

Prayer: “Declaration of Dependence”

Texts: Acts 1:15-17, 21-26

1 John 5:9-13 (Series B. 7th Sunday after Easter) Ps.1

John 17:6-19

"I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me" (John 17: 6-8).

Prayer

What is Prayer? Just make a mental note of your answer. A prayer a day keeps the blues away. According to the British Journal of Health Psychology, daily prayer wards off depression. Researchers found that people who prayed daily or often were more likely to report lower depression, lower anxiety, and higher self-esteem than those who hardly ever prayed.

A research study was carried out some time ago, in which groups of hospital patients were prayed for by members of the local church. There the researchers found that those who were prayed for did significantly better than those who were not prayed for. And, it was a double-blind trial, so those who were praying knew only the names of those they were praying for, and none of the hospital patients knew whether or not anyone was praying for them.

So, there we have it...but not so fast, my friends; prayer doesn't heal all physical ailments. Does God pick and choose who to heal or not to heal? So, what happens when some prayers are not answered as we wished? Does it nullify the power of prayer or the power of God to answer prayers? Personally, I do not think so. The trouble is that it isn't easy to pray. Even those who were physically with Jesus throughout his ministry, found it difficult to pray. They watched him as he communed with God and saw the result of that prayer in his life and in his work. Yet they said to him, "Lord, teach us how to pray." So, Jesus taught them the Lord's Prayer.

In today's Gospel reading, Jesus has just had his final, farewell meal with his disciples and this is his final speech. But Jesus doesn't address his disciples, instead he addresses God. His final speech is a prayer to God.

Jesus begins by praying for himself; then moves on to pray for other people and other situations. Jesus goes on to place the future of the Christian community firmly in God's hands. So, the future of the community is not entrusted to the community itself, but is turned over to God. It's quite a comforting thought that no matter how much we, in the church, may succeed or fail, the future of the church is not really in our hands, but in God's hands.

The tone of this prayer of Jesus is very personal. He addresses God as someone whom he knows very intimately and as someone whom he trusts implicitly. And in the prayer, Jesus weaves together the past, the present, and future into a kind of timelessness, which he suggests is available for all those who love God.

This prayer of Jesus is quite different from the Lord's Prayer, which is short and easily remembered, so perhaps here we have some clues about how to pray. There are many different types of prayer and many different approaches to prayer and, therefore, there's no one way which is either right or wrong.

Public prayer, prayer which somebody leads in church or in a prayer group on behalf of a congregation, is quite different from private prayer; so, liturgical prayer, the prayer of church worship, is usually more formal than private prayer.

As Jesus showed, the language of private prayer is very intimate and personal. Sometimes words must be used because there's something which is deeply troubling, and we find it difficult to get off our chest. That sort of prayer would probably use the everyday language that we would use with a friend or a member of our family: "Help me, God, I need you!"

Churchy language is appropriate in church but is usually inappropriate in private prayer. So private prayer is our own personal thought addressed to God in our own personal way, however inadequate that may feel at times. At other times, prayer may be utterly silent, with no words at all. In silence, we listen to God speak to us.

Whatever sort of prayer you prefer, there needs to be some time for silence so that God has space to speak to us. That silence may be when we're outside gardening or enjoying a view or out for a walk in nature, walking the dog. It may be while we're ironing or it may be in deliberate meditation.

Another point worth mentioning is that our prayers shouldn't have a ring-fence; in other words, making requests which hold God hostage or which tell God what to do and how to do it.

Following Jesus' example, he didn't lay down conditions. Rather, he opened up his thinking to God, and then placed his friends in God's hands. "*I ask you to save them from the Evil One,*" he prayed, "and to sanctify them (*set apart*) in the truth." If I make my prayers *too specific*, I'm doomed to disappointment, for God acts in ways which I can't begin to imagine. Isaiah the prophet says: "*For my thoughts are not your thoughts neither are your ways, declares the Lord. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts*" (Is.55: 8-9).

But if I hold those people or situations that I'm praying for in God's presence and then hand them over to his care, I allow God space to respond, all in God's time. It takes real faith to hand things over to God, because it is our nature to tell God what to do. Therefore: *Prayer for me is a declaration of dependence on God.*

Prayer is a lifeline to God. When prayer becomes real and we begin to expect and to experience a real response, life becomes both very exciting and a little scary because we never know what God may ask us to do. When God becomes God in our prayer life, we'll soon discover the transforming power of prayer in our life. For this reason, Jesus prays for the community of believers. *God always has the success*, not us. You and I are not irreplaceable or indispensable. And God is always looking for broken hearts or broken vessels to send his message of love and healing to our hurting world.

What will be your prayer to God after these readings? What part of Christ's mission now calls to you and me before we venture into the world again? As God knows our hearts, I pray to continually seek to love and serve Christ during all of my living days and to love and serve others in Christ's name.

As the original 12 were chosen by Jesus, and Matthias was chosen by God, we, too, are empowered to fulfill the Mission and Ministry of our Redeemer. We, too, are chosen.

A message that is real, a message not smitten with ego or pride but with humility, authenticity, and love for God and his Word. Francis Schaffer, a great man of God...after he delivered a powerful speech, he then added these words...The Lord's work must be done in the Lord's way. The Lord's work must be done in the Lord's way. The Lord's work must be done in the Lord's way.

Our way will work, if we learn to pray and to trust. God's work will get done at his pace. Finally: What is Prayer? What ever definition you have come up with in your mind is correct. But allow me to add one: Prayer, to me, is **Declaration of Dependence** on God.

On the cross is the strongest man who ever lived who died for us, Jesus Christ. We can't make it through eternity without him. Having Jesus as our own Saviour. His work...his way within us.

A willing vessel can be a powerful tool in God's hands. We will be amazed by what God can do with lives that are devoted to him in prayer and service. The Lord's work must be done in the Lord's way. The Lord's work must be done in the Lord's way.

Prayer: Declaration of Dependence.

Dear God, remind me that you know exactly what's in my heart, so I might as well be up front about it. And remind me that you're not a disapproving Father, but one who loves me and rejoices in me, no matter how inadequate I might feel.

Help me to learn how to pray. Give me the faith to believe that you hear and will respond, give me the courage to seek that response, and give me the endurance I need to keep going when it feels hopeless and dry. Make us patient as you prepare us for our moment, our day, and our ministry in Your time.

I ask this through Jesus who was such a model for prayer and who taught his disciples how to pray. Amen.

Prayer concerns: *Matilda Molyneaux-Piper, Wess Bourgaize, Johannes Eidnes, Hanne Bourgeoise, Ellen Eriksen, Joanne Severyn & COVID-19 patients, essential and frontline workers.*

Make melodies in your heart with these hymns:

- Lord Jesus Christ, Be Present Now # 527
- What a Friend We have in Jesus # 742
- Glorious Things of You Are Spoken # 647

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