

July 28, 2019

"Doing the Mission: Prayer and Stories"

Luke 11: 1 - 13

Pastor Jonathan

It's July and it's summer. How many people love the heat? Like it a little bit? Not so much?

Sunday after Sunday, I stand before you and offer you life and death, blessing and curses, community and loneliness, spiritual health and the ten plagues, music and noise, mission focus and distraction. Given these alternatives, I wish I could tell you that it will be easy to choose, and that you and I will immediately agree on life and all the positive choices before us...but I cannot. We will have hard decisions this coming year as individuals, as families, as a congregation, as a Session, as a Presbytery and as a denomination. Some will leave. Many will stay. But we must know our calling and our mission. And we must know the One who calls us. If we lose track of that, it doesn't matter what we choose. In these days, we must know the One who holds us together, who gives us reason to care about the Church, because we care about Him.

Dr. Luke teaches us that the Mission continues into chapter 11 of his gospel. At the end of chapter 10, we just left Mary, sitting at the feet of Jesus, listening and caring about what Jesus was telling her, giving herself to Him. It is a beautiful moment, to reflect on in our lives...giving ourselves moments at Jesus' feet. Sometimes these moments are the only ones that bring back sanity and peace in a world full of craziness, confusion and noise. I trust you are making time with Him, throughout the day, as well as in the morning or evening with Scripture...and briefly at meals. These prayer moments are the mission moments of your life. Don't squander them or harden yourself to Him at those moments. I find myself hardened at times and I need to be soft when hearing the Lord and his directions/instructions and soft at times I need to be hard on sin and evil in my life. How about you?

Then in chapter 11, we immediately see that one of Jesus' disciples noticed that Jesus was praying. Now if Jesus prayed, boy, do we need to pray...but let me be clear: Praying is acknowledging the constant presence of Jesus at your side by the Holy Spirit. Praying is offering words, but also offering ourselves in every

situation in which we find ourselves, even when we are in rebellion to God...Prayer is the communication side of our relationship with God. Jesus regularly took time alone to talk to the Father quietly and with words that others could hear. The Gospel of John more intimately paints this part of Jesus' earthly ministry, where we are told that Jesus didn't take a step, utter a word, or breathe a breath without knowing and following His Father. Such intimacy is the place where we are drawn.

And yet in this day and age, the prayer meeting seems to be something of the past, certainly as a larger corporate event. Small prayer groups barely carry on. The prayer closet is filled with clothes. The hunger for prayer is not what it seemed to be...This is not to guilt you or shame you, nor me, whom I include in these reflections...it is to re-ignite the spirit of the question asked Jesus: "Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples."

Because if you are not interested in prayer, it doesn't make sense to ask the Lord how to pray...does it? So first settle with the Lord, whether you are interested in prayer. Just tell Him if you are not interested. Ask Him to ramp up your desire for Him and for talking to Him. See what He does in your prayer life. Report what He does to someone you love or care about.

The Mission is based on the relationship with the Lord. Therefore, it makes sense that the relationship will in large part fare better or worse depending on how the communication is going in the relationship. It's the same for your marriage, dating, friendships, work, entertainment and volunteer relationships. If the communication is going well, you can go through almost anything together. If the communication is going poorly, then it's hard to get a meal planned, let alone travels or vacation or significant project.

Prayer is the lifeline for the Mission. Jesus' disciple was wise in asking this question, and he had reflected on the fact that John mentored his followers in this way. It makes sense. Prayer doesn't make sense to people who don't value the relationship with God. You know this to be true. The hard question for reflection is whether you or I are one of those people.

But once we say "yes" Jesus, please teach me, I want to know...then comes the Lord's prayer, or rather, the Lord's exemplary prayer: "exemplary" meaning "a desirable model; representing the

best of its kind." And  
what is in this model prayer, particularly as we know it, perhaps too well...

1) Father, Dad, Daddy, Papa, Abba, states the love relationship, the ordering relationship, the dependence in the relationship, the reliance on Him for the relationship, and the whole Mission (to acknowledge and know Him as Father); no matter what our relationships to earthly fathers have been...

2) "Hallowed be your name..." is a shorthand for a huge amount of content. It references the Qaddish prayers in Judaism, "Holy are you O Lord our God...(in Hebrew: Qaddish Adonai Elohenu)" which then refers to God's dealing with humanity, and Israel, calling us to remember Creation, Saving from the Flood, Noah's Covenant, (with the real rainbow as a reminder), Abraham's Covenant, that God leads us through moves and thick and thin to the Land, Moses' Covenant, that God doesn't leave His people in slavery, but provides redemption that is fulfilled in Jesus Christ; God is holy and pursuing us in relationship more than we are pursuing Him; we ought to treat Him like God, worship Him like God, praise Him like God, because He is God and we/I are not. Holy is who God is, may we treat you like your name, as the mysterious center of all life, made known fully in Jesus Christ, made real and personal in the Holy Spirit. Thank God for His pursuing you, wooing you, loving you as you utter "Hallowed by Thy Name..."

