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Some Reasons To Pray

Mark 14:32-36
Isaiah 40:28-31; 55:6

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Isaiah 40:31 "Those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength..."
Isaiah 55:6 "Seek the Lord while he may be found; call upon him while he is near."

Prayer for Illumination:

God our helper, by your Holy Spirit, open our minds, that as the Scriptures are read and your Word is proclaimed we may be led into your truth. In the name of Christ Jesus we pray. Amen

As many of you are aware, Ruth and I recently enjoyed a month-long visit in our home of two of our grandchildren, Palmer and Anna. Palmer is just shy of 3 years old. At meal-times we went through what became a predictable routine.

Mommy: "Palmer, would you like to say the prayer?"

Palmer: "Yes, Mommy." Silence followed as we all held hands, eyes closed, and the little voice again: "You do it, Mommy."

Prayer---so simple, yet seemingly so complicated. It is as easy and natural as talking to a friend, yet, for many, laden with a world and life-time of emotions, of confusion, of disappointment, of mystery.

Yet, many people today do not seem to have much time for prayer. And not just because they are too busy – though that's certainly part of it. We live under the tyranny of clocks and calendars. Our lives are cluttered. There isn't much time for prayer. Many of us do not take time, at any rate.

But, that's the least of it. What I mostly mean by saying that many of us don't have much time for prayer is that we seem to have lost confidence in it. That sentiment was expressed quite clearly to me one day by a man whose sense of faith in general, and his practice of prayer in particular, was a thing of the past. O, not all of us have lost confidence in prayer. Some continue to pray in a disciplined way. And, probably none of us have given up praying altogether. We pray 'in church'. We may say 'grace' at mealtimes. And, we pray whenever we are desperate – when the life of someone we love

hangs by a thread, let us say, or when there's a local, national, or world-wide crisis. But the kind of praying that undergirds, sustains, and directs everyday existence; multitudes have given up – if they ever knew it to begin with!

I suppose the reasons are many. But, I wonder if most of our hesitancy about prayer isn't caused mainly, either by inadequate ideas of God, or by deficient understandings of prayer. So I've decided to share with you today about "Some Reasons To Pray".

I. Reason One

The first reason for praying has to do with the nature of God. We can and we should pray because God is approachable.

I know that is anything but obvious. And at times we feel as if God is a million miles away. Nevertheless, as Christians, we believe our best clue about God comes, not from the world around us, and the 'Incredible Universe' in which we live, but from Jesus Christ. And Jesus tells us, not only by his words, but by his whole life, and most of all by his death and resurrection --- Jesus tells us that we may think of God as a gracious Father. The Father, says Jesus, is personal, loving, and is willing, therefore, to hear about whatever concerns us.

We can and should pray, then, about any and all things. Pray about the good things and the bad things, the confusing, sad, and funny things. Pray honestly about all things. Trust God with your dark fears as well as your bright hopes, with your anger and resentments, as well as your joy and gladness.

Only let us keep this in mind: the primary purpose of prayer is not to get something from God, but to get with God. Because God is personal, our prayers nurture a relationship.

II. Reason Two

One reason for praying, then, is because God is approachable, and we pray to establish and nurture a relationship. A second reason for praying is that we are told to **"seek the Lord while he may be found"** as Isaiah put it. In another place he said: **"Wait for the Lord."**

For most of us waiting is the last thing we're inclined to do. We want to act. Yet, as Theodore Ferris writes, "One thing is certain. No matter how God may choose to speak to you, you will not hear him unless you listen, and you cannot listen until you yourself are still. You must learn to sit still, to be still, like the waters of a lake, which on a windless day reflect a perfect image of what is around and above them." Ferris continues, "This is perhaps one of the hardest things in the world to do. The very idea is strange, having been brought up that there is something sacred about activity, some inherent virtue in being busy. But the thought of being still for 15 or 30 minutes so that he might hear what God is saying, strikes (one) as an utter waste of precious time."

"Be still and know that I am God," says the Psalmist. **"Those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength,"** wrote Isaiah.

To this end, make waiting and listening a part of what you do when you pray. Sometimes reading the Bible is how this best happens for me. Especially, memorizing and recalling particular verses. Don't spend all your prayer time telling God what you want. This is where most of us miss the boat. Most of us, when we pray, would do well to realize that real prayer occurs, not when God hears us, but when we hear God, when we hear what God wants and come away from praying ready to do it.

III. Reason three

And that leads me to suggest on more reason to pray. Pray because praying can change you. Prayer may or may not change your circumstances. It may or may not help you to get well, or to find a job, or to fix something wrong in your life or in the lives of your children. But whether or not your circumstances are changed by prayer, you will be.

Think with me of the example of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, on the night before his crucifixion. He went there to ask to be spared from the agony of death. Not just any death, but death on the cross. **"My Father,"** he said, **"if it is possible, let this cup pass me by."** But, the cup didn't pass by. Jesus wasn't spared. Instead, he was given the strength to meet the ordeal and to go through it in such a way as to save the world. He went to the cross. But, oh, how he went! He prayed for those who mocked and scourged him: **"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."** He prayed for himself: **"Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit."**

I urge you to pray, not so you can sidestep something difficult or dangerous, but so that you can step up and meet it.

(Refer to words of the morning Anthem... 'I Am Not Afraid')

Nearly two weeks ago our nation recognized the birthday of a great American and spiritual giant, Martin Luther King, Jr. In one of his sermons he spoke about the trouble and tension that came into his life early on because of his leadership of the Civil Rights Movement. There were increasing numbers of threats. There was one especially angry and vicious one that came over the telephone in the middle of the night. King told what happened next.

"I got out of bed and began to walk the floor. Finally, I went to the kitchen and heated a pot of coffee. I was ready to give up. I tried to think of a way to move out of the picture without appearing to be a coward. In this state of exhaustion, when my courage had almost gone, I determined to take my problem to God. My head in my hands, I bowed over the kitchen table and prayed aloud. The words I spoke to God that mid-night are still vivid in my memory. "I am here taking a stand for what I believe is right. And now I am afraid...I am at the end of my powers...I have come to the point where I cannot face it alone."

King went on, "At that moment I experienced the presence of the Divine as I had never before experienced him. It seemed as though I could hear the quiet assurance of an inner voice, saying, 'Stand up for righteousness, stand up for truth. Your Lord and your God will be at your side forever.' "Almost at once," King said, "my fears began to pass

from me, my uncertainty disappeared. I was ready to face anything. The outer situation had remained the same, but God had given me an inner calm.” Again, listen to these words from our morning Anthem: “You hold me in your hands and will not let me go. I will not be afraid, for I am not alone.”

That’s the effect prayer can have—not just for the spiritual giants of this world, but for you, for me, for anybody.

If you are one of those who have given up praying for one reason or another, I hope I have said something that will encourage you to go back to it. And if you are one of those who has never quit, I hope that what I have said will encourage you to keep at it!

And, now, before we sing the hymn, I invite you to turn with me again to the prayer printed in the bulletin as the Prayer of Confession, which wonderfully captures the essence of what I have tried to say.....let us pray.....

Merciful God, we confess that we do not know how to pray. We speak too much and listen too little. We are uncomfortable with silence and impatient in waiting. Far too often we are more concerned with listing our needs and wants than in discovering your will for our lives. Forgive us, we pray, when we are selfish, lazy, hard of hearing or less than honest in our moments with you. By your grace, teach us to pray so that we may come to know the heart of Jesus in fresh and living ways this day.

Amen...and so be it...in my life...and in yours!