

“It’s about change” A sermon by Lee Ireland
Cathedral City Community Presbyterian Church
July 28, 2019, Seventh Sunday after Pentecost
Luke 11:1-13

Let us pray together: Open our eyes to see your Spirit in our life. Open our hearts to receive the blessings you send each day. Guide us with your wisdom so that through us Christ may walk on the earth once again. Amen.

How many of you have heard a sermon on how to pray? Perhaps the sermon instructed you on the parts of a prayer. You know, you are ‘supposed’ to include adoration, confession, thanksgiving, supplications or your requests of God. Or at least that’s one of the suggested ways to pray. That method is referred to as ACTS: adoration, confession, thanksgiving, supplication. You may have heard that there are particular types of prayer. Supplication, centering, thanksgiving, corporate or prayers in church. Has any of this information and instruction helped you in your prayer life? Some of you may answer ‘yes,’ but others of you, may say ‘no.’

Praying in America is not something just a few people do. The statistics I found show that we Americans pray with some frequency. Pew research found in 2014 that 55% of the population prayed at least once a week. Interestingly, the Pew Research data showed that the older you get the less you pray. I hope that’s not true of all of you! The Barna Group, in 2017, found that of those people who do pray, 82% pray solo. They prefer to pray silently by themselves. And what is this 82% praying about? Prayers of thanksgiving and gratitude are the number one subjects of their prayers. After prayers of thanksgiving and gratitude come prayers for the needs of family and community.

What about Jesus and praying? When did Jesus pray? What did Jesus pray for? Well, Jesus prayed before meals. He prayed when he was alone. He prayed the night before he chose his disciples. He prayed before raising Lazarus from the dead. He prayed at his transfiguration. He even prayed twice while he was dying on the cross. And what did Jesus pray for? Jesus prayed for guidance as well as praying for others. He often thanked God in his prayers.

If we are to take a clue from the Bible, we would have to say that prayer was important to Jesus. Jesus seemed to have prayed day and night. Why was Jesus praying so much? I believe it was because he was checking in with God. To use a term most of us can relate to, Jesus was having a conversation with God, the one who sent him to earth. God had sent Jesus to earth to show us the ‘kingdom of God is near’ as Jesus often said. I believe that Jesus, who was human as well as divine, was checking in with God to make sure he was demonstrating the kingdom of God to all he met.

In this scripture, Jesus tells us to pray **Father, your kingdom come**. As I said, bringing God’s kingdom to earth was vitally important to Jesus. So important, that he instructed the disciples who were sent on a mission to heal and share God’s love, to tell people that the kingdom of God was near. In the scripture I just read, Jesus asks us to pray for the kingdom of God to come on earth. When you pray, do you pray for that?

I wonder why the disciples asked Jesus to teach them how to pray? They knew he prayed practically continuously. They had heard him pray many times in public. The disciples

knew the type of prayer that Jesus prayed wasn't like the public prayers they'd seen in the Temple. Jesus had even told them not to pray like those who make a show of praying, but to pray in private. Jesus didn't want prayer for show, but sincere prayer.

In today's scripture, Jesus tells his disciples and us to pray to God asking for his kingdom to come and then he goes on to also talk about praying for our needs.

Did you notice that most of today's reading from Luke is about being persistent in our prayer life? Jesus wants us to be persistent when talking to our already persistent God. How is God persistent? God exhibits great persistence. God loves us unconditionally and forever – even in death – no matter what we do. We can count on God's unfailing love and concern for each of us. But can God count on our persistent, unfailing love for God?

Consider that what Jesus is talking about in this scripture is tenacity in a relationship, persistence in our relationship with God. When Jesus tells the story about the neighbor knocking late at night asking for bread, who do the neighbors represent in this relationship? The scripture is, I believe, ambiguous – just to get us thinking. Jesus mentions the neighbor asking for bread for unexpected guests and his neighbor being reluctant to open the door to fulfill the request. Is God the one in the house who is already asleep for the night and isn't opening the door unless we are insistent? Or are we the one not opening the door to God when God is knocking continuously, telling us what God wants in our life?

And where will our persistence get us? Jesus said, **ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.** We simply need to believe, to have faith – and God's kingdom will be opened to us. For God is a good parent who will give us what we ask. God will not give us a snake. God has our best interest at heart. God loves us unconditionally. But God wants us to open ourselves to communication with God, for the reward is great - **how much more will the heavenly father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him.** Are you asking? Are you communicating?

We do need to continuously communicate with God about our wants and needs – as well as thank God for all God's good gifts. But there are two sides to a true conversation. Are we listening when God talks to us? And what might we hear when we listen?

Richard Rohr, one of the presenters I heard at Chautauqua, writes in his book, *The Naked Now*, "Prayer is about changing you, not changing God." Think about that statement, "prayer is about changing you, not changing God." When we pray, are we trying to change God's mind or are we, like Jesus, checking in with God, to make sure we're doing what God wants us to do?

This week forget about any prayer formula. Forget about praying 'correctly' and just talk to God. When you ask for God's kingdom to come, you are opening up a communication line with God. Tell God your needs and wants. Listen for what God has to say to you. Knock on God's door. God will open it and join the conversation. Enjoy the conversation! You just may be changed and find that God has given you what the changed you really wants and needs.

May God bless your every effort!