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We have been talking about what it means to be disciples of Jesus. Action is required of followers. And today we learn that prayer is that action. I will be reading from a different translation so you may hear the Lord's Prayer with fresh ears.

Luke 11:1-13 Prayer (CEV version)

11 When Jesus had finished praying, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his followers to pray."

² So Jesus told them, "Pray in this way:

'Father, help us to honor your name.

Come and set up your kingdom.

³ Give us each day the food we need. ^[a]

⁴ Forgive our sins, as we forgive everyone who has done wrong to us.

And keep us from being tempted."

⁵ Then Jesus went on to say:

Suppose one of you goes to a friend in the middle of the night and says, "Let me borrow three loaves of bread. ⁶ A friend of mine has dropped in, and I don't have a thing for him to eat." ⁷ And suppose your friend answers, "Don't bother me! The door is bolted, and my children and I are in bed. I cannot get up to give you something."

⁸ **He may not get up and give you the bread, just because you are his friend. But he will get up and give you as much as you need,** simply because you are not ashamed to keep on asking.

⁹ So I tell you to ask and you will receive, search and you will find, knock and the door will be opened for you. ¹⁰ Everyone who asks will receive, everyone who searches will find, and the door will be opened for everyone who knocks.

¹¹ Which one of you fathers would give your hungry child a snake if the child asked for a fish? ¹² Which one of you would give your child a scorpion if the child asked for an egg? ¹³ As bad as you are, you still know how to give good gifts to your children. But your heavenly Father is even more ready to **give the Holy Spirit** to anyone who asks.

Proclamation of the Word

Have you ever prayed shamelessly? Do you recall the first time you did so?

I do not mean the first time you learned to say the blessing or the bedtime prayer routine such as "Now I lay me down to sleep..."

I mean that desperate, needy, shameless kind of praying.

Maybe it was a time of crisis or great decision making.

People pray this way in fox holes, at exams, before surgery, after an election cycle.

The prayer sounds a lot like "please, please, please."

My first memory of this kind of prayer was when I was maybe 7th grade.

Life had gotten complicated and difficult-

Puberty for one thing. Need I say more?

My father had died a couple of years before, but there was a new complication.

My mother started dating.

But I was confused, angry, sad that my father had died, and frankly, I wanted my mother all to myself.

She was all I had left as far as parents go.

Like most crises, there is an opportunity to grow-

What grew was my prayer life.

I had professed my faith in front of my church family, who loved me, and taught me that I could take everything to God in prayer.

This is what we promise to do today with Jay at his baptism-

to show and teach him the life of faith in the same way.

So I took it all to God in prayer.

But this was no sweet rehearsed prayer.

This was weeping, angry, confused, bargaining, praying....

asking, seeking, knocking on the door of heaven.

At bedtime, I would listen to my Christian music (Amy Grant and Michael W. Smith. It was the 1980s), and God and I would chat---

sometimes more of a lover's quarrel than a chat.

I guess you could say that was my spiritual discipline, or faith practice in Middle School.

This is how I prayed daily.

But have you ever prayed shamelessly?

Persistently is the word most Bible translations use, but persistence does not even do it.

"Shameless" is the best translation.

This is shameless praying.

And while I am in my seventh grade shoes, I want to acknowledge the news of Dana's leaving, is especially hard for our youth.

There is sadness and worry when someone who has played a significant part of our lives leaves.

And losing someone like that brings grieving.

As pastors we grieve, too, when we lose those friends in faith who have also impacted and meant a lot to us, too.

But that is where trust in God's providence and protection come in.

The Psalms give us words to pray, when we have none.

Psalm 121 speaks God's protection.

¹ I lift up my eyes to the hills—
from where will my help come?

² My help comes from the LORD,
who made heaven and earth...

⁷ The LORD will keep you from all evil;
he will keep your life.

⁸ The LORD will keep
your going out and your coming in
from this time on and forevermore.

The Psalms are our prayer book.

- God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in times of trouble. (Psalm 46)
- The LORD is my light and my salvation...whom shall I fear? (Psalm 27)
- The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want... (Psalm 23)
- Jesus even prayed shamelessly, Psalm 22:1, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

Prayer---Jesus spent time in prayer regularly.

Jesus probably did not make a show of it.

Praying is something Jesus was always doing like breathing.

Luke does not make a huge deal out of the most famous prayer of all time.

He gives us few details.

We are not exactly sure where we are when this happens or the precise day.

They could be anywhere.

Which is why we know it was a natural part of Jesus' daily actions.

The disciples saw Jesus praying this way, and they asked, "Lord, teach us to pray..."

