

Sermon

“Teach us To Pray”

A Sermon for First Presbyterian Church

Sunday, July 28, 2019

Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Psa. 85:0 To the leader. Of the Korahites. A Psalm.

- 1 LORD, you were favorable to your land;
you restored the fortunes of Jacob.*
- 2 You forgave the iniquity of your people;
you pardoned all their sin. Selah*
- 3 You withdrew all your wrath;
you turned from your hot anger.*

*Psa. 85:4 Restore us again, O God of our salvation,
and put away your indignation toward us.*

- 5 Will you be angry with us forever?
Will you prolong your anger to all generations?*
- 6 Will you not revive us again,
so that your people may rejoice in you?*
- 7 Show us your steadfast love, O LORD,
and grant us your salvation.*

*Psa. 85:8 Let me hear what God the LORD will speak,
for he will speak peace to his people,
to his faithful, to those who turn to him in their hearts.*

- 9 Surely his salvation is at hand for those who fear him,
that his glory may dwell in our land.*

*Psa. 85:10 Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet;
righteousness and peace will kiss each other.*

- 11 Faithfulness will spring up from the ground,
and righteousness will look down from the sky.*
- 12 The LORD will give what is good,
and our land will yield its increase.*

13 Righteousness will go before him,
and will make a path for his steps.

Luke 11:1 He was praying in a certain place, and after he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, “Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.” 2 He said to them, “When you pray, say:
Father, hallowed be your name.

Your kingdom come.

3 Give us each day our daily bread.

4 And forgive us our sins,

for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us.

And do not bring us to the time of trial.”

Luke 11:5 And he said to them, “Suppose one of you has a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say to him, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; 6 for a friend of mine has arrived, and I have nothing to set before him.’ 7 And he answers from within, ‘Do not bother me; the door has already been locked, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.’ 8 I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, at least because of his persistence he will get up and give him whatever he needs.

Luke 11:9 “So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. 10 For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. 11 Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for a fish, will give a snake instead of a fish? 12 Or if the child asks for an egg, will give a scorpion? 13 If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”

I. In 1994 — First pastorate

A. Realized that I knew a lot of helpful things

- B. But honestly did not know how to pray.**
- C. Partly my fault**
- D. But seminaries were not doing a good job then of teaching future pastors to pray.**
 - 1. Preach**
 - 2. Moderate Sessions**
 - 3. Engage in theological reflection**
 - 4. Translate and interpret the Bible**
- 5. But strangely not a single class dedicated to my own relationship with the living Lord and how to maintain that...**

II. A friend who taught me to pray

- A. I did not know it at the time — but while I was still in seminary two of my professors were collaborating on a book about “Living the Christian Life: A Guide for Reformed Spirituality.”**
 - 1. They wrote: “Prayer is the lifeblood of the Reformed Tradition . . . and of the whole of Christian faith. It is one of the chief ways God helps us to grow in the life of faith.”**
- B. 3 years into ministry and my failure to be a man of prayer was taking its toll...**
 - 1. Feeling burned out, isolated, disconnected**
- C. Wrote to one of those authors (Ben Johnson)**
 - 1. “I’m dying out here! What should I do!?”**
 - 2. Ben’s simple answer, “pray.”**
- D. I started clumsily praying**
 - 1. Though I didn’t know it — Ben was quietly**

arranging for me to go on pilgrimage with him later that year.

2. In November I found myself walking from Jerusalem to Jericho — down the fabled road where the man was set upon by robbers in Jesus' parable about the good Samaritan.
3. Mostly me complaining to Ben about prayer
4. “Why don't you get out of the hole you've been digging and simply let the rain fall on you?”

††† It was my first lesson in learning to pray - grace! †††

E. I have been on a journey of prayer as the lifeblood of my faith ever since then.

III. Today in Luke's telling — Disciples see that Jesus is a man of prayer and ask — “Teach us to pray.”

- A. They could tell he was a man of prayer because:
 1. Was constantly stopping what he was doing to pray!
 - a. Alone atop a mountain
 - b. With Peter, John, and James atop mountain
 - c. He prays for the world
 - d. He prays for his disciples
 2. Perhaps the first thing Jesus taught about prayer is that it comes *first*. It is life which gets organized around one's prayers . . . not the other way around.

