

Sermon Notes - July 12, 2020

“Lord, Teach Us to Pray”

Luke 11:1-13

When you were younger, you may have had the opportunity to have a grandmother that was a wonderful baker – and you as a granddaughter or grandson, had the opportunity to ask her to teach you how to bake. Perhaps you had someone (a neighbor, friend, uncle, etc.) who was really good at woodworking and you had the opportunity to ask them to teach you how to do that. Well, Jesus disciples had noticed that Jesus often went about praying. Before he would heal or teach someone, he would go off into the mountains to pray – and after he had taught all day, he would go into the mountains to pray. When he went into the garden of Gethsemane, he prayed. They noticed that he was often praying and spending time with God the Father. And when he came back, they noticed a change in him. They noticed that he was more energized. He had this powerful force at work in him. He had the power of God working in him when he was healing and teaching. *They noticed a difference in him.*

One day, when he had finished praying, one of the disciples asked him, “Lord, would you teach us to pray – just like John did his disciples?” You see, it was not unusual in that day for a disciple to ask their Rabbi for instruction and how to pray. But, I want you to notice that Jesus taught them something different. He says, “When you pray, say ‘Father.’” What he was doing was introducing them to a personal, intimate relationship with God. You see, Jews hardly ever spoke aloud the name of God – in fact, they rarely, if ever, addressed him as “Heavenly Father” or “My Father” or “Father.” He was a little more formalized and distant. And here, Jesus introduces them to a personal, intimate way of knowing God – call him “Father.”

If you remember your Old Testament, you remember when God spoke to Pharaoh through Moses and Aaron right before he had rescued the Israelites from slavery, He said, “Israel is my first son - my first born. Let my people go!” God was already claiming that relationship of Father to

them and to us – so Jesus told them, “When you pray, say “Father.” He wanted them to know that they could have that personal, intimate connection with God. Then, he says, “Hallowed be your name” – that is, may His name be honored – respected – revered. Just because you call him Father, don’t forget who he is. God wants a personal relationship with you.

Then Jesus says, “Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” God is telling us what he wants from us – that our wills will so intermingle with his will that he can use us as instruments of his in this kingdom here on earth. May we let our minds and our wills be overtaken by God’s will, so God can use us in this world. **He goes on to say that you can bring your physical needs to God.**

He said, “Give us this day, our daily bread.” Have you ever thought about (in the Old Testament) when the Israelites were in the wilderness, they were on their way to the Promised Land and they were struggling. Food was scarce, so they prayed out “God, did you bring us out here to starve?” God promised he would provide for them; he would give them daily manna. He only gave them enough for that day. “Give us this day, our daily bread” – in other words, “Give us provision for this day.” ***Jesus was reminding them that we are to trust and depend on God.*** You see, God only gave the Israelites enough for each day – and on Friday (and Sabbath began), he gave them enough for Friday and Saturday – and that was it. He wanted them to learn to trust and depend on him. **God wants us to know that we can trust and depend on him to take care of our physical needs. But, then he also cares about our spiritual needs.**

I think one of the hardest things we do as Christians is learning to forgive one another. He says, “Forgive our debts as we forgive our debtors.” We all sin and we need forgiveness – and others need that forgiveness too. God has been generous in forgiving us and we are to learn to forgive one another, as God is as generous in forgiving us.

“Lead us not into temptation.” Does God lead us into temptation? No. But I think in that prayer, he is saying that there are times when we are

weak and we cannot deal with the temptations that come our way. We need the extra strength - and God is there to give us the strength that we need to go through it. You know, as I think about this prayer, Jesus kind of sums up the essence of communication with God. Here's what God is: He's a father - He loves you and He provides for you - He is faithful. God tells you what He wants. God tells you that you can bring your physical and spiritual needs to Him.

Jesus not only gives them a model prayer, he gives them a story. Let's say a friend comes to you at your house - and you live in the Middle East. They come in the middle of the night and you don't have enough bread to give them. Now, in those days, if you only had a half a loaf of bread -that wasn't good enough. You had to have a full loaf of bread to serve your company. So, if you didn't have enough bread, you would go to a neighbor's house, knock on the door, and say, "I need some food. I need some help." In that day, the family all slept in one room - so, if you opened the door or turned on the light, the whole family woke up. *What Jesus says in that story is you might not get up because of your friendship - it may be inconvenient and you don't want to get up - but, in that day and time, you would get up for a matter of honor. It was expected for a family and a community to extend hospitality.* So, if a friend came to your house, it was expected for you to get up and give them what they needed. If you didn't, it was shameful to you, your family, and your community.

