

The Presbyterian Church in Canada  
**St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church**

January 19<sup>th</sup> 2020

Minister: Rev. Dr. Emily Webb      Clerk of Session: Mary Strong  
Director of Music: Dr. Foster Hill      Office: 519-332-2662

**WE GATHER IN GOD'S PRESENCE**

Prelude

\*Entry of the Word

Welcome and Announcements

Introit      *"The people that in darkness"*

Call to Worship

\*Hymn      *"Thou whose almighty word"*      #291

Prayer of Approach and Lord's Prayer

Assurance of Pardon

*Minister: The peace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you.*

**People: And also with you.**

\*Sharing the Peace of Christ      *May the God of hope*

\*Hymn      *"Saviour, like a shepherd lead us"*      #485

**WE LISTEN TO GOD'S WORD**

Children's Message

Prayer of Illumination

Responsive Psalm #138

Old Testament Lesson:

1 Samuel 12:20-24.....Page 255

Large Print Bible.....Page 438

New Testament Lesson:

Luke 11:1-13.....Page 72

Large Print Bible.....Page 1624-5

*Reader: The Word of the Lord*

**People: Thanks be to God**

Anthem      *"My God will supply my needs"*

Message      *"Short Cuts"*

**WE RESPOND TO GOD**

\*Hymn      *"Fill all my life, O Lord my God"*      #653

The Offering      *Winter – 2<sup>nd</sup> Movement*      Vivaldi  
Lee Rawson & Foster Hill

\*Doxology      *"Praise God from whom all blessings flow"*      #830

Prayer of Thanksgiving and Intercession

**WE ARE SENT OUT AS GOD'S PEOPLE**

\*Hymn      *"Guide me, O thou great Redeemer!"*      #651

\*Charge and Benediction

\*Blessing      *"Sing amen"*      #264

Sing amen! Amen, we praise your name, O God.

Sing amen! Amen, we praise your name, O God.

Sing amen! Amen, amen, amen, amen,

Amen, we praise your name, O God.

\*The Word Goes with Us

Postlude

## January 19<sup>th</sup> 2020 – St Andrew's [Travel Light/Short Cuts]

Last week, our journey with Jesus began in Samaria.

As Jesus travelled through the northern part of Israel,  
he encountered a young expert in Jewish law  
who asked him about neighbours.

From there, Jesus travelled on  
to the home of his friends, Mary and Martha.

And now, he is taking some time to pray.

His disciples, his closest followers, see him.

And they ask him to teach them how to pray, too.

This is a private moment between Jesus and his followers.

And that's important.

There are many times when Jesus speaks and acts  
for "the crowds," for "the people;"

Sometimes the crowds are friendly and interested,  
sometimes they are demanding and provocative;  
sometimes, they're downright violent  
and unwelcoming.

But there are also special, quiet moments

when Jesus and his followers spend time together,

Just for them.

Like a rest stop on the road;

On a long trip, there's no point in hurrying.

And travelling with Jesus

is a journey worth savouring.

It's easy to get caught up in the work of following Christ;

Today, Jesus is talking to us about simply being with him,

With God,

through prayer.

Jesus prayed a lot.

There are a few famous instances in the Bible:

At his baptism, in the garden of Gethsemane,  
the long prayer for his disciples before his arrest,  
and on the Cross.

But there are so many other instances,

Where Jesus was praying

and then the action of the story begins,

That it seems to have been something he did often;

As a daily practice.

It makes sense that his disciples

– his friends and students –  
would want to be taught to pray, too.

So Jesus gives them words to say,  
words that are deeply familiar  
to Christians all over the world,  
of every denomination and church:  
The Lord's Prayer.

Jesus starts his prayer  
by reminding us who we are praying to:  
his Father  
whose name is holy  
and worthy of being honoured,  
and whose coming kingdom  
is something to be anticipated happily  
and hopefully.

We are to ask for what we need to live,  
And for forgiveness,  
in response to our own forgiving of others.  
Finally, we are to ask God to protect us from hardship  
that will test our faith.

Jesus doesn't stop there, though.  
He has more to teach about prayer.  
First, the story of the shameless friend,  
Who woke his neighbour and friend up  
asking for bread to take care of an unexpected guest.  
His sleepy and grumpy friend refused,  
but by shamelessly continuing  
to ask for what he wanted,  
he got his bread in the end.

So, Jesus says, ask and you'll get it;  
look for it and you'll find it;  
knock on the door and it'll open.

