

Prayer is More Than You Think!!

Sean Kelly

John 17: 14-23

First Presbyterian Church

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It is an honor to be here this morning, and the sharing/teaching of God's Word is not something I take lightly. I'm excited for the opportunity to share this morning and the encounter the Word of God together.

But before we dive into the text, I feel it is necessary to share some information about myself. You see...I need directions & goal or desired outcome - - I feel more comfortable with a task when I have as much clarity as possible about what is expected of me or what is the objective I am attempting to accomplish! ...Cooking pasta...measuring water...cookbooks w/ pictures... Sadie's toys: follow the instructions...

Sometimes to a Fault:

Going to Zeteo in Altoona, PA we were planning to stay at the Hampton Inn, there is only one in Altoona. As we entered Altoona, we passed a Hampton Inn along highway but GPS said 12 more miles. We drove through Altoona... into the middle of nowhere/open fields and GPS says 'You have arrived!' With a crying baby, nervous wife and 5 teenagers all telling me different things to do!!

I'm a doer... I like solving problems and having a concrete plan! This, naturally, becomes a challenge in my faith because we can't know everything and our God is a complex God! Prayer was the biggest hurdle for me because I felt like I wasn't doing anything! I felt passive and lazy... as if I would never see results simply by praying.

I was a natural fit with my Seminary because the Bible teaches that God is on a mission to redeem His people and reconcile them to Him! We believe the life and witness of the church should be thoroughly shaped by its participation in the mission of God to reconcile the world to himself in Jesus Christ, and by the call of Jesus to be the people of God sent into the world to proclaim and live out the gospel.

We believe the Father's sending of the Son, and the subsequent sending of the Spirit to reconcile the world to himself, provides the essential purpose of the church's existence and that this missional pattern should thoroughly shape our life and witness.

We are committed to ongoing engagement with culture and the world for the sake of our witness to the gospel, and to continual learning from Christians in other cultural settings.

Biblical Theological Seminary is committed to providing training that enables leaders to exegete (study/engage) culture as well as Scripture in order to engage and speak into our culture in ways that are faithful to the missional purposes of the God revealed in Scripture.

One of the first days in class I read a quote from Christopher Wright...

“I believe passionately that mission is what we (as Christians) should be doing, and I believe the Bible endorses and mandates it. The Bible is itself a ‘missional’ phenomenon ... The Bible renders to us the story of God’s Mission through God’s People in their engagement with God’s World for the sake of the whole of God’s Creation... Mission is not just one item on a list of things the Bible talks about, Mission is what it’s ALL about!” – Christopher Wright (‘Mission of God’)

I was excited! I was finally going to get a concrete road map on how to participate in the Christian faith with practical instructions! I viewed my pending journey through seminary as an 'Instruction Manual' that was going to teach me how to put the Christianity puzzle together!

Our third course was entitled 'Missional Theology 1': "Students will reflect on God and God's mission within and for creation and our culture." It felt like I was on the verge of receiving my 'to do' list to better participate in God's world for God's will!)

The most missional thing you can do is 'PRAY! PRAY! And PRAY some more!'

I was confused, frustrated and convicted! How could prayer be the most missional thing you can do when you aren't doing anything? I've come to realize that my understanding, and my approach, to prayer was the problem!

'Prayer is intended to be a vehicle for fellowship and communion with God... what prayer has become, for most men and women, is a quick plea for a bit of divine intervention in the need of the moment.' Dr. Bob Beltz

I believe we have manipulated the practice of prayer to the point where we misunderstand its purpose and how we should pray correctly! Christian Life is about following and living more like Christ... Jesus was ALWAYS praying!!

Mark 1:35- 'And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed.'

Luke 6:12- 'In these days he went out to the mountain to pray, and all night he continued in prayer to God.'

Matthew 14:23- 'And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up on the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone,'

'Nearly every critical event in the Life and Ministry of Jesus Christ was preceded by times of extended prayer!' - Bob Beltz

As followers of Christ, and a church, I feel it is paramount that we become diligent in the practice of prayer in order to see God work in the hearts and lives of our community that we are trying to reach with the love, reconciliation and unity of God!

God is teaching me that prayer is not a passive exercise... it is relinquishing control and inviting God into a situation where God's presence is desired and needed!

There was a story in Our Daily Bread about C.H. Spurgeon's church in London. Five young college students were spending a Sunday in London, so they went to hear the famed C.H. Spurgeon preach. While waiting for the doors to open, the students were greeted by a man who asked, "Gentlemen, let me show you around. Would you like to see the heating plant of this church?" They were not particularly interested, for it was a hot day in July. But they didn't want to offend the stranger, so they consented. The young men were taken down a stairway, a door was quietly opened, and their guide whispered, "This is our heating plant." Surprised, the students saw 700 people bowed in prayer, seeking a blessing on the service that was soon to begin in the auditorium above. Softly closing the door, the gentleman then introduced himself. It was none other than Charles Spurgeon. (Our Daily Bread, April 24).

The Church (followers and believers of Jesus) cannot be faithful, or exist, without the diligent practice of prayer!!

The most revealing prayer in Scripture is John 17:14-18 when Jesus is praying before His arrest, & ultimately His crucifixion, for His disciples: present & future.

“I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one. They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth.”

God is the protector who stands over our lives to shelter us and guard us from the assaults of evil. The fact that we fall so often is due to the fact that we try to meet life in our own strength, and forget to seek the help of God and remember God’s presence and protection!! Prayer is inviting God in, and admitting our inability/vulnerability, and acknowledging God’s strength/power/ability to overcome!! John 17:25-26 continues,

“Righteous Father, the world does not know you, but I know you; and these know that you have sent me. I made your name known to them, and I will make it known, so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.”

After this prayer Jesus went straight out to His betrayal, the trial and the cross. He would never speak to the disciples again (before His Resurrection). This chapter is a wonderful and precious thing when we

remember that before these terrible hours that awaited Jesus, His last words were not of despair but of glory, they were not a sermon but a prayer!!

One last observation I have from this text is that Jesus teaches about the impact a diligent life of prayer can have in verses 16-18 which says...

“They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.

These are powerful words, ones that the global church and even our individual church strive to accomplish as we decipher our mission to reach the world with the love of God. However, when we understand the context of the story, these words become even more powerful!

You see the disciples were in Jerusalem, surrounded by Pharisees that have proven they were willing to go to extreme measures in order to stop the spread of the message we know as Christianity. And across the Mediterranean Sea you had the Roman Empire, ready to conquer the World and instill their will, and way of life, on those whom they conquered. So against global powers such as the Pharisees and Romans, how was this rag-tag group of 11 disciples supposed to complete their task?

By following the ways of Jesus, remembering the unity that only Christ can offer, relying on the hope that God provides, remembering that they are in the world but not of the world. By diligently praying for the protection and guidance of God, relying on the authority & provision of the Lord Almighty and not their own strength & abilities to withstand and overcome!! So my hope this morning is for our community to be known as a community of prayer.

I remind you that the most loving, biblical, Christ-like thing we can do for someone is to pray for them. In order to truly submit to the Lord, in order to reach the world with the love and reconciliation only Jesus can provide, we must learn to diligently pray.

So as I end this morning, with the challenging words of John 17 still fresh in our minds, I want to leave you with the instructions given from another disciple of Christ. This encouragement comes from the words of the apostle Paul in Colossians 4:2

“Devote yourselves to prayer with an alert mind and a thankful heart.”

Amen.