



Hear the Word

from Pastor James N. McEachran



Gather... Encourage... Equip... Send...

Fifth Sunday after Epiphany

February 5, 2017

Lord, Teach Us to Pray

February 5, 2017: Matthew 6:5-15

It would seem that a month long sermon series on prayer ought to begin with a prayer...so we will...
Let us pray...

Shh!

O Lord, our God, grant wisdom to our words, clarity in our hearing, confidence as we live and walk faithfully in prayer and in serving; in Jesus' name, Amen.

Shh!

We live in a time of many means of communication. Our screens open up the world in ways that would have been unknown in the times of Jesus.

Imagine Jesus competing with Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, texts and tweeting, Facetime catching up at the end of the day for a team huddle about mission. There are, by yesterday's count, some 91 sites for what we have learned to call "social networking."

Or, imagine a world where when we pray, we hear the words of a heavenly voice say, "Your call is important to us. All our lives are busy, but for immediate service press 3." I long, we long for timely, clear communication in life and in prayer. But, where is the true path to human communication, face to face, heart to heart, voice to voice? I was raised in a time of the three party line rotary dial phone. Three TV stations, no remote control, and the only pad in the house was a heating pad.

The only device for communication WAS the human voice with life centered at the dinner table, the living room, school, and church. And, in each of those environments there was the presence of prayer. Early on we learned to use what were simple words like, "Now I lay me down to sleep..." or the "Our Father" of the prayer we call "The Lord's Prayer." Who was it that first taught you the prayer that simply begins "Our Father..."? Not "My Father" as if we were in control, but that moment when we logged on to what is simply A Prayer to Communication, God's plan for the people who live under the Cross and in the name of Jesus.

It has been written that "Prayer is the key of the morning and the bolt of the night." (Gandhi) It is so in every religious tradition and especially for those who lived in the first covenant and those who were learning to live with Jesus.

It is Luke who has the disciples first ask Jesus to teach them to pray; to pray like the disciples of John. It is Matthew that puts the Lord's Prayer at the very center of the Sermon on the Mount. It is the Disciple's Prayer that covers everything.

If you would pray, this prayer is the prayer which becomes the 'grace-container' of every word of prayer you will use every use...it sets the space where we live our lives with God and one another (Faith's Living Room), in that space the language we can each understand, and the clue/a cue to the character of our relationships in the world that others can learn.

Here is the foundation: "...your Father knows what you need before you ask him." Why pray? If God is so Smart/all knowing, let's get on with something else. But, wait, Jesus says there are the words that keep you in tune with what God has in store for those who trust the words to carry us in life.

This way to prayer:

"Our Father in the heavens, holy your name." In ancient times there were many thoughts about. Most often some THING to be feared, out there, not engaged. It is Jesus who teaches connection, priceless relationship, nurturing presence as an inexpressible unearned gift. "Abba." Not like a father, OURS. The one WE hold highest and holy. This turns even individual prayer, in private, into a communal connected of all whom Jesus calls 'Blessed.'

"Your kingdom...your will...on earth as in the heavens" God's kingdom is one of promise, and gift. Jesus once made clear that it was the will of Father to give us His Kingdom. Luther taught to be receive God's Kingdom is to believe in Jesus Christ and, thereby, to know and believe that God's will is our will as it became for Jesus in a Garden called "Gethsemane."

"Give us this day our daily bread."...we who hunger and thirst for righteousness need filling...not just the bread that sustains. but the sustenance that lasts forever from the One who is the Bread of Life, Jesus!

Luther asked "What does this mean? God certainly gives bread to everyone without our prayers, even to all evil people, but we pray in this petition that God would lead us to realize and to receive our daily bread with thanksgiving." Then, adds that "bread" includes food, drink, clothing, shoes, house, home, land, animals, money, goods, devout husband, wife, kids, grandkids, workers, faithful rulers, good government, good weather, health, self-control, good friends, faithful neighbors, (A GREAT CONGREGATION COUNCIL), and the like." God does not work from a deficit position. Life is not about the next upgrade but the generous stewardship of all that God calls us to steward/manage to His glory.

Then, what often leaves me in wonderment: "Forgive us our debts, our trespasses, our consequences of what sin what we owe because of what we are without forgiveness, as we forgive others"...ever choke on that one, I have!

Once forgiven, we can do no other than to forgive. Repentance is more than sorrow for sin, it is the path to reconciliation, to be brought back into life with God and with one another. I am called to be in peace, at peace, with peace, because now we can share the peace knowing that all, ALL of our sins are forgiven now and forever.

"Save us from trial and deliver us from the evil one." Anything that opens us up to darkness and, yes, even to evil. The petition for bread a prayer for the present as in "Give us today," The petition for forgiveness was a prayer for the removal of a bad past. And now a petition for leading into a good future. And it is for US!

And the prayer stops..."no power and glory forever and ever." That was added when the prayer was embedded in the worship life of the Church Our confidence that with our heavenly Father we receive the full meal deal in Jesus, at the Lord's Table and at the throne of God one day with the Lamb.

But, there is an add on...forgiveness is the embed in those who pray the prayer...love as we were first loved, forgive as we have been forgiven, confident that if God is for us not one thing will ever sweep us up.

Why? As with Paul we are those who have committed "to know nothing...except Jesus Christ and him crucified" who this days calls us to prayer.

† The Lord's Prayer is container and key to all prayer:

† Prayers of Adoration and Praise which ought always to begin our prayers;

† Prayers Confession at the Font as to the foot of the Cross;

† Prayers of thanksgiving for all that we have from the generous provision of God;

† Prayers of Supplication/Intercession for those lives, those issues at our circle of concern and circle of where I am called to serve and make a difference.

The Lord's Prayer holds every prayer we have ever, or will ever speak because it places life in the hands of the God who, in Jesus, we call "Father," provider and friend who guards and guides us to simply pray---as Jesus taught: "Our Father in the heavens:

1. Your Name is hallowed in heaven, may it now be hallowed on earth.
2. Your kingdom has come in heaven, may it now be come on earth.
3. You will has been done in heaven, may it now be done on earth,
4. Our bread for the day give us today.
5. Our sin against you forgive us, as we have forgiven those who sin against us.
6. Do not bring us into a time of testing,
7. But rescue us from this test by the Evil One."

Seven petitions, a holy number. May these words break through the crust of custom and familiarity and be our entry anew into the heart of God with one another in Christ. "For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are God's, now and forever. Amen!