

SERMON ON MT - THE CHRISTIAN AND PRAYER

Matthew 6:5-18

Today is the first Sunday of Lent- which is the
40 days before our celebration of Easter resurrection.
Lent is a time to examine our lives,
And seek repentance for our sins,
So today we began to look at the Holy Habits
or Spiritual Disciplines of the Christian life.

There are two types of Spiritual Discipline.

The first is WORKS OF PIETY,

Showing our love for God in the private acts of prayer, fasting and giving;
Scripture study, and meditation.

And in the public acts, of worship, Holy Communion, Fellowship, Study and
Accountability.

The second type of Spiritual Discipline include WORKS OF MERCY,

Showing our love for neighbor in public act of caring for widows and orphans, feeding
the hungry, clothing the naked, assisting strangers, visiting the sick and imprisoned, and
witnessing to others.

If we can keep these Holy Habits during the Lenten season,
Perhaps its possible to practice them all years long in the goal of holy living.

Today we look at the Holy Habit of Prayer and Fasting...

When Jesus talked about Prayer and Fasting

I'm sure it elicited a wide variety of responses
Just as it does for us.

Some of us remember the first prayers we learned.

When visiting my Granddaughter.

I went in to pray her nighttime prayer with her.

I was happy to know that my daughter is teaching her children
the same prayers I taught her.

You probably know it so lets pray it together.

Now I lay me down to sleep,

I pray the Lord my soul to keep.

If I should die before I wake,

I pray the Lord my soul to take.

However my granddaughter prayer changed

The ending with some phrase about

An angel watch me thru the night

And wake me with the morning light.

Why did we change it?

I wondered is it because our generation is afraid
to talk to little children about death.

That we have a living God who has another world prepared for us.

The thing I remember liking about that prayer

Was the fact that if I died I would be with God!

Or maybe you remember the shorter table prayer you learned:
Let pray that together:

**Come Lord Jesus be our guest and
Let this food to us be blest, amen.**

Today we have blogs and classes,
Internet sites and books on prayer.
Everyone here would say prayer is important.
And yet many would confess that we do not pray as we should.

Samuel Johnson was once asked what was the strongest argument for prayer.

He replied, "There is no argument for prayer."

He did not mean that prayer is irrational or
that there are not convincing arguments for the practice of it,
but that prayer is natural and universal.
It is a part of our nature to talk with God.

When Samuel F. B. Morse sent the first telegraph message in 1844,

He voiced a prayer: "What hath God wrought!"

We don't have to be students of history to know that Samuel Morse
was a man of faith as well as a man of science.
His prayer revealed the kind of man he was.

**Martin Rinkart wrote the magnificent hymn, "Now Thank We All Our God," in
1644 during the thirty Years War. His home town of Eilenburg had been stricken with an
epidemic of plague and Rinkart was burying people at the rate of fifty per day. His wife
also died. It was in the midst of that horror and death this Christian pastor wrote a hymn
of thanks for use by his people.**

**Now thank we all our God, with heart and hands and voices,
Who wondrous things has done, in Whom this world rejoices;
Who from our mothers' arms has blessed us on our way
With countless gifts of love, and still is ours today.**

Doest that sound like a man hopless in his grief?
**O may this bounteous God through all our life be near us,
With ever joyful hearts and blessed peace to cheer us;
And keep us in His grace, and guide us when perplexed;
And free us from all ills, in this world and the next!**

As we look at Jesus words on prayer
First we see his

I. EXPECTATION OF PRAYER:

⁵"And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites,

⁶But when you pray, go into your room,

⁷And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans,

Three times in three different verses Jesus says:
When you pray---

Not if you pray,
Or could you pray,
But WHEN YOU PRAY

Jesus expects you to pray.
Jesus practiced what he preached:
He always begin every event or effort, with prayer.
He prayed over five loaves and two fishes.
He prayed over the blind man's eyes.
He prayed in the garden of Gethsemane in the shadow of the cross.
He prayed for the disciples and his followers.

