we don't have everything ourselves; that we are not in charge as much as we would like to be. Instead, we are to implore God to truly take charge of our lives and bring peace to this world. In the Psalm today we can get focused on the fact that God was angry and wrathful. But really what the psalmist was doing was imploring God to truly let go of God's anger and by letting go of God's anger God could then instead restore justice and righteousness in society while at the same time renewing our hearts to a singular devotion to God. The psalmist was speaking on our behalf; a communal lament about how wrong the world had gone and how we needed to bring it back into order.
3. And then the final piece was to seek and ask for three things; food to nourish our bodies, ‘give us this day our daily bread’, forgiveness, ‘forgive us our trespasses’, and number three, fidelity, ‘lead us not into temptation’.<sup>2</sup>

Kenneth Leach writes a book called, ‘True Prayer: An Invitation to Christian Spirituality’, in which he says, ‘It is the human experience which is the starting point of prayer. A process of growing awareness of why people love us, forgive us, and of openness to the wonder and glory of creation and nature and of the elements. At its heart prayer is the process of self-giving and being set free from isolation. To pray is to enter into relationship with God; be transformed by God.’<sup>3</sup> That is the point of this. It's not to simply get what we want, but to be transformed in a way that we could never imagine. Prayer is the process of liberation and awakening.

When Jesus taught the disciples to pray, he didn't end there with those simple instructions, but instead added a parable just to confuse us all and says you must ask, knock and search. And, in this parable he talked about how somebody went to his friend's house, knocked on the door and the person was like, ‘Hey look I'm asleep. Could you just go away and bug somebody else

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<sup>2</sup> James A. Wallace, *Feasting on the Word*, p.289-291.

<sup>3</sup> Kenneth Leach, *True Prayer; An Invitation to Christian Spirituality*, (Harrisburg: Morehouse Publishing, 1980), p. 6-7.

because it is just too late? Go bug somebody else.’ But Jesus is telling us that we need to be persistent. There are times when we feel like we pray and our prayers are not answered, but we are not to give up; to keep asking, to keep searching, to keep knocking because the door will be opened. Like the sleeping friend we need to be persistent in our prayers to God for awakening, and we become liberated when we realize that we are not alone. Jesus wants us to ask search and find.

Last night I had the privilege of being at the most spectacular wedding and reception where I met some of the most beautiful faithful people. I witnessed prayer being answered. What was amazing was that two of the members of our congregation, Ben and Josh, who were married; in the speeches last night we heard about the fact that they were so happy that they had found one another. What was so moving for me was hearing that their families had answered their knock. When they were searching for what it meant for them, for where they would find love, the knocked and their families answered. Their families were there for them in a way that was unconditional. What was even more beautiful was when the parents talked about how one of their greatest fears was that they wouldn’t find love and yet here we were in a moment where they did. Their prayers had been answered. Ben and Josh were persistent in finding one another and what they found through prayer and through that love with one another was each other. And a beautiful relationship is blooming, and they are no longer alone. It was such a great celebration and such a great testament to how prayer works; when we are persistent, when we ask, when we seek and when we remember that we are not alone.

Psalm 85 says mercy and faithfulness will come together where justice and peace embrace; where justice and peace embrace. That is what we saw last night; justice and peace embraced in acceptance and belonging in a world that is often fraught with injustice we are assured that when we pray, when we knock, God will open the door and God will answer. God may not give us exactly what we ask for, but God will give us what is necessary and what is beneficial and most importantly we will be transformed. If you are feeling spiritually parched or disconnected, get praying. You can do it. There is no magic formula. You just must do it. Having a conversation with God has a profound way of bringing us peace when it seems life is out of control, hopeless and frustrating. Spending time giving thanks to God helps us remember how blessed we truly are and helps us to remember what we have truly received. So, what role has prayer played in your life? Who taught you to pray? Whose voice do you hear when you are praying? How has prayer transformed your life? May God add blessings to your life. Amen.