

Trinitarian Congregational Church
Take Out
September 13, 2020

Announcements

Prelude: “God Bless the Child That’s Got His Own”
Herzog, Jr. and Holiday. Pianist: Lynne Walker
[Video - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F3xCXN8UHJw>]

Call to Worship

One: Come, let us gather to offer praise to our loving God.
God meets us in these moments with welcoming arms.
All: We come before God, rejoicing in his presence with us.
We turn to God, trusting in his wisdom as he leads us.
One: God answers the prayers of all who seek help.
God strengthens our souls and energizes our life.
All: We know God’s goodness and grace.
Our hearts sing out with thanks and praise.
One: We are claimed as God’s people, called into a faithful relationship.
God will give the fullness of his Spirit to all who ask him.
All: We will ask, we will seek, we will knock.
All the gracious gifts of God await us.

Gathering Prayer

We lift our hearts to you in prayer, loving God, trusting in your faithfulness and your goodness. We come to you as we are, with hope and doubt, confidence and confusion, faithfulness and failings asking for your favor and seeking your ways. Meet us in this hour that we might know the joy of your presence, the fullness of life you offer and the ministry to the world you intend. Amen.

Gloria Patri

Scripture Luke 11:1-13

Special Music: “Wondrous Love”
Arrange by Tedd Smith. Duettists: Chris Harris and Lynne Walker
[Video - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ul2lkv9tAHSermon>]
“Teach Us to Pray”

Sermon

How many of you here have a daily practice of prayer? How many of you feel that you could use some help in your prayer life? Now, wherever you are, I don't want you to feel bad, as if you have not arrived, because I am in the same boat with you. For all my years as a minister, I am still learning about prayer. And I think I always will.

Prayer is a wonderful thing. It is essential to a living faith because it is the one practice that so freely and fully connects us with God. You can pray as a child, or as a senior. You can pray when you are happy, you can pray when you are sad, you can even pray when you are angry. It can be elaborate and deep, or simple and light. If it is sincere, it is valuable.

But still, I think most of us could use a little help in our prayer life. Is it any surprise to us then, that even the disciples asked Jesus for help with their prayer life? "Teach us to pray" they said. And I think Jesus was more than happy to give them some lessons. However, he did not talk to them about the mechanics of prayer (sit, stand or kneel) or the language (Thou or You). And he really does not cotton to endless, thoughtless prattle – in Matthew 6 he warned us not to 'heap up empty words...' So we need to take prayer seriously, even as we weekly pray 'the Lord's Prayer' by rote. We need something more, we need something genuine and sincere, something with power and validity behind it.

We need a better idea. We read through the stories of the Bible, and we see some amazing moments when God answered prayer. But it seems our prayers languish off our tongues. We know that God has helped Abraham and Sarah, Moses and Miriam, the prophets and the disciples. And we know there have been great figures of the church who seemed powerfully connected with God – from Augustine to Mother Theresa. God's word and God's power seemed to come to them in extraordinary ways. So why doesn't God speak to me in that way? Why doesn't God 'move mountains' in my life?

The key, I have found, the common thread for all these people, has been 'a prayer room'. Remember in the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus said 'But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father, who sees in secret with reward you.' Do you have a prayer room, or a corner, or maybe even a closet? Herb Miller, a leading expert on Church vitality, and the creator of a unique prayer program, discovered this in a very special way when he was visiting a campus minister in New Mexico. The campus minister was showing him around the student center. As they walked down the hall, looking in different rooms, they came by a door marked 'Prayer Room.' Herb says, 'I don't think he meant to show me that one, but as we went by, I pulled the door open.' This is how Herb described the prayer room.

'I was amazed to see it stuffed with boxes, boots, clothes hangers, junk, and a general musty smell. On the altar (the communion table) stood a pair of cowboy boots, an old box that had at some earlier time contained a well-known brand of whisky, and a roll of toilet tissue. A little embarrassed, the campus minister told me that they used it for a storage area during the summer and hadn't gotten it cleaned out yet.

‘At first glance, it seemed like a sacrilegious thing to me to stack a prayer room full of junk. I felt some righteous indignation was appropriate here. But then I realized what a dramatic picture that prayer room was of my own life. I had let important demands of my life crowd into the time I should have spent talking with God each day, until I could no longer get back into the habit of praying at all.’

