

## "Prayer at the Heart"

Luke 11:1-13, John 17:6-26

Here we continue on with our series on the "Windows of the Church." Last week we started with an introduction to basically what a window is and how they can be inspiring to us. The windows here at Faith Church represent various aspects of the Christian faith that we experience as believers in Jesus Christ. Last week we discussed communion, focusing on the bread and the wine and how those symbols came to represent the body and blood of Christ, ultimately representing the new covenant that exists between God and human.

Today we focus on the window that resides next to the communion window. We focus on the window with the hands. These hands are held in the traditional prayer position, indicating a focus on God and all that resides above. It is a sign of reverence for the awesome power that the thoughts and words of an individual are directed towards. It's a sign of the devotion that a person has to God and all that encompasses in a relationship with the ultimate creator.

Today I plan for us to look at prayer and ponder what it means for us in our spiritual lives. I also plan for us to look what Luke records from Christ's discussion on prayer and then read a prayer of Christ in John that He lifted up for the disciples. Prayer is indeed a broad topic with many aspects and manifestations, but I believe that this can be the beginning to a conversation in the church on how important prayer can be in the life of the church and in our personal lives.

Prayer is basically a spiritual discipline that has been practiced since the beginning of our faith story. Looking back at the Hebrew scriptures we have the prayers of the early fathers of faith lifting up their concerns to God and God even having a conversation with individuals.

Prayer is a task that is carried throughout the Hebrew Scriptures and on into the New Testament that we have today in our current canon of scripture.

What does this act of prayer mean to those in the scriptures? What does prayer really even look like? What is prayer trying to accomplish? Why should we engage in prayer as a community and individually?

I look at prayer as being the connection, a direct connection between believer and God.. In the bible I see prayer being used as a connection between the faithful who wanted to understand the ways of God in this world. Prayer is used to lift up concerns and uncertainties up to God. Prayer is used as a way to understand the complexities of God. Prayer is used to form a bond between the person who is praying and God. Prayer can be used to open the hearts of those praying so that they can ultimately understand what it is that God is calling for them to do in this world.

Prayer today manifests itself in many fashions to this day, with its various functions that folks employ in order to connect with the Divine. The most common of all prayers that we experience, is the prayer before a meal, where we take time to thank God for the food that we are about to receive and for those that have taken the time to prepare the food. We have prayer in church where we lift up our concerns, where we praise God, and ask for guidance in our lives. We have private prayer, where we personally lift up our concerns, thoughts, and requests to God on our own.

We have prayers that are written down, written in books and many prayers that have been lifted up to God for centuries. We have prayers that are new and given directly from the moving of the Holy Spirit within us. Both of these prayers are genuine as long as they are given from the

heart and in the context of truly forging a connection between God and the people the prayers are spoken by and for in their time and place.

We have prayers of salvation, where we ask forgiveness of our sins and we ask for Christ to come into our being and be present with us in our lives that we may live a new life. These prayers are the starting point for many believers in life. We have prayers of salvation that are prayed by long-time believers, who continually seek renewal in their lives and so that Christ may continue to dwell in their lives. Both types of prayers of salvation are very real and relevant for believers, wherever, whenever and whomever the prayers are spoken for and with.

These are just a drop of the many forms that prayer can manifest itself today in our world.

In our Protestant and Methodist tradition, we believe that prayer can be given directly from any believer up to God. There is no need for a person or other individual to pray on our behalf in order to reach God. We believe that anyone can lift up a prayer to God. Prayer can be as simple as saying "God, help me" or "God, thank you." God is there and present and ready for you to lift up your prayer to Him.

But with all of this, what does Christ say about prayer? What direction do the gospels give us in our way of understanding prayer? What is the ultimate example and instruction of prayer that we can understand today?

I look to Luke 11 as a classic example of prayer and the instructions of prayer. In the beginning of the passage we get what could be considered an abridged version of the Lord's prayer. Short and to the point and it carries quite a bit of meaning not only for the disciples of the day but for us today as well. There is an asking of God's will, a petition for having our needs met, forgiveness of sins, and a petition that we are not brought into a situation where we would

be tested in faith. It's a basic outline of prayer that we can use in our own prayer lives, which is exactly why Christ would have given us this direction to the disciples and for us.

I find that this basic outline of prayer a good starting point for us in our lives. Not to be trivial, but it is like a recipe that you get from your grandmother on how to bake the best cookies. You begin with the basic foundation, the basic recipe. You start from there, but then you get motivated to add in a little more chocolate chips, maybe some macadamia nuts, and then you go on from there. You can begin to improvise and add your own ingredients and then make it your own recipe with a solid foundation in what is known as good.

Likewise with prayer, we can have a similar experience. We can take the example given to us and then build upon it. We can begin to add our own petitions, pray for others, and allow the prayer to speak from our hearts. We can begin to expand our prayer to encompass all areas of our life and allow the Holy Spirit to begin to work within us and through us in this life.

Moving on through Luke 11 we reach a classic and wonderful passage of the Bible. Starting at verse 9 we have "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. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened." Here we have a passage that can give us the motivation to pray.

Christ in this passage is encouraging the disciples and followers to have perseverance in their prayer life and to push forward even when it may seem that there is little of a response coming forth. It is important for us to take what we are experiencing in our lives and lift that up to God so that we can be open to God working in our lives. We may not understand all that is going on in our life but we have the opportunity, the possibility, of being opened up and gaining understanding of all that we are going through.

When I have given devotionals on prayer, I often look to this passage of scripture as a whole for inspiration. I believe that we are given a foundation for our prayer lives in whatever manifestation that prayer lives may go. We have Christ giving direction and guidance so that we know how we are to take the great tradition of prayer and use it for the benefit of God's kingdom and for the benefit of those that are in need of care. Christ is building and guiding the tradition of prayer laid out to us by our faith ancestors.

In looking for guidance of prayer and understanding the foundation of what we are to do with prayer, I look to another spot in the Gospels. In John we have Christ himself lifting up a prayer to God on behalf of his disciples. It's an act of showing the care that Christ had for his followers and shows how he himself lived out prayer in his ministry. Let's take a look at that passage. It's a lengthy passage, so bear with me as I read for us today.

Read John 17:1-25.

Here we have a prayer that Christ is lifting up to God near the end of his time on earth. Christ is lifting up the disciples so that they may be able to continue the work of Christ on this earth so others may have the life that can come through the true life in God and in glorifying God.

Even at the hour of when Christ was near the end of his life and had an immense amount of anxiety of what would happen to him he took time, to come to God. He took time to pray for his disciples and as modern day disciples Christ was praying for us as well. We can look to the example of the One who brings life into the world and see that truly prayer is important to us in our lives.

The topic, discussion and understanding of prayer can go far, far beyond what time is here for this sermon. It is my hope that we can begin the conversation of prayer. If we are to be a

community that reaches out to the greater community beyond our four walls then indeed we need to be prepared to pray. We need to be prepared to pray for those who are in need of God's love, who are in need of the life that can come through belief in Jesus Christ. We have been given great guidance and inspiration to begin the process of prayer. As we go forth from here today. May we be enriched ready to begin our prayers of the heart, prayers to God, prayers that can give the world life through Christ.

Let us pray.