What was Jesus trying to say in this story? He says, "Keep asking, keep seeking, keep being persistent." God is going to answer because God's honor is at stake. God's going to answer; it may not be in the way we want, but He will answer. Jesus goes on to say that if a child comes to a parent and says, "Dad, I want a fish" - is the parent going to give him a snake? If he asks for an egg, are they going to give him a scorpion? No. He says that if you, as adults, are sinful and make mistakes, and you still give your children good gifts - how much more is God going to give you? **He's going to give you the best gift... the Holy Spirit.**

Jesus promised his disciples and us upon his death, resurrection, and ascension that he would send us the advocate, the Holy Spirit, to comfort

us - to assist us - to teach us all the things that He had tried to with His time on earth. "My Holy Spirit will be with you." God wants the best for us.

You know there are people who pray - and say, "Ms. Peggy, I can't pray. I don't pray out loud." I want to say to you that you don't have to pray out loud - you can pray silently. ***God is not as concerned with the elegance of our words as He is with the attitude of our heart.*** When we pray, it is not like God is some magical genie that comes out of a lamp, we tell it what we want and it gives it to us... He's not like Santa Claus where you make your list and you automatically get what you want. God doesn't work that way. As someone once said, **"Prayer doesn't always change God, but it changes us."**

I heard about a man named Dr. John Muskens who was a pastor in Pennsylvania - in Jenkintown, Pennsylvania - back before World War II. During World War II, his son was killed by the Germans - and right after the war ended, he preached a sermon called "I prayed for them" (meaning his enemies). He had three points: "I prayed for them, my enemies, because Jesus did. On the cross, Jesus said, 'Forgive them, Father for they know not what they do.' I prayed for them because prayer changes the one who prays - and most of all, I prayed for them because prayer lifts me above my hate."

Prayer is about changing us. It's not about always getting what we want - but God helping us to want what we need. God knows what is best for us. God doesn't always give us what we want - and aren't we glad sometimes? Do you remember that song that Garth Brooks had out years ago, called "Unanswered Prayers"? Sometimes, we are glad for those unanswered prayers, aren't we? Because it wasn't the best person or situation for us - even though we thought it was. Thank goodness God is going to give us what is best for us. He reminded the disciples to know that God loves you - like a Father - and He is going to give you the very best gifts. He may not always answer you the way you want, but He's going to give what's best. ***Prayer is about connecting with God and***

making ourselves open to the power of God to be at work in us. It changes us more than it changes God.

A pastor friend of mine has a person in his church with ALS - Lou Gehrig's disease. Most of you know that Lou Gehrig's disease immobilizes your muscles - you can't dress yourself, feed yourself, sit up without help, you can't walk or anything - but your mind may still be clear and lucid. One day, he was out visiting the man and before he even got into the bedroom door, the guy began cursing him and cursing God and cursing his illness. The preacher just let him rant and rave. Finally, after he finished, he sat down and said, "Sir, you didn't shock me - and you definitely didn't shock God. But maybe you are praying the wrong prayer." He said, "Well, I've tried to pray - and I've prayed for God to heal me and I'm getting worse and worse - and I just don't understand - why me?" The pastor said, "Well, maybe you are praying the wrong prayer. Instead of praying for healing, maybe you are supposed to be praying for strength to deal with your illness - strength to enjoy the life you do have - and to be kind to the people around you, like your family that's caring for you." The pastor said his words and walked out. Two weeks later, he came back to see the man. I guess that man had some time to pray and think. His wife said his attitude began to change. He was kinder and more gentle with the kids and with her - more appreciative of what they did for him. One day, she said she walked into see him and he asked her for a piece of paper and a pen - and asked her to write some notes for him. "I want you to send notes of care to people in our church who are sick and having a hard time, like me." All he had her to write was, "I'm thinking of you and praying for you. Hang in there. I know God cares. I don't understand, but God cares and loves you." A few weeks later, he called his brother to his bedside and asked him to do something for him when he died. He said, "Right now, I can't hug my kids or my wife. I want you, when I die, to give them a hug for me and tell them how much I love them and appreciate them. I can say the words, but I want you to give them a hug and say that's from me. I want you to tell them that I have enjoyed my life - as short as it was." Who did that? God - through this man's praying.

You see, God can change our attitudes. God can transform our thoughts, words, and actions - and through prayer, God changes us. Prayer is the powerhouse for the Christian. You want to grow in the faith? Spend some time praying and talking with God - listening to God. It's not just us doing all the talking - it's all about listening. It's not as much about changing God as it is about changing us. He may not give us all we want, but he'll help us to want what we need. Prayer does work.

Can I answer why God doesn't answer some prayers? No. It's above me. Sometimes, I think we have to pray for God to give us the strength to live our questions into answers - and to pray for the quiet resolve to trust God - even when we don't understand.

A friend of mine asked, "How come some people live righteous lives and pray - and everything seems to go well in their lives? Other people pray, try to live righteous and do the right thing and life doesn't seem to give them a break." I can't answer that - but I pray for the quiet resolve to trust God. May we learn how to pray. Lord, teach us to pray as you taught your disciples:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever.

Amen.