3) "Your kingdom come..." This is the second of the two God centered prayers, asking for God's way and will, his teaching and understanding of life to guide life in this broken world; so that we might know Jesus and Jesus' power. Of course, we learn bit by bit. But we are here to be agents of transformation and introduction. Transforming the devil's lies, theft and murder (John 8) into truthful statements of reality, giving back with restitution and building up, not tearing down. When we see God changing someone's life, we see kingdom coming. When we hear of the fear of death being taken down, and someone trusting Jesus for that journey, we see the kingdom coming. Mostly, the biggest parts of the kingdom will not be seen in this life, such as when we won't need street lights due to the Lord's light, and we won't have to tell anyone about the Lord, because everyone will know... but many important events will take place here and now. The Kingdom continues to break into our reality and that of our family, friends and co-workers...so we pray, "Let your kingdom come..."

4) "Give us each day our daily bread..." So there are two God centered and three human centered requests in Jesus' model prayer in Luke. The first of the human centered ones ask us for daily provision, bread or food. Jesus probably was relying on the Scriptures here in Proverbs 30, from the saying of Agur: verses 7 - 9: "Two things I ask of you, O LORD; do not refuse me before I die: Keep falsehood and lies

far from me; give neither poverty nor riches, but give me only daily bread. Otherwise I may too much and disown you and say, 'Who is the Lord?' Or I may become poor and steal, and so dishonor the name of my God. (NIV) Lying wrecks our hearts and our character, even if we are good at remembering the narrative shape of our lies, even if we can remember the stories we have told. We need to be honest with God and with each other. Secondly, Agur asks for neither poverty nor riches, because they result in dishonouring God. In North America, we constantly are unaware of how rich we are. Let us remember God whether we are relatively rich or relatively poor.

5) "Forgive us our sins..." which means we admit our sins and brokenness regularly, not just on Sunday mornings quietly, although that is good, but daily, and as we ask the Lord to forgive our sins, we agree with His teaching to forgive others who sin against us. We cannot walk in unforgiveness and expect God to forgive us. We need to let go of the person who has offended us or hurt us, and place them in God's hands for His dealing with the offense. And yes, Dr. Luke uses the word "sins" here in the Lord's prayer in Luke 11:4 (hamartias). Matthew uses the word "debts," (opheilèmas) in Matthew 6:12, not "trespasses," as in the Anglican Book of Common Prayer or the Roman Catholic liturgy. It's even "debts" in the KJV. And it has nothing to do with Presbyterians being more into financial sins or Anglicans more into real estate sins. "Trespasses" apparently is a broader legal term, but the Scriptural word is clearly owing someone, being in debt. Or, as in Luke's gospel, sinning against someone, being treated or treating someone in a manner against the justice and right behaviour of the Law, or the Scripture. And yes, the Scripture actually says if we choose to not forgive, then the Lord is right to not forgive us: "Forgive us our sins, as we also forgive everyone who sins against us..." We forgive their debt.

6) "And lead us not into temptation..." God does not tempt us, or lead us into temptation (James 1:13). He does allow us to be tempted, and we are tempted everyday. What we are praying here is to be delivered from the trying times and for deliverance from the evil one and his deceit. We are praying for passing the tests we undergo, and not simply continue in rebellion against God. Matthew's version of the model prayer has deliverance from evil, or more properly, "from the evil one," and later manuscripts have the doxology, of "For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, forever, Amen." But mostly Dr. Luke's is a simple model prayer and Matthew's is a liturgical prayer, set out for use in worship.

All of this is to say that Mission and Prayer go hand in hand. The story we tell is of how Jesus met us, and how He wants to meet the person with which we are talking. But Jesus told other stories too. He wants to borrow three loaves of bread at midnight to show hospitality to a weary traveller. The man who might even be a baker, doesn't want to get up, but does so at the friend's insistence. Similarly, we are to knock in our prayers at heaven's door, and we are told it will be opened to us, and we will see Jesus, and his eyes of compassion for us. Even broken fathers know how to give a meal to their children without poisoning or injuring them, so much more, the Father wants to give you your heart's desire.

But what is that desire? Do you know what your heart's desire is? Would the Lord want to give that to you, and if He did, would that be good for you?

As we talk to God, "O God help us to hear you, not just ourselves, or what we think we want to hear. Help us take your Mission seriously, and You seriously, in Jesus' name.

Let us continue to pray.