We as a Church begin every meeting, every committee,
Every worship service with prayer of thanksgiving.
It should become a natural part of our lives.

Take the little boy who found something unique to give thanks for. As his parents listened, he prayed, "And God bless Mommy and Daddy . . . and thank you for sending Jesus to wash away our sins . . . so that we can have new ones."

Jesus is saying three things about prayer:

⁵"And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. Matthew 6:5"

Jesus is saying that prayer must be in line or balance with the rest of life.
If it is full of the sin of arrogance,
If it is full of the sin of appearance and impression.
Then there is no answer,
They have their reward.

If you're praying for God to take care of you financially,
And your gambling, or drinking away your pay,
That all the reward you're going to get.

Or spending it foolishly on tanning booths and cigarettes,
On excessive sports paraphernalia and clothing so you look good to others.
Well that is the reward you're going to get.

If you're praying for God to give you good mental health,
And you spend your time worrying, and seeing the doctor,
and talking to your friends in a negative way,
So as to draw attention to yourself, "Poor me"
Well that is all the reward your going to get.

Secondly Jesus said:

⁶"But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. Matthew 6:6"

True Christians are open and transparent.
 True Christians don't fall into the trap of trying to "Fake and Act like a Christian".
 Jesus was saying if you can't trust God in the closet of your house
 You won't be able to trust him in the kitchen, or bedroom,
 The garage and the family room.

God heard Daniel's prayer from the closet of the lion's den,
 He heard the Hebrew boys from the closet of the fiery furnace.
 God heard Paul and Silas from the closet of a prison cell.
 Jonah from the closet in the belly of a whale.
 He heard Peter pray when he was walking on the water.
 And he will hear you pray wherever your walking and talking.
 Sitting. Even in the closet of your home.

THRID Jesus said:

⁷And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. ⁸Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

Prayer is just talking with God.
 The more you talk the more you both understand one another.
 Jesus enjoyed an intimacy with God
 That went beyond words.

Married couples know what I'm talking about.
 They can finish each other sentences,
 Anticipate each others actions.
 Some even begin to look like each other
 (which deeply troubles my wife.)
 Donna and I have been married for 39 years.
 We don't have to talk, we can communicate in code.
 She walks into the kitchen while I'm getting some ice-cream.
 Donna I ask.
 She says: No I don't what any.
 I stare for a few moments into the fridge.
 Donna I say:
 She says: the Chocolate is on the bottom shelf.
 Chips are behind you.
 We have been together long enough that
 Donna can speak for me.
 She know what color I prefer
 What taste I like,
 What programs I enjoy.
 She can speak for me.
 Because we have spoken 39 years together.

Prayer is talking with God,
 Because we have come to know God.
 Then we don't need a lot of words.
 We just say what is in our hearts.

And God knows what we need.
 Jesus was saying you don't have to babble on
 With noble phrases and fancy words,
 If you do, it shows you really don't know your father in heaven.

Prayer is heart talk, soul talk, with the one who is the creator of our soul.
 Believing God is there where ever we pray.

I heard about a businessman who had been working in Virginia and was being transferred to California. The move had been the principal topic of conversation around the house for weeks. Then, the night before the big move, when his five-year-old daughter was saying her prayers, she said, "And now, God, I'll have to say goodbye forever because tomorrow we are moving to California."

Oh no, we can pray anywhere and anytime.
 Next, Jesus gives us the

II. THE PROMISE OF PRAYER

God will answer.

Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.
⁸**Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.**

The promise of prayer is that God will answer.
 God does know your needs.
 This God who placed the planet earth in space,
 6 sextillion tons of molten earth.
 Tilted at 23 degrees.
 Spinning at 1 thousands miles per hour
 Any degree tilted any other way, and we
 Would be lost in a melted polar flood.

Can this God who ignited the sun not light your path?
 Can this God who created the roar of the ocean, not hear what you say in secret place,
 Can this God who daily waters the lilies, not see the tears on your pillow,
 Can this God who created the nightingale's song,
 not hear your words choked out in the darkness?
 Yes he does.