We know that all too well, don't we? Our lives get so crowded with demands and the 'junk' of life that our time with God gets pushed to a back corner, dry and dusty and all but forgotten. I wonder if somehow that sense prompted the disciples to ask Jesus 'teach us to pray'. The disciples had a busy life following Jesus around. Jesus was a busy man, and yet a powerful man, a man of God.

So what made this man, Jesus, different from all other people? One of the most observable differences was his prayer life. He was fully in touch with the hidden power of the universe, the power of God. Before he even began his ministry he spent 40 days in a prayer retreat in the wilderness. When things got rolling, before he called his apostles, he spent a day in prayer. Often when the disciples would awake up early in the morning, they would find Jesus missing from the camp. When they found him, he was out by himself, praying. At other times, even in the midst of great crowds clamoring to hear him teach and many people who needed his healing touch, Jesus withdrew to a quiet place by himself to pray. The day before his crucifixion he spent the night awake in fervent prayer. Even from the agony of the Cross, Jesus was praying.

Do you think that might have made a difference"? And if Jesus, the Son of God, needed to do that in order to stay sufficiently in touch with God to live an effective life, how can you and I expect to get by without it? But we do try, don't we? We have every good intention to start our day with prayer. But the bed is too tempting and we hit the snooze button. (It happens to me.) Or we pray and the phone rings, the dog noses you, or you just can't seem to focus. (Been there too). We say grace at the table (letting the food cool off enough to not burn my mouth.) But we will pray in a crisis, when things are so bad we are desperate. (Guilty) We pray in worship, repeating words written on a page, that we hope will address the feelings of our heart. (Amen – and I'm the one who writes them!)

There are probably two key reasons why we don't pray. One is that we feel we really don't know how, and we will get to that in a minute. The other one is that we really don't want to, because prayer is powerful. Because God is sure to answer, and we really are very uncomfortable with that reality.

I know of a pastor, with several years of experience, who was called to visit one of the church members in the hospital. The man, an older gentleman, had had a stroke which was very severe. His speech was slurred; one side, his good side, was paralyzed. The doctors had just given him word that there was not much hope for significant recovery. Of course, like any well trained minister, at the end of the visit he asked the man 'is there anything I can do for you?' And the man simply said 'pray'; which the pastor did. "Oh, Lord, be with John, grant him your comfort, your support, you're your healing touch ... (you know how it goes.)" Then he said 'amen', and

you draw us near to you. And so Lord God, we come to this time of prayer with joyful anticipation and courageous hope.

We pray, Loving God, for your church and for this congregation. Keep us every mindful of your mercy and goodness, and ever attentive to your promptings. May this be a place where we lift our hearts to you in praise, our spirits to you in hope, and our lives to you in obedience. Grant that our faith may always lead us both to your throne of grace and into our world.

We pray, Mighty God, for our world and our leaders. May they turn to you with their burdens and seek you wisdom as they guide the nations, that your good will may be accomplished for all peoples. And grant to your people spirits that will petition you for the vast needs of the earth, and willingness to do our part in being your answer to the prayers of the world.

We prayer, Caring God, for all who cry out to you today. Grant to the disheartened your hope, to the perplexed your guidance, to the repentant your mercy. Grant also your healing to all who are ill, your comfort to all who mourn, and your provision to all who are in need. We especially lift up ... and all those needs that are on our hearts. And grant us, who have known your abundant goodness, open and generous hearts towards all our neighbors, near and far.

We praise you, Wondrous God, for your mercy and goodness and kindness towards us, through Jesus Christ , who taught us to pray...

The Lord's Prayer

Offering

We now come to a time when we acknowledge God's goodness to us and the offerings of our grateful hearts. Let us Pray.

Loving God, for the gift of life, your renewing mercy, and your faithful presence, we give you thanks through these offerings. May they be a sign of our fuller commitment to lives that reflect the way of Christ and serve to meet the needs of our world. Use them to your glory. Amen.

Doxology

Common Commission

Let us go forth into the world in peace, being of good courage, holding fast to that which is good, rendering to no one evil for evil, strengthening the faint-hearted, supporting the weak, helping the afflicted, honoring all persons, loving and serving the Lord, and rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Benediction

Go now into the world

May the God who hears your prayers
be your comfort and your strength,
your hope and your peace,
your light and your way.

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord. Amen.

Postlude: “We Are Marching in the Light of God”
Zulu melody, setting by John Carter Pianist: Lynne Walker
[Video - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kqacdxeoAxo>]