Finally, Jesus speaks of a human parent who,  
though never perfect,  
is still capable of giving good things to his child,  
and he compare this human father with God the divine parent:  
"How much more will the Father in heaven  
give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him."

What can we take away from this exchange between Jesus and his disciples?

First, we get a handy reference guide for praying;  
 we get the Lord's prayer  
 which we say together every Sunday,  
 along with many other Christians.

Second, we are told how to approach God,  
 what our attitude toward to prayer should be:  
 shameless and persistent.

And finally, we are assured  
 that God the good parent stands ready  
 to give good things to us;  
 no scorpions or snakes...only good things.

It's like finding a short cut:

use these words, be shamelessly persistent  
 and just keep banging on God's door...  
 and he will answer your prayers,  
 get you to where you want to be,  
 like the perfect divine parent that he is,  
 skipping over the detours  
 and speed bumps  
 and potholes along the way.

Prayer is something Christians are meant to do a lot.

Following this example prayer that Jesus provided,  
 We elaborate on the components of the Lord's Prayer  
 through our worship service,  
 especially the longer version in Matthew 6.

We start with a prayer of adoration, honouring God;

We confess our own sins,  
 and accept and offer forgiveness  
 amongst each other and from God.

We pray for illumination,  
 to discover what God has to say, his will;  
 And we thank him and pray for others,  
 for good things for them.

We pray for discernment to stay well away from bad things;  
 for the kingdom to come  
 in small ways into  
 all our lives.

We pray together, and we pray alone;

Perhaps you also pray with your spouse or your family.

You may also pray when you read your Bible,  
to learn or to apply what you learn.

If you read the Good Samaritan story, like we did last week,  
you might pray for an opportunity  
and for God's gracious help  
to be a good neighbour.

That is how we pray, and when.

Why we pray is a stickier issue.

Are we trying to wake God up,  
like the grumpy neighbour in our text this morning?  
Alert God to the things that need doing,  
the things that we think are important?  
Convince or harass him into acting  
by being shamelessly persistent?  
Do we pray because Jesus said  
we should pray,  
and that's enough?

Does that line up with how you think about prayer?

The thing to do when you read something in the Bible  
and it creates more questions than it answers,  
is to make a list of what you know about God  
and see if that helps.

So, what do we know about God?

We know that God does not sleep,  
because he has promised to be with us always.  
So prayer can't be about waking him up.

We know that everything,  
down to the hairs on our head,  
are known to God,  
That we are created and loved by him,  
and that the unfolding of our lives is tended to by him.  
So we don't need to pray  
to draw God's attention to something...  
he's already looking.

And we don't need to harass or persuade him to give us what we need,  
 because Scripture makes it clear, from start to finish,  
 that God wants to be our provider, our parent, and our protector.

Finally, we know that blind obedience and rule-following  
 is not something God or Jesus want from us;  
 otherwise, we wouldn't have  
 these explanatory stories  
 attached to every instruction and teaching.  
 So it's not a matter of following orders from Jesus.

I wonder...  
 what if the why we pray,  
 and even the how and the when,  
 are not the most important aspects of prayer?

In teaching his disciples about prayer,  
 Jesus spends more time talking  
 about who we are praying to than anything else.  
 Perhaps Jesus is trying to tell us  
 that prayer is not primarily about getting  
 what we ask for from God,  
 that there are no right words  
 or a perfect time to pray,  
 that there is no  
 magic number of times  
 to pray to get an answer.

Perhaps prayer is,  
 before anything else,  
 about walking through that open door  
 and getting to know God the Father,  
 the way that Jesus does.

Talking to someone,  
 sharing your day, good and bad...  
 that is the way we build friendships and intimate relationships  
 with one another.  
 What if Jesus is trying to teach us  
 that prayer  
 will strengthen and deepen the relationship  
 between God and us,  
 and between one another?

Instead of thinking about this exchange  
 between Jesus and his disciples  
 as a short cut to getting God's attention,  
 what happens when we read this passage  
 from the perspective of relationship with God?

The shameless friend is shameless  
 – unembarrassed –  
 as he abandons good manners and personal dignity  
 to ask for help.  
 He got his bread  
 because he trusted that even late at night,  
 his friend would eventually help him.

