

“The Power of Prayer”
Sermon delivered 7-25-10
Immanuel Lutheran Church
Neal Collins, Pastor

Luke 11:1–13

[Jesus] was praying in a certain place, and after he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples." ²He said to them, "When you pray, say: Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. ³Give us each day our daily bread. ⁴And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us. And do not bring us to the time of trial." ⁵And he said to them, "Suppose one of you has a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; ⁶for a friend of mine has arrived, and I have nothing to set before him.' ⁷And he answers from within, 'Do not bother me; the door has already been locked, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.' ⁸I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, at least because of his persistence he will get up and give him whatever he needs. ⁹"So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. ¹⁰For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. ¹¹Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for a fish, will give a snake instead of a fish? ¹²Or if the child asks for an egg, will give a scorpion? ¹³If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

How do you pray? Who taught you how to pray? Do you pray often? Rarely? Daily? Prayer is often and regularly misunderstood as being a form of magic, with the right formula, or like Aladdin's Lamp, rubbing long and hard enough the genie will appear. Of course, we all know God is not a Santa Claus, and prayer is more than a wish list we text to God. Nonetheless, it can be confusing for the best of us. We pray in times of desperation, and nod in times of tranquility. You can get a Masters Degree with two years of studying prayer. This morning we go back to the basics of the Prayer Jesus taught his disciples when they asked him to teach them to pray.

Let us confront the reality of prayer for many of us this morning. Pastor Marquaret from Seattle contends the average person prays less than 4 minutes a day, and the reason the number is so low is because people are busy. Don't feel too bad, because the average Pastor will pray 7 minutes a day for the same reason. Many people do not see prayer as playing a significant role in their moment to moment, day to day life. The Great Big God up there has more to do than worry about the little old me down here thinking. We may fall into wondering things like, "how could a loving God allow something like Manswell, the young man who went missing a year ago, to happen?" How could a loving God allow my husband to die of cancer, or a toddler to be run over by a car? Questions we

have about prayer need to be addressed. The questions about prayer and the value of prayer are endless when we confront our images of prayer and God.

The Lords Prayer is the prayer of prayers because it is the prayer Jesus taught his disciples when they asked him to teach them to pray. It is one of the few things the disciples asked Jesus to teach them. Jesus didn't just say "talk to God". He specifically teaches them to pray for daily bread, about temptation, forgiveness, the coming of the kingdom, and to honor God's name. It is important to note the "our and us" over the "me and the mine." We are all in this together. We are all tested by the reality of life and how we respond to the testing is a part of not being led into temptation. When we omit the coming of the kingdom, forgiveness, temptation, daily bread, and honoring God's name, we short change ourselves and the struggles we face daily at the deepest core of our being.

Prayer is more than just asking God for what we want, or asking to be relieved of something, or for something to happen. This is one form of prayer. Let us be clear prayer is so much more. Thanksgiving and Gratitude are prayer, weeping, mourning, and sadness can be forms of prayer. Fighting and anger can be a form of prayer - like Job raising and questioning before God. Prayer can be a conversation, like many of the Psalms. Prayer can be the audacity and the trust to address God, yes the great big God, with the little bitty you. Our prayers before meals mindfully call and recognize God's presence in our midst, and our prayers before sleep with words like "if I die before I wake" are prayers of trust.

Jesus is reported to be praying before his baptism, calling the 12, on the Mount of Transfiguration, and again before his disciples when they ask him to teach them to pray. He prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane that this cup might pass from him. In Romans, Paul says "to be constant in prayer", in Ephesians he writes to "pray at all times", in Colossians, to be "steadfast in prayer". In Luke we read "not to lose heart".

After teaching them to pray, Jesus tells a story. Suppose your friend shows up late at night, hungry. What do you do? You feed him. The disciples agree. Now, you have nothing to feed your friend. What are you going to do? You go to your friend's house. Now the house in the first century is basic two floor/one room model, with the animals on the lower level, the entry level with mom and dad, and six kids sleeping on the kitchen floor. The situation is more than just getting bread for your friend when he is knocking on the door. The animals wake up and start moving around, the baby wakes up, and you just want to go back to sleep but can't because he keeps knocking and knocking and knocking.

This story is intended to be *Saturday Night Live* from Jerusalem. It is funny because it happens rarely, but to the best of them. Does it mean God doesn't answer prayer until we become a nag and he wants to shut us up? No, it is about what Carole King sang in a song "You got a friend" Our persistence is about how

we view God. This is a crazy story Jesus is telling his disciples. They are laughing with the freedom to approach God as they would their best friend. Secondly, the man knocking on the door isn't knocking for something for himself, but for another.

Okay, you say, I got that, but what about this "Ask, Seek, and Knock"? I ask and I don't get. I seek and I don't find. I knock and nobody is home. Let us put these words back into context. I am fearful that when they are taken out of context, they fail to produce, then we throw the baby (God) out with the bath water. Jesus never said, "Ask and you will get what you want." If this were the case, we would all be Power Ball winners. Jesus said, "Ask and you will receive something good", the "good" being the presence of God. Receiving is different than getting what you want. I may want my life to be healed from cancer, my job restored, my kids to love me, or my office to be in the corner, but what I receive will be different than what I ask.

I may receive the courage to face the transition and transformation of life, a new vocation, a new way to love my kids without attachment or strings, the realization that I am more than where I sit in my office. Prayer changes lives, beginning with the awareness and knowledge of God's presence in your life. The God "up there" is right here, right now. The translation of the ask, seek, and knock from the Greek is to keep on asking, keep on seeking, and keep on knocking for the kingdom to come, forgiveness, for daily bread, to resist temptation. Change happens with a life of prayer.

For those of you who pray only randomly, I invite you, upon rising in the morning, to say the Lords Prayer - in the shower, during coffee, driving to work - just let the words flow from your lips, and prior to sleeping say them again. When you are comfortable, dare to be average and say your four minutes to God. Express your gratitude, frustration, anger, and hopes as you prepare for the day, or close the day, and finish it with the "Our Father." It is important to conclude with the prayer Jesus taught his disciples. You will come to the awareness that God occupies more than just four minutes of your time. God is omnipresent in every aspect of your life, your breathing, conversations and challenges with others. As Paul wrote you become fully conscious of God as the one in whom, "you live, move, and have your being." Prayer will change your life, because it changes you. God never leaves you where he finds you. Ask, seek, and knock constantly.

This morning, I invite you to a deeper level love relationship with God, not for getting what you want, but for what God wants to give you. I invite you to move from thinking about God to interfacing with God, through the power of prayer. Your life can be richer, deeper, and transformed by talking to God as you would a friend. I invite you into this sacred space buy asking, seeking, and knocking, so you may know and see the ground on which you are sitting and standing is holy ground, because God is present in your life.