

September 30, 2018

St. Nick's

Way of Love sermon series: PRAY

Dwell intentionally with God daily

Genesis 18:20-32

Psalms 138

Colossians 2:6-19

Luke 11:1-13

As we continue to discuss the Way of Love practices that enable us to live Jesus-centered life, and before we turn our attention today to prayer, let's review: we are turning, turning from building our own kingdom to participating with God in the building of the Kingdom of love. We are learning the importance of knowing God's story and our role in it so that we can fully participate and be who God is calling us to be. And today we will talk about prayer - dwelling with God, intentionally, everyday.

Just what is prayer? Basically, prayer is our way of communicating with God. Like all communication, it has to flow both ways to be effective. We can't just keep talking and talking and not listen to what God has to say.

Prayer is a part of how we stay connected to the head of our body, to Jesus. Prayer is a way of life that keeps us continuously in God's holy presence. Prayer is what brings together our time in this life with the eternal life given to us by our creator so that we live both at the same time.

God is a god of relationship. As the Trinity, God is the ultimate relationship - distinct and yet inseparable. We were created to be in relationship with God and with each other and relationships involve both giving and receiving what we need physically, emotionally, intellectually, and spiritually. God chooses not just to give us what he already knows we need but he desires that we ask, actively involved in a relationship. In prayer we come before God and we admit we need the One who created each and every one of us.

We have to always keep in mind that communication involves people in conversation. In a good healthy conversation we both listen and we speak. And we listen to hear beyond the words to who the other truly is. It is the same with our relationship with God.

And as we spend time in conversation with God, growing deeper in our relationship, our hearts and wills become shaped like his. Our inner most being, who we are at the very core of ourselves settles into the God-shaped space inside each and every one of us so that what we ask for becomes Kingdom oriented.

Our culture teaches us to value and praise independence, but that is not what God teaches us and it isn't how Jesus showed us to live. Interdependence is the valued attribute in God's kingdom and just as God asks us to participate in the building of the Kingdom, so he desires that we ask for what we want and need.

Most of us, I'd guess, have a difficult time asking for things. We don't want to appear needy or weak or we don't want to impose on others. And yet we still need others to get what we need and so some of us will take without asking. Some of us will complain until someone gives us what we want. And some of us will just do without because we don't want to bother anyone with our asking.

But God tells us to ask! And to ask boldly. Coming before God in prayer we acknowledge both our dependence on him and his goodness in giving us what we need.

In the gospel story we read today, Jesus' disciples witness him in prayer. They understand the holiness of prayer and they want to do it right.

Open your bulletins and look at the gospel reading. If you are wondering what happened to the rest of the prayer, this is a shorter version of how Matthew tells this same story.

Let's break it down:

We come to God in direct address, calling him by a familial, intimate name, and while the name Jesus uses is a masculine noun - the Greek word Pater - we know that God isn't either male or female. Both male and female are created in God's image. The Greek word Pater can also be understood as an "originator or creator". Jesus used the common language of the time he walked this earth to give us a way to address in relationship our Creator who is beyond our human comprehension.

And this name is to be Hallowed - to be holy. When we enter into conversation with God, when we speak the name of God, we are entering into a holy presence.

And what's the very first thing we proclaim in this holy presence of our creator? (wait for answers...)

We get our orientation right - who we are and what we do as Jesus followers is about God's kingdom, not our own.

And finally we ask - for what we need to truly be Kingdom people: for sustenance - both for our body and our soul, for forgiveness and the capacity to forgive, and for protection so that we might remain in God's holy presence.

We are to be persistent in prayer. As our life - through all the practices of the Way of Love - continues to become more and more God-shaped, the things we ask for will become more and more in tune with God's kingdom. God wants to give us good things, just like as parents we want to give our children the best we can. God gives us the very best gift - he gives us himself.

Jesus says whatever you ask will be given to you. Now, this doesn't guarantee that just because you ask for million dollar mansion or that fancy red sports car that you will get it. But you might. Abraham seems to have gotten his way, he appears to have changed God's mind. Abraham appeals to God's goodness because he knows God to be good but Abraham also wants to believe in the goodness of his fellow human beings. Surely, these people are not so far gone that they can't still recognize God and repent?

And so God appears to give in to Abraham's appeal. But in the end, who was right? We know how the story ends - not even 5 obedient people could be found; God came to the people of Sodom and they tried to do him harm. As it turns out, God didn't give in to Abraham but helped him understand better God's relationship with his people.

I can't even begin to claim that I know exactly how prayer works. Why does God appear to answer some and not others? There isn't a simple answer because it isn't just a simple question. To

understand why it appears we get our way in some instances and not others is to understand God. And without being God, we can't fully comprehend God.

Knowing the anatomy of how speaking and hearing work doesn't help us know the person we are in conversation with. Knowing how the mechanics of our phones work doesn't give us insight into the person we are calling.

It is in spending time with others that enables us to know them. Prayer isn't about getting our way but about being in relationship with the God who created us in love and who promises to be with us even in the darkest moments of our lives. Prayer is about admitting we are dependent on the one who came to live and die as one of us, it is about desiring a relationship with the who knows and understands us completely and far better than we can even know ourselves. Prayer shows that we know God is faithful to us even when we've been unfaithful to God.

So here are your questions for the week:

What intentional prayer practices center you in God's presence, so you can hear, speak, or simply dwell with God?

How will (or do) you incorporate intentional prayer into your daily life?

With whom will you share in the commitment to pray?

"Jesus teaches us to come before God with humble hearts, boldly offering our thanksgivings and concerns to God or simply listening for God's voice in our lives and in the world. Whether in thought, word, or deed, individually or corporately, when we pray we invite and dwell in God's loving presence." Amen.

<https://www.episcopalchurch.org/explore-way-love>

https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=650

https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=719

<https://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?post=1570>