The shameless friend modelled  
 the boldness that comes from familiarity,  
 from knowing his friend.  
 Jesus is telling us that we can do the same with God:  
 we can shamelessly, without embarrassment,  
 impose on God;  
 be boldly, unashamedly familiar with God,  
 and ask him to keep his promises,  
 for daily bread, for forgiveness,  
 for help.

Throwing ourselves into  
 asking, seeking and knocking,  
 praying tirelessly again and again for the same things...  
 understanding it that way puts too much on us.  
 Jesus is telling us to reach out to God, yes;  
 but we are not the key to making prayer work.

If we ask, seek and knock  
 with any expectation of a response, of finding,  
 of having a door open to us...  
 it's because God did it first.

God has asked for us,  
 he has sought us out and he has knocked on the door of our heart.  
 Jesus is inviting us to do the same thing in return.  
 It's an invitation to trust;  
 to ask, seek and knock trusting that you will receive,  
 that the divine parent is ready  
 to listen and give.

God wants us to knock,  
 and find the best that he has to give

– a life of journeying with the indwelling Holy Spirit –  
 waiting for us on the other side of the door.

And the example of the earthly parent  
 being capable of goodness toward his child,  
 is reminding us that  
     God is good and loves us as his children  
         more perfectly than even the best human parent.  
         God is good and eager to give,  
             but like any parent...  
             you might not get exactly what you ask for.

Jesus ends his lesson on prayer by exclaiming, how much more  
 will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him.  
 The closing promise of the Spirit  
     as the ultimate response to prayer  
     rejects any assurance  
     that praying will get us what we want.

God is not Santa Claus or our fairy godmother,  
 and his goal isn't to spoil us or shut us up with treats.  
 God's intent for us is to be people who receive the Spirit,  
     people for whom and in whom  
     the kingdom seed is planted.

When his disciples asked to be taught to pray,  
 Jesus began his prayer by inviting them  
     into the same kind of relationship with God that he had:  
         Son and Father;  
         Child and parent.

We are very used to hearing God described as a parent now,  
 but remember that before Jesus,  
     God's name was too holy to be spoken,  
     his face too terrifying to look at.  
 Jesus invites us to acknowledge that, too  
     – may your holy name be honoured –  
     while still assuring us that we can approach God  
     and speak to him  
         with the familiarity and boldness of a child  
         with a loving parent.

God's kingdom coming, God's will being done



– handing our present and our future over to God –  
 is something we can pray for without fear.  
 Because we are kingdom people  
 who have received the Spirit of God,  
 and we trust him.

And then Jesus gets into the “asks”:  
 for daily bread, for forgiveness,  
 for being capable of forgiving others.

Jesus is inviting us to make everything known to God...  
 and yes, God knows it all already.  
 But in speaking those needs,  
 in speaking our sin  
 and how we have been hurt by the sin of others,  
 we are trusting that God wants to hear it from us,  
 that the relationship can bear hearing  
 the fearful, hard things of our lives.

The relationship may even depend on that hearing  
 for it to grow strong and unbreakable.

Jesus ends his prayer-training by telling us we can be confident  
 in the powerful and protective love of God our Father  
 when life gets rough or painful.  
 It might really be better to call this the “Disciple’s prayer”  
 instead of the Lord’s prayer.

Because it really is a prayer for us, for his followers, to say,  
 And in praying it, especially together, we are reformed;  
 As a community that honours and worships God together;  
 That forgives one another because we are forgiven by God;  
 That intercedes for each other and for others,  
 for the kingdom to come, together;  
 That eats of the same loaf,  
 given by the same loving Father.

Prayer binds us together,  
 with one another and with the Triune God.

Relationships take time, just like a journey.  
 Instead of looking for a short cut, Jesus advises a rest stop.  
 Like a reusable water bottle or a gas tank:  
 refill your souls in prayer, in worship,  
 in a community of followers of Christ,

for the road ahead.

Ultimately, prayer changes us, not God.

Prayer shapes and re-shapes our minds,  
our experience of the world,  
how we think and act in response to what happens around us;  
how we relate to one another.

God already wants to be parent, provider and protector to us;

He wants that relationship with us, always has...  
from Adam and Eve to Abraham and Sarah, to Jesus' first followers,  
and to you and I here today.

Prayer doesn't change God.

Prayer changes us.  
And it does so by changing the relationship,  
the bond,  
between God and us,  
by making it deep and sturdy,  
familiar and trusting,  
confident and honest.

Prayer tops us up with a love that goes both ways

and binds us together,  
with one another and with Jesus. AMEN.