They had been watching Jesus.

They want to become more like him, so they ask the HOW question.

How do we pray...and we could get into those mechanics for many hours.

But we could also become Pharisees who think there are only certain ways to pray.

We could get into a conversation about praying while kneeling, sitting, standing.

Or do you have to have your hands together in this way..... (Folded) or not?

Charles Schulz poked some gentle fun at this in a "Peanuts" comic strip when he had Linus tell Lucy, "If you hold your hands upside-down, you get the opposite of what you pray for."

But Jesus is not interested in technique.

Although he is clear about not making a show of praying in order to look pious as the Pharisees did.

For Jesus praying was a way of life.

Jesus prayed like he was breathing because Jesus was communing with God all the time-
through words, in silence and stillness, and when he acted.

Praying is a way of being.

So rather than the exact HOW of praying, Jesus helps us focus on WHO.

We pray to God who is like a friend who will get up in the night to give us what we need. God is like a father who gives a child good things to eat, bread for each day, not snakes and scorpions.

God's providence and care is trustworthy.

Bonhoeffer's wisdom here is crucial.

"The phrase 'learning to pray' sounds strange to us. If the heart does not overflow and begin to pray by itself, we say, it will never 'learn' to pray. But it is a dangerous error, surely very widespread among Christians, to think that the heart can pray by itself. For then we confuse wishes, hopes, sighs, laments, rejoicings – all of which the heart can do by itself – with prayer... **Prayer does not mean simply to pour out one's heart. It means rather to find the way to God and to speak with him, whether the heart is full or empty.**"

Most of all, prayer is communicating because relationships are built on communication.

So the question of whether prayer works is not the concern.

In prayer, we ask God for what we need truthfully.

We go in search of God...we knock on the door.

And God is always ready to hear our prayers.

We do not always get that which we ask for,

but we can trust in the steady, faithful presence and love of God.

We do not believe in God only when we get what we ask for or when it "works."

Same as in human relationships.

My husband's value isn't in whether my requests to him "work."

A healthy marriage, like prayer, hinges on spending time together, listening, going places, discerning what he might want, loving each other, forgiving one another, loving others.

Notice Jesus' clever wording: fathers know how to give good gifts to their children – and so our heavenly father knows how to give... what? Good gifts? No: the Holy Spirit!

God's presence: that's the answer to prayer, the point of prayer, the real need of all who pray.

Madeleine L'Engle explained so movingly that prayer is about relationship with God.

Over a long weekend, she and her husband Paul were waiting on his biopsy result.

She kept praying, "Please, dear God, don't let it be cancer."

Someone suggested that her prayer was invalid: it already either was or wasn't malignant. But she said, "I can't live with that. I think the heart overrides the intellect and insists on praying. If we don't pray according to the needs of the heart, we repress our deepest longings. And so I pray as my heart needs to pray."

Later, after the cancer was pronounced terminal, she wondered if her prayers had been wasted.

But she concluded, rightly: "Prayer is love, and love is never wasted. Surely the prayers have sustained me, are sustaining me. Perhaps there will be unexpected answers to these prayers, answers I may not even be aware of for years. But they are not wasted. They are not lost. I do not know where they have gone, but I believe that God holds them, hands outstretched to receive them, like precious pearls."ⁱ

My shameless praying in middle school was my first memorable experience of God's unrelenting presence.

I probably prayed about my father's death and absence and all that meant in my life.

My father did not come back from the grave and take rides in the country late at night to calm me before bed.

We were still broke.

Mom was still dating.

In my seventh grade world, life was confusing and changing.

Those circumstances did not change.

I may not have gotten what I prayed for, but I received God's gift of the Holy Spirit.

I can promise you I learned that I could count on God, my heavenly Father.

I learned that Jesus was my constant friend.

I learned that no one human, be it a mother, a youth minister, a spouse, a friend can supply all I need, only God can.

God is the WHO to whom we pray.

We are never alone.

Praying "Thy Kingdom come" means my kingdom goes.

And "Thy will be done on earth as in heaven" means that we can trust God's bigger purposes.

And eventually the gifts of the Holy Spirit come: patience, peace, joy, but most of all LOVE.

Always and most of all LOVE.

Prayer:

Father in heaven,

in your goodness

you pour out on your people all that they need,

and satisfy those who persist in prayer.

Make us bold in asking,

thankful in receiving,

tireless in seeking,

and joyful in finding,

that we may always proclaim your coming kingdom

and do your will on earth as in heaven. Amen.

¹ adapted from James Howell's blog: jameshowellweeklypreachingnotions.com/blogspot.com