

Sermon: Luke 11:1-13
"The Party Line"

© The Rev. Kate Heichler; Preached at Christ Church La Plata/Wayside
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Word of God: speak to us. Speak through us. Amen.

The third spiritual practice in the collection we call the Way of Love is Pray. These days I'm praying more than I ever have.

Daily, hourly, sometimes minute-by-minute: "Come, Lord Jesus. Come into me, and give me your peace. Fill me with your love that casts out fear. Protect this nation from violence. Bless our leaders. Bless our people." Many of you have joined the 135 people who have taken the pledge to pray for our nation for the forty days leading up to Election Day – and as those 135 forward those prayers on social media, or podcast, a lot of people praying with us. In a season when many feel particularly helpless, powerless to bring light into so much darkness, 40 Days of Prayer gives us action to take. It's actually the most powerful action available to us. Too often prayer is our "last resort." We are invited to do it first.

I once fell down a flight of stairs, carrying a desktop computer. In heels. Alone. I missed a step, felt myself go, heard the crash of the computer and came to, head down, at the bottom.

The very first words that formed in my mind were: "Jesus. Be here now." And he was. I'll never know if I was injured and he healed me in that moment, or if I was okay all along, but I had a bump on the back of my head, so I must have flipped over. Even in my dazed state, though, I was aware and glad to know that my first word had been "Jesus."

That is the most essential prayer for Christians, all prayers boiled down to their essence. It is the only prayer we need. Because Jesus is all we need. When we invoke the name of Jesus, we invite him to be present with us in that moment, whether it's a crisis or a just a quiet time of prayer. We start our prayers with the name of God, because that invokes God's presence. It reestablishes a connection, reopens an ongoing conversation. Many of you use text - you may have a text conversation with someone that is active for awhile, and then you go for days another text with that person – but the conversation is there for you to see all along. You could reconnect any time. Prayer is reopening the text, or the chat, or the messaging. And God is always there, ready to text back.

Prayer is simply conversation with God, as essential to developing our relationship with God as conversation is to any relationship.

But it's not a conversation we start.

When we pray, we are joining a conversation that's been going on since before time.

Have you ever lifted the receiver of a landline and heard someone talking?

Some of you may be saying, "What's a landline? What's a receiver?" In olden times, telephones were attached to the wall instead of our ears, or sat on a table. Imagine!

That's what it's like to tune in to prayer...

As we understand God in three persons, this Father, Son and Spirit are in constant relationship and always communicating, and we're invited to join in.

God is already speaking to us, and we check in and out.

What happens when we tune in?

Jesus exhorted his disciples to pray persistently – don't hold back asking

God for what you need. That's being real in the relationship.

When they wanted him to teach them how to pray, he taught them categories –

Who – Our Father, who is holy; God is God and we are not.

Your kingdom come – let God's reign be established among us.

Your will be done – let the life of the heavenly realms be manifest in this one.

Just think about the power of that prayer for a moment!

Forgive us, as we forgive others;

Give us what we need for today, not for the next twenty years, today;

Protect us from having our faith tested beyond its capacity.

That's one format for prayer. There are many others.

But a conversation in which we do all the talking isn't much of a conversation.

The true gift of prayer is a sense of connecting with God and receiving guidance and a sense of belovedness and connection.

What does Jesus promise will happen when we pray?

He says we won't receive scorpions or evil or punishment; misfortune does not come from God, though God will be with us in it when it comes.

He doesn't say we will receive what we ask for....

He says we will receive the Holy Spirit.

It is the Spirit in us who enables us to tune in to that conversation – and then we begin to hear God's side of the conversation.

The Spirit is the tuning device. Praying to be filled with the Holy Spirit is the only prayer we need. "How much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

If prayer is a conversation, not a wish-list,

we need to learn to quiet our minds and our spirits so we can listen.

We can use the words that Eli told Samuel to say, “Speak Lord, for your servant is listening...” There are many techniques;

many meditation techniques came from early Christian prayer practices:
slowing your breathing, centering, using a mantra...

Some people pray in tongues, a prayer language God gives us – glossolalia.

The Spirit brings us into that heavenly prayer already going on.

St. Paul wrote to the church in Rome, “*We don’t even know how to pray!*”

The Spirit prays inside us, with sighs too deep for words – and God knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.”

So we tap into God’s prayer for us and for the world and join that.

All prayer begins with God, and we join in and add, and it returns to God.

When the prayer is two-way, we feel something, maybe a joy or peace.

Words might come to mind, words that seem to come from God, or images.

A friend I knew would get song lyrics in answer to prayers.

For me, often, it’s words – one time I settled down to pray, and as usual started with “I’m sorry I’ve been so irregular about sitting down to pray...”

And I sensed God say, right away,

“You don’t need to say you’re sorry. I love you. There is nothing you should do or can do to make me love you more - I already love you the most.”

Those are words I have never forgotten, and that I’ve often shared with others who needed to be reminded – If I hadn’t tuned in, I wouldn’t have heard them.

We need to grow in our practice of Pray because God wants us to know him.

If we stay at the level of the wish list, we’re often asking God to align his will with ours.

As we can move from there into deeper prayer, the prayer of the heart, tapping into

God’s prayer for us and for the world, we are aligning our wills with God’s.

God’s prayers for us, God’s prayers for the world are truly blessed.

And God’s prayers are always answered. Amen!

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.' He said to them, 'When you pray, say: Father, hallowed be your name.

Your kingdom come.

Give us each day our daily bread.

And forgive us our sins,

for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us.

And do not bring us to the time of trial.'

And 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; for a friend of mine has arrived, and I have nothing to set before him." And 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." I 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.

'So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for a fish, will give a snake instead of a fish? Or if the child asks for an egg, will give a scorpion? If 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!'