

Introduction

Check-in & Introductions

Generosity Revealed in Prayer

Sermon Reflection Notes

This week the scripture lesson is a very familiar passage from Matthew, the one in which Jesus gives us the Lord's Prayer. And even though everybody knows this scripture, prayer is still difficult for many of us. We may even feel like Pastor Ron did as a child, being carried out of a serious, 'grown up' place yelling at everyone to pray for us. We hope we're doing it right; we may be pretty sure we aren't. We may feel like we get this seemingly very basic practice down as a habit, but that we are in fact, just pretending to know what we are doing.

Pastor Ron gave a working definition of prayer: *prayer is ultimately about a relationship that seeks to align our hearts and God's heart, align our will with God's will. Prayer is opening our minds to being transformed to desire what God desires.*

But just how do we go about that? Jesus says: "When you pray..." Not *if* you pray. *When*. Prayer is the centerpiece of the spiritual life, even though it may seem strange speaking words, often aloud, to a being that cannot be sensed through touch, sound, or smell. We may start by "saying what's on your heart." This may lead to prayer becoming stale over time though. We may say the same empty phrases again and again. As we move toward spiritual maturity, we hope to seek and achieve a more mature relationship with God. We can move beyond prayer lists (*although those are valuable and good*) and asking for 'favors' (*although those prayers may never completely disappear*). Rather, we may choose to see prayer as a way to discern how our lives might be used for God's purposes. We may begin to pray the Lord's Prayer, and many others, with new eyes and ears, with new hearts, moving ourselves closer to God with each utterance.

Deliver us from evil--keep us from the things that separate us from God.

Thy kingdom come—let this world look more fully like the Kingdom of God, where the hungry are fed, the poor are filled, the sick are healed, the weak are strong, and the kids are running the show

On earth as it is in heaven—as MLK Jr said: "It's all right to talk about the new Jerusalem, but one day God's preacher must talk about the New York, the new Atlanta, the new Philadelphia..."

Thy will be done—not my will, but thine. Not what I think thy will is, that aligns with mine, but actually thine.

When we pray ceaselessly, we may just find ourselves so in tune with God that our hearts and God's heart beat together. And with that rhythm and joy, we can find ourselves not only prayer 'thy kingdom come,' but desiring to participate with God in the redemptive work.

Scripture

Matthew 6: 5-25

⁵ "And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. ⁶ But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

⁷ "When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard because of their many words. ⁸ Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

⁹ "Pray, then, in this way:

Our Father in heaven,

may your name be revered as holy.

¹⁰ May your kingdom come.

May your will be done

on earth as it is in heaven.

¹¹ Give us today our daily bread.

¹² And forgive us our debts,

as we also have forgiven our debtors.

¹³ And do not bring us to the time of trial,

but rescue us from the evil one.

¹⁴ "For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, ¹⁵ but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

Discussion Questions

1. What could inform us about what it means to "align our hearts with God's heart" through prayer? What structures or traditions might we draw upon?
2. Pastor Ron said he is not a fan of the phrase "prayer works." He likened that phrase to manipulation or asking for favors. Why might he have said that?
3. Often, we say "I will pray for you" to someone. What responsibility have we taken on when we offer to pray for someone? What would it look like to pray for someone AND align our hearts with God's heart at the same time?
4. What was the point of telling the story of Hannah, who prayed so long for a child, only to send Samuel to the temple?
5. How does Martin Luther King's prayer inspire us to imagine new ways to pray?
6. Pastor Ron said that he regularly prays the Lord's Prayer: *thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven*. Why is the Lord's Prayer an important way to pray? Why has it become canonical and persistent in Christian faith traditions?

Closing Prayer

Holy and loving God, we know neither how to pray nor for what to pray, so we join our voices together, hoping to more closely align our hearts with yours, by praying the prayer you taught us:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed by thy name. Thy kingdom come; thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

" 'Thy kingdom come' also equals 'my kingdom go' " The pothe