

July 24, 2022

“Speak Up!”

As we continue in worship this morning, I want to acknowledge the great number of people and staff of the church who carried the day and did heavy lifting for the last three days. We are heart broken with the people we are losing to death and the frequency with which it has been happening. Thank-you to those of you who have soldiered on in a busy and important week.

These moments can raise questions of faith as all of us pray for healing when a loved one gets mortally sick and more often than not – they pass away. So, what does that mean for our prayers? If you prayed for a safe journey and you got it – but it included being pulled over and given a traffic ticket because sleepy you was driving too fast, was that the answer to prayer you were looking for?

Far too many of us don't *pray as often or as seriously* as we could because it seems to us that perhaps God isn't holding up the divine end of the bargain. Following Jesus was not seamless nor easy. We can imagine the disciples feeling a bit left out learning from a Rabbi who kept going off to pray by himself – leaving them to wait. And then, to add insult to injury, the disciples learned that John the Baptist had given his disciples a prayer to pray. It may well have felt to them that Jesus had let down the side. We are so glad you a champion prayer, Jesus – but how about you give us a little help here?

Or maybe they just saw that prayer changed Jesus – he was different when he came back from when he went away – and they wanted some of that as well. Whatever the motivation the disciples are quite direct, *“Lord teach us to pray.”*

We have to wonder if Jesus got some negative response to teaching this prayer in the same way Abraham Lincoln was skewered by the opposition press for the Gettysburg Address. Most people hadn't started listening when the president's speech was done. “A disgrace” they said. “How can you call something that short a serious effort?” And now we teach it in school.

Just like time has vindicated Abraham Lincoln – Jesus' prayer has proven itself over the millennia to be a doorway to enriching our spiritual lives. *Notice the prayer is communal.* “Our Father,” sets the stage for our belonging to each other because we belong to God. The prayer seeks God's Kingdom in our world. And it acknowledges there will always be a place for forgiveness in our lives together.

Jesus has given them an amazing prayer in a few short sentences. And I suspect they all stared at him with vacant expressions – That’s it? We were hoping for something a little more – you know – specific to the moment. A little more, I don’t know – **“Get the job done!”** Do you have a prayer for us like that Jesus?

And Jesus tells them the story of the friend at midnight. We listen to the opening of the story as if it makes sense. You have a friend come unexpectedly and you go to a neighbor and ask for desperately needed food so you may extend hospitality and your neighbor turns you down. Everyone listening to Jesus story expected the friend to say, *“Of course I will give you bread so you may fulfill your sacred duty of hospitality!”* To this day if you travel to the Middle East you have to be careful not to stop by the home of someone who will stretch beyond their financial ability to offer you hospitality. It is a sacred duty.

What the friend did in Jesus’ story was unimaginably terrible. At this point in the story we want to ask, *“Jesus, is there a neighbor on the other side who is more kind so I can go to their house and ask for help?”* And Jesus says, “no.” No other neighbor possible so what do you do? **You keep pounding.** You are not willing to give up. And finally, your rotten neighbor helps you – because you didn’t quit.

Jesus is not saying if we just prayed harder or longer our loved ones won’t die. ***This story is about the nature of God.*** This is a classic *“how much more”* story – of which there are many in the Bible. If your friend, who is awful, will help you because you were persistent...***How much more!*** Will God who loves you give you what you need.

We are used ***to transactional love.*** You scratch my back, I’ll scratch yours. I do you a favor and you help me out. I know a guy who knows a guy who knows a guy and in due course you connect me to the help I need. Sometimes human relationships are like that. Instead, we are invited ***to trust God’s faithfulness and speak up!*** Prayer is not primarily transactional –the heart of prayer is ***relational trust.*** Praying deepens our connection to God and changes who we are, how we live and what we need.

God’s love may issue forth in what we are asking for or not - and it is always right to speak up and be persistent with God – deepening our connection, sharpening our holy senses and discovering relationship is even more important than the outcome.

Be brave. God wants to hear from you. Speak up!