To pray only when we feel like it is more to seek consolation than to risk conversion. To pray only when it suits us is to want God on our own terms. To pray only when it is convenient is to make the God-life a very low priority in a list of better opportunities. To pray only when it feels good is to court total emptiness when we most need to be filled. The hard fact is that nobody finds time for prayer. The time must be taken.

Joan Chittister, OSB, "Wisdom Distilled from the Daily", 31

B. He teaches them a *short* prayer —

- 1. Perhaps lesson two is that there is no need for many words in prayer, nor eloquent ones.**
- 2. Bob — "I am trapped by my own eloquent prayers which cost me nothing."**

Praying

It doesn't have to be
the blue iris, it could be
weeds in a vacant lot, or a few
small stones; just
pay attention, then patch

a few words together and don't try
to make them elaborate, this isn't
a contest but the doorway

into thanks, and a silence in which
another voice may speak.

C. His prayer focusses on transformation:

- 1. "Your kingdom come..."**

Rom. 12:1 I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God,

which is your spiritual worship. 2 Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.

D. His prayer reminds us of our creatureliness:

1. “Give us each day our daily bread...”

Suzanne Stewart asked:

“Why pray?”

Brueggemann’s response:

“We pray because our life comes from God and we yield it back in prayer. Prayer is a great antidote to the illusion that we are self-made.”

SPIRITUALITY TODAY

Spring 1986, Vol. 38, pp. 41-52.

E. His prayer has forgiveness at its heart:

- 1. Our forgiveness of others**
- 2. God’s forgiveness of us**
- 3. We forgive because love requires it . . .**

Forgiveness is the name of love practiced among people who love poorly. The hard truth is that all people love poorly. We need to forgive and be forgiven every day, every hour increasingly. That is the great work of love among the fellowship of the weak that is the human family. - Henri J.M. Nouwen

F. His prayer acknowledges that there will be times of trial:

1. **This petition of the prayer is much argued over by biblical scholars**
 - a. **partly because Luke has Jesus use a word which is from the Legal profession (em>peirasmos). While . . .**
 - b. **partly because Matthew’s version of this “deliver us from evil”**
2. **Perhaps it is enough to conclude that in all the “trials” of this life, both legal and metaphorical, we need God’s help.**

IV. I hope that your faith is steeped in prayer.

- A. **Jesus later in Luke will “[tell] them a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart.” (Luke 18:1)**
- B. **Indulge me in a moment of advertising —**
 1. **The Pilgrimage ministry is offering a short-course in late Sept. - early Oct. on prayer.**
 2. **Christian Prayer Toolbox - back by popular demand.**
 - a. **Praying with beads — yes Protestants CAN do that!**
 - b. **Praying with Icons — We can do that too!**
 - c. **Practicing the prayer of the Examen.**
 3. **These are meant to teach you about forms of prayer not already familiar to you.**

V. Prayer is the way we make our relationship with God *real*.

- A. **It is how we show that all of our words about**

loving God have substance behind them . . .

- 1. We spend time with those we love!**
- 2. God is no different and if we say we love God but take no time to be with God and God alone in prayer . . . we should be asking some hard questions about the depth of our love for God.**

B. The good news is that when we go to God in prayer . . . we discover that it was God who invited us...

- 1. Let me close with a word from Carlo Carretto:**

Understanding prayer well means understanding that one is speaking with God. Thus there are two poles. One very, very tiny and very, very weak: my soul. One immense and powerful: God.

But here is the first paradox, the first surprise: that {God} who is so great should have wanted to speak to me, tiny as I am. It is not I who wanted prayer. It is {God} who wanted it. It is not I who have looked for {God}. It is {God} who has looked for me first. My seeking {God} would have been in vain if before all time {God} had not sought me. The hope on which my prayer rests is in the fact that it is {God} who wants it. And if I go to keep the appointment it is because {God} is already there waiting for me....

Letters from the Desert