

Connecting to Jesus the Storyteller... "How to Pray"

Hillsboro Presbyterian Church

July 26, 2009

Pastor Michael McCall

We are off to the beach this afternoon, so we begin with a water story. The disciples were in a boat on the sea when they saw Jesus walking on the water. Peter asked if he could also walk on water and got out of the boat to do so. But when Peter took his eyes off of Jesus, he began to sink and cried out the perfect prayer: **"Lord, save me!"** If Peter had prayed any more...he would have been gargling! "Lord, help!"...and Jesus did. We are in the Parables of Jesus this summer – and today's parable has to do with prayer. Turn to **Luke 11:1-13**.

Luke 11:1-4 One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples." Jesus said to them, "When you pray, say: 'Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us. And lead us not into temptation.' "

It is OK to call this "The Lord's Prayer," but it is better to think of it as "The Disciple's Prayer." It is a summary of the basic aspects of prayer. Jesus taught: "pray this way": 1) affirm your relationship with God; 2) give God praise; 3) urge God to advance His reign on earth; 4) tell God what you need; 5) ask for grace as you promise to be gracious; 6) ask for help in overcoming sin.

Then in **Luke 11:5-8**, Jesus told this parable: ***"Suppose one of you has a friend, and he goes to him at midnight and says, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread, because a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have nothing to set before him.'" "Then the one inside answers, 'Don't bother me. The door is already locked, and my children are with me in bed. I can't get up and give you anything.' I tell you, though he will not get up and give him the bread because he is his friend, yet because of the man's boldness he will get up and give him as much as he needs."***

The traditional view of this parable is that if you were a villager in ancient Israel, your sleeping neighbor would respond to your needs only because of your persistence. Kenneth Bailey from Lebanon says Palestinian peasants hear it differently. In a Middle Eastern village, neighbors have a strong sense of obligation to each other. Because people deliberately travel in the cool of night, it is not uncommon to have surprise arrivals at midnight. If you woke up the next-door-neighbor and said, "I have an emergency, a friend has arrived and I have nothing to set before him," a Middle Easterner would outdo himself in helping. Those that first heard this parable could not imagine the neighbor saying "don't bother me." No, the neighbor would get up and give as much as needed - because of your boldness in asking and because you have a relationship of mutual obligation. We would say, "It's really no bother because that's what friends are for." The difference in their culture and ours is that we might have that relationship with our next-door-neighbor. In the ancient Middle East, they would say, "That's what neighbors are for." Jesus says his Father has that kind of loyalty to his sons and daughters. If you can pray "Father God," if you enjoy a relationship with the Almighty and God responds to your prayers, even if you feel awkward, embarrassed, or inadequate. After telling the parable, Jesus said. . .

Luke 11:9-10 "So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened."

These phrases are in the present imperative tense, exhorting us to continue to make our appeal, ***"Keep asking...keep seeking...keep knocking..."*** Here persistence is emphasized, with the promise that God moves in concert with our prayer. Our Heavenly Father wants us to ask, sometimes choosing to wait for our asking before providing. Jesus the Son is saying that God our Father is even MORE attentive than earthly parents.

Luke 11:11-13 "Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

Fishermen in the Sea of Galilee sometimes caught inedible eels in their nets. If their children asked for fish to eat, loving parents wouldn't give them an eel! In that region, scorpions often curled up in a ball, looking like an egg. If their children asked for an egg, loving parents wouldn't give them a scorpion! Jesus said, if human parents know how to give good gifts to their children, how much more will our Father in heaven give his very Spirit to those who ask. But it all begins with a relationship with the Almighty as our Father in heaven...then coming to God as God's born again children through Christ...honest to God with our real needs...THEN asking until receiving God's promised Helper...the Holy Spirit.

Many Christians pray for patience or love or peace... when what they need is the Holy Spirit...whose fruit (**Galatians 5:24**) IS ***"love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control"***. Of course, sometimes, the best prayer is simply ***"Lord, help!"***

We close with a testimony. Tony Snow was a TV news commentator and then President Bush's Press Secretary. He also fought cancer. Months before he died, he wrote:

I don't know why I have cancer, and I don't much care. It is what it is, a plain and indisputable fact. Yet even while staring into a mirror darkly, great and stunning truths begin to take shape. Our maladies define a central feature of our existence: We are fallen. We are imperfect. Our bodies give out. But despite this—or because of it—God offers the possibility of salvation and grace. We don't know how the narrative of our lives will end, but we get to choose how to use the interval between now and the moment we meet our Creator face-to-face...Though God doesn't promise us tomorrow, he does promise us eternity—filled with life and love we cannot comprehend—and that one can in the throes of sickness point the rest of us toward timeless truths that will help us weather future storms...Through such trials, God bids us to choose: Do we believe, or do we not? Will we be bold enough to love, daring enough to serve, humble enough to submit, and strong enough to acknowledge our limitations? Can we surrender our concern in things that don't matter so that we might devote our remaining days to things that do?

We don't know much, but we know this: No matter where we are, no matter what we do, no matter how bleak or frightening our prospects, each and every one of us who believe, each and every day, lies in the same safe and impregnable place, in the hollow of God's hand.

Tony Snow captured the essence of Jesus' teaching on prayer..."we are secure in our Father's hands." Do not hesitate to bother your Father God...praying in the Spirit - for provision and holiness...until that day when you have no need nor any fault.