

Genesis 18:20-32
Psalm 138
Colossians 2:6-19
Luke 11:1-13

Sermon July 28th, 2019

“Prayer is God’s Way of Intimately Connecting with Us”

Every day in my profession I see how meaningful prayer is for people as they face the joys and challenges of life. The peace prayer brings to someone who is suffering from cancer or some other health problem. The comfort prayer brings to the loved ones who are sitting at their bedside supporting them through this. The hope prayer brings to the person who faces injustice. The joy prayer brings to the person who gives thanks for what God has provided for them. The love prayer brings to the person who is struggling to love. The forgiveness prayer brings to the person who feels shame. The compassion prayer brings to the person who is in a position to help others. The feeling of belonging prayer brings to the person who is lonely or disconnected from those they love.

Prayer is one of the most intimate ways we connect with God and with each other. Prayer opens us up, helping us take off the masks we often put on for others to see. Prayer makes us vulnerable to and dependent on something beyond ourselves. To trust in God and others to help us face these joys and challenges that come our way.

Prayer plays such a vital role in our everyday life as Christians, and yet, how often do we feel insecure about our prayer life? Am I praying for the right things? Am I praying enough? Am I praying the right way? Am I praying in the right places?

As I was trying to grow in my prayer life at seminary I struggled with some of the ways we were being taught to pray. Like kneeling to pray at the chapel. Or reciting specific prayers daily. Or finding a quiet space to pray all by myself. I didn’t always come away from these experiences feeling connected to God or to my brothers and sisters in Christ for that matter. I am a strong extrovert who connects best with God and others when I am around people. The ways I was being taught to pray were more created for introverted personalities. I ended up getting down on myself. I had failed at one of the most important practices in our faith. “And I am going to become a pastor?”

Rest assured I didn’t give up hope that I could figure this out. So, I went to the library at seminary and embarked on a search to find at least one book that helped me reconcile my prayer life with my extroverted personality.

After an ardent search in the spirituality section, God brought forth a book called “Spirituality for Extroverts”. This book helped me see that I had a very healthy and active prayer life. Instead of kneeling in the chapel to pray I would go for a long walk

down a popular walking trail and talk out loud with God about what was going on in my life. Sometimes I would invite others to join me and we would pray together through our conversations about what God is saying to us.

I remember when I first moved to Saskatchewan I was going on one of these long walks along the river. People kept looking at me really weird. After the tenth person I realized they weren't looking at me weird because I was talking out loud. They were looking at me weird and sometimes with disdain, because I was wearing an Edmonton Eskies cap. Probably would get similar looks here.

I also joined campus ministry where we did a lot of group prayers together while sitting around in a circle. I found more connection in these settings than I did in daily chapel at the seminary. I started to feel more secure in my prayer life.

However, what I have come to realize now is it doesn't really matter how I pray or where I pray or what I pray. What matters is that I find opportunities to pray, because I feel that intimate connection with God most when I am talking to God. Sharing my life with God. Just like I feel that intimate connection when I am talking, sharing my life, with my friends, my family, all of you.

In our gospel this morning, the disciples are seeking guidance on how to deal with the insecurities they face when praying. They ask Jesus to teach them how to pray.

Jesus gives them a template that we know as the Lord's Prayer. Now for some when given a template, they basically follow it as is. For others, they improvise. As the church we recite this prayer in our worship services regularly. We recite this prayer in hospitals and care facilities. We recite this prayer with family and friends on special occasions.

However, as the church we don't always recite the Lord's Prayer, but take what Jesus taught us and improvise. For example, our prayers of intercession, or prayers within a prayer group setting.

So, Jesus gives us a template to help direct us on what to pray for, but, this isn't the only thing Jesus is teaching us about prayer in our gospel this morning. Instead, Jesus is also trying to point the disciples, and us, to the most meaningful purpose for prayer. Prayer calls us back to this intimate relationship we have with God as God's children.

In Jesus' teaching here, God is compared to a gracious friend, and to a loving parent. Highlighting that intimacy, that connectedness, that exists in our relationship with God.

In the prayer Jesus recites, we are called to see God as an active presence in our lives providing for our needs. Forgiving us. Helping us forgive and love others. Helping us face the challenges that come our way. God is intimately involved in our lives like our

closest friends. Like our families. Prayer reconnects us to this intimate relationship we have with the One who created us.

At the end of our gospel this morning, we see that if we pray to God, we will receive the Spirit. Now sometimes, people hear these words of Jesus this morning as meaning that if we are persistent or if we just ask God, that God will give us whatever is in our heart. Or in other words God will do what we want. But, this isn't quite what Jesus is saying here today. If we pray to God, if we ask, seek, knock, God will give us the Holy Spirit. Meaning God will walk with us and guide us as we face the joys and challenges of this life.

Or in other words, God answers our prayers, but not always in the way we think or even want them to be answered. Sometimes, I feel that our commodity driven society has shaped what we expect out of prayer. That we need God to answer us in a certain way for us to feel that God is listening. Or we look over at someone whose prayers have been answered and we think because we are still sick or struggling that we are not praying hard enough or good enough. We start to feel insecure about our prayer life all over again. Or we get angry with God for letting us down. Instead, of trusting that whatever God's answer will be we will experience God's promise of redemption and healing. Whatever that will look like. And to trust in God's promise that when we reach out to God we are reconnecting with the Holy Spirit we received in our baptism. We are reconnecting to God's guidance and presence in our lives.

So, as I hear the gospel this morning, I feel God is empowering us to give over our insecurities to God, and open ourselves up to pray in whatever way we need. Not worry so much about how we pray or what we pray for or how often we pray. The important message Jesus teaches us this morning is that prayer is our most intimate way to connect to God, and opens our hearts to trust in God for our well being.

Because, God wants to intimately connect with us. God wants to be an active presence in our lives loving us and empowering us to love others. God wants to be our best friend, our loving parent. The one who stays up with us to hear our struggles. The one who provides for us when we reach out for help. The one who holds us tight in the midst of our insecurities reassuring us that we are loved for who we are. God's wonderful creation.

Let us pray, loving God, thank you for giving us prayer to connect with you. When we struggle to pray remind us that you are there longing to hear our voice. When we feel insecure in our praying. Empower us to see that you value us for who we are. Your wonderful creation. And that whatever way we offer prayer you will hear us and answer us in your own gracious and loving way. Helping us trust in your will. **Amen.**