What your Father sees and hears in secret-- He rewards openly.

When the hurt is too great, God say:

I am the Holy one, and I am among you Hosea 11:9

When we're weighed down by yesterday's failures and sins: God says:

There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.. Romans 8:1

When the pain of the world leaves us lost and confused: God says:

I know what I planning for you plans for your good and not for evil, to prosper you and give you hope. Jeremiah 29:11

The oldest living things on earth are the sequoia trees on the West Coast.
 Some of these trees were living six hundred years
 before Moses led the Hebrew people out of Egypt.
 The secret of their long life is their interdependence.

There is no central tap root. They live in clumps
 Intertwined, each holding the other up.
 The strength of one is the strength of all.
 some six thousand years old and still growing.

That is exactly the same way the hearts and lives of a Christian community intertwine.
 Because every person feels responsible for one another,
 supports one another, works with one another,
 loves one another – and above all prays for one another.
 Only then can a community be a community worthy of Christ's name.

Sometimes prayer calls for fasting.
 Jesus included his instruction.

¹⁶"When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting...¹⁷But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, ¹⁸so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. Matthew 6:16-18 New living Translation

Fasting is to refrain from eating while in prayer.

John Wesley's fast started by missing the evening meal and lasted until the next days evening meal. In that time he prayed and read the scriptures as he worked thru the day. Perhaps you might consider a 24 hour fast. Eat a noon meal and fast until the next evening meal.

Biblical fasts happened for

1. Insight or wisdom- Matthew 17:19-21
2. To reverse destructive circumstances- Ester II Chronicles 20
3. Guidance- Isaiah 58:11, Acts 13:1-3
4. For forgiveness and restoration- Isaiah 58:12
5. Healing for the land- II Chronicles 7:14
6. For God's spirit upon us- Joel 1:14; 2:28-29

But every fast should be done without fanfare or announcement.
 God will reward you when you fast in secret.

Lets close by looking at the

III. THE OBSTACLE OF PRAYER:

¹⁴ "If you forgive those who sin against you, your heavenly Father will forgive you. ¹⁵ But if you refuse to forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins.

Most all of our problems in life involve other people.
 Whether they cheat us, beat us, best us, bless us, or just irritate us.
 Jesus said be careful: your prayers can be hindered by an unforgiving spirit.

If there is someone in your life that you haven't forgiven,
 You need to forgive him or her.
 If there is someone that you feel resentment and bitterness toward,
 If there is someone that has taken your place, stolen your boyfriend, or belittled you,
 Jesus was saying to make prayer successful,
 We need to forgive him or her,
 To ask God to clean up our hearts,
 To move resentments and bitterness, out of our minds,

Hate, lust, greed, and envy can distort and detour
 Our prayers before God.
 because we know the Lord does not dwell in unclean places.

But if you refuse to forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins. Matthew 6:15

How clean are your relationships today?
 How loving are you toward your family, your parents, or your children?
 God knows
 And if we refuse to forgive others,
 Your father will not forgive your sins.

Will you make your confession?
 Will you ask God for his forgiveness as we begin this Lenten season?
 Seeking the Holy Habits and Spiritual Disciplines of a Godly life?

If you would do that
 I invite you to join me in this closing prayer of penitence
 As we ask God to examine our heart during this Lenten Season.

CLOSING PRAYER OF PENITENCE

**Almighty and most merciful Father,
 We have sinned and fallen away from your path.
 We have strayed like lost sheep.
 We have followed the devices and desires of our own hearts.
 We have broken your holy law.
 We have offended our family and friends,
 and we have carried bitterness and resentments,
 And there is nothing good in us.**

**O Lord, have mercy upon us,
 Spare us, O God, who confess our sins.
 Restore us who are penitent;
 According to Your promises declared unto us in Christ Jesus our Lord.
 Cleanse us from an evil conscience
 and grant that we may from this moment on,
 Live a godly, righteous, and sober life;
 as we live in love and charity with our neighbor
 we pray all this in humble confession
 at the foot of the cross.
 In Jesus name. Amen.**