

Date: July 27, 2025 (Pentecost 7)

1. Texts: Hosea 1:2-10; Ps. 85; Colossians 2:6-15; Luke 11:1-13.
2. Subject: prayer.
3. Topic: efficacy in praying.
4. Aim: educate, challenge.
5. Proposition: "We don't pray for what we want. We pray for who God wants us to become."

## PRAY FOR WHO GOD WANTS US TO BECOME

Today the reading from Luke's Gospel has introduced us to the very difficult topic of prayer. Yes, praying is a complicated business. Jesus' example of the Lord's Prayer helps, as do his parable and teaching following. But it takes a lot of work to get to the foundations of the truth in praying.

That we have to pray is obvious to us all. This obligation is not just because Jesus commanded prayer and practiced it. We were created by God to pray.

You see, people live inside time, space and human experience. This is our God-given reality. But this reality creates barriers between God and us. Human beings do not have direct access to God. Our access is filtered through time, space and our experiences. We can't see God face to face. We can't speak and hear God directly, as if we were standing before him. God exists outside time, space and human experience. We exist inside them, and they form a barrier between God and us. That's how God intended human existence to be. So, we were created to pray.

Prayer is one way that we can overcome those barriers. We pray to God and listen for his reply. We pray through our words and our songs. We pray through movement and meditation. We read our prayers and we spontaneously write them on our hearts. Prayer is communication with God. It is a relationship. God speaks. We listen. We speak. God listens. Whatever form and art we use, we seek to overcome the barriers of time, space and human experience. This is how we were created. This makes prayer a spiritual instinct and imperative.

But the Lord's Prayer and the teachings that follow it in Luke's Gospel make it sound as if all the believer has to do is ask God for whatever he wants and – SHAZAAM—God will make it appear miraculously. It almost sounds as if God

is a divine magician who answers every prayer with a yes and a wave of his shepherd's staff. All you have to do is pray, and God will do whatever you want.

We all know that this is not how prayer works. Healings don't always happen. Our children and grandchildren don't always grow up to be believers. Loved ones die prematurely. Our prayers are not God's magic spells.

So, when our deepest requests are answered with a divine "not at this time", we're left spiritually wounded. Many disciples assume that their own faith is lacking or that their prayers are faulty. We fear that someone's sin has blocked our prayer. For many a believer, unfulfilled prayer has led to a rejection of God.

Let's remember that praying is part of our human need. We were created to pray and praying is actually fulfilling our creation even when we don't get the answer we want. All communication with God is good. Whether we sing his praises, dance to his glory or pray the entire *Book of Common Prayer* in a month, we are becoming more what God created us to be. We are finding spiritual fulfillment and purpose in prayer on its own, independent of God's response.

Since praying is part of our spiritual fulfillment, we must also remember that prayer is to be directed at the image of God in which we were created. Prayer is not about what is happening *to us*. Rather, prayer is directed at what is happening *inside us*. Prayer is about our character, not our circumstances. We don't pray for what we want. We pray for who God wants us to become.

When we need goals in our prayer life, we then look to Christ. We are made in the image of God, and Jesus was God inside time, space and human experience. As we pray for who we want to become, we look at Jesus as our model and guide. We can make our prayers more specific by asking God to remake us in Christ's image, given our time, space and experiences. We pray for who God wants us to become, and it is Christ's image that is our goal.

The big question that is lurking at the edge of our awareness is this: how do we pray about our circumstances? We want to pray for healing for someone. We want to pray that the addicted person finds freedom from his addiction. We

definitely want to pray, “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done” in any particular circumstance.

So we pray,

In this circumstance, Lord, guide those involved to yourself. Increase their courage. Enable them to hear your voice. Bring them to a closer relationship with Christ and a deeper experience of salvation. If healing will guide that experience, bring healing. If a miracle will empower their relationship with you, then create a miracle. Use their circumstances as a path to your presence. May your kingdom come in their lives. May your will be done through their lives. Lord, in their circumstances make yourself known to them, and use me as your servant in their lives. Amen.

You see? As we pray for people in their circumstances, we are praying for the kind of people God wants them to become. We are not praying to alleviate their circumstances. We are praying for their spiritual revival in the midst of their circumstances and despite them.

This is not an easy lesson to learn. As children, we start out with, “God bless Mommy and Daddy.” That’s good. That’s the kind of prayer we have been talking about.

But as we grow older our emphasis shifts from character to circumstances. “God, stop this war. End that conflict. Heal this person. Save that marriage.”

So, we aim our prayers at the souls around us.

God, increase the wisdom and compassion of all the leaders. Grant us all a hunger for justice and righteousness. Bring courage into that life. Convict the hearts of those who deceive and cheat so that they might keep power and wealth. Amen.

We hold the goal of God always before us as we pray. That goal is to be molded in the image of Jesus himself so that all might experience his abundant life. Our goal is to transplant the image of Jesus into our hearts that we might be the people God intended us to be. This makes us focus on the characters of

people, not on their circumstances. The circumstances become part of God's toolkit in re-creating us in Christ's image.

It is a difficult lesson to learn. In the end, it will be one of the best lessons to learn. We don't pray for what we want. We pray for who God wants us to become.

AMEN.