

Sermon Bytes: Prayer and Presence

Luke 11:1-10

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The opening to our Gospel passage is a request that each of us understands:

“Lord, teach us to pray.”

We want what Jesus had. We want to know how to pray. We want to have a deep and abiding prayer life - a life that connects us with God and makes our lives richer and fuller.

Too often we want to find a way to make our prayers more meaningful and perhaps what we feel are more of what God really wants to hear. Maybe that's our problem. We're trying so hard to bring meaning to our prayer life that we're not allowing prayer to bring meaning to our life.

In other words, we're trying so hard to find God that we are blind and deaf to experiencing a God who is already here. God does not have to be invited into our lives; we merely have to open our eyes, our ears, our hearts to God's Presence.

Jesus knew that. He knew that people struggled to experience the Presence of God and because of that, they were often blind to God who was already there. He knew that we struggle with what we think prayer should be.

So he begins by showing the disciples and us what was at the very core of his own life—his relationship with God.

Jesus had made prayer an integral part of his life. Witness how many times are that he “withdrew to a deserted place” or “went to the mountain” or “spent the night in prayer”. He prayed before he chose the disciples, when he fed the five thousand, and on the night before he was led to his death. He even prayed on the cross: “Father Forgive Them”. So now let's listen as he answers the disciples request “Lord teach us to pray”. First of all - What Jesus provided in answer to the disciple's request is an introduction to the presence that is already there, as you will: an opening of a door or a window to a new awareness of what is already there around them and within them.

The prayer begins by implying relationship. In particular an intimate relationship with God. A relationship with which all of us are familiar – a family one: “Our Father” - literally “Abba” or “Daddy”. And that this relationship is sacred and holy: “Hallowed by thy name”

Next a reminder that this place that we call home is the Lord's house: “Thy kingdom ...on earth as it is in heaven”. An invitation to envision all that is, within the justice and peace that only God can give.

The remaining petitions have to do with basic human needs - those things that are the very sustenance of our life - food, relationships with others, and how that connects to

our relationship with God. These are prayers about life, not petitions for stuff, or comforts, or for things to get easier for us. It doesn't even ask God to make things clearer .

It is a petition for those things that only God can provide. It is an opening to the awareness that God made us, that we are God's, and that God's desire is not for us to be right, or to be good, but rather simply to be. To realize as Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, philosopher, theologian , historian once said "we are not human beings having a spiritual experience. We are spiritual beings having a human experience."

The prayer that Jesus taught the disciples and us to pray has nothing to do with knowing the right words.

As he finishes Jesus reminds his listeners to be persistent reminding us to keep asking, keep seeking, and keep knocking.

Far from characterizing God as some sort of celestial Santa Claus who always brings the things we ask for, Jesus seemed to assume that God is already in motion, that God is already answering every prayer, and that God is already opening every door. That indeed God stands at the threshold inviting us to enter. So praying opens our lives to the presence of the God who is always and already there

We are not merely called to pray; we are called to a life of prayerfulness, where every breath we take and every move we make is attuned to the breath and the movement of God that is already a part of us.

Prayer comes with responsibility. As we enter that realm of God, we, too, are called to be a part of creating a world of justice and peace, of forgiveness, of providing bread for the hungry, and a shunning of those things that temptingly pull us away from where we're called to be.

Prayer, opens us to life, to love, and to grace and forgiveness. It becomes a way of life.

A New York Times bestseller written by Elizabeth Gilbert titled, *Eat, Pray, Love: One Woman's Search for Everything Across Italy, India and Indonesia* (and the movie of the same name) is the account of a women's search for meaning in her life. Frustrated and lonely where she was in the hustle and bustle of New York, she took off on a whirlwind adventure on a quest for enjoyment, devotion, and transcendence.

She finds it but first of all she has to get out of herself and away from the chaos that she has surrounded herself with to find what was there all along - to find the sustenance that is life. Simply —to eat, to pray, and to love. She finds that she cannot exist without each of them and that in some way it was not an introduction to newness so much as an introduction to what was are ready there.

She says that “the search for God is a reversal of the normal, mundane worldly order. In the search for God, you revert from what attracts you and swim toward that which is difficult. You abandon your comforting and familiar habits with the hope that something greater will be offered you in return for what you’ve given up. Every religion in the world,” she says, “operates on a similar understanding of what it means to be a good disciple —pray, hone your virtues, be a good neighbor, respect yourself and others, master your cravings.”

Faith is belief in what you cannot see or prove or touch. If we truly knew all the answers in advance as to the meaning of life and the nature of God and the destiny of our souls, our belief would not be a leap of faith and it would not be a courageous act of humanity; it would just be...a prudent insurance policy.

“I couldn’t care less,” she says, “about evidence and proof and assurances. I just want God. I want God inside me. I want God to play in the blood coursing through my veins. In the breath that inhabits my being; the way sunlight dances on water.”

Prayer is many things. It is a chance to slow down and focus. It is an opportunity to go to the core of our being. It is a way to receive the gifts of life. It is a celebration of all that is.

People use many different things to help them in their prayers. Christians, Muslims, Jews and Buddhists all have variations on beads

Prayer can be done alone. It can bring us together

It is always a journey