



Westminster Presbyterian Church
Eugene, Oregon
“At Home” Worship
September 6, 2020

Please hold in prayer:

*Bill Reynolds
Marjorie Brown*

*(if you have a prayer request you would like added to
the At- Home Worship service,
please email Brooke office@wpceugene.org.)*

Gathering Around God’s Word

*. The sermon is also available on the church’s YouTube
Channel or on the website: www.wpceugene.org under the
Worship Menu by selecting Sermons.*

Call to Worship from Luke 11

**Jesus said, "Ask, and it will be given you;
search, and you will find; knock, and the door
will be opened for you."**

Lord, as we search now, let us find you.

As we knock, open the door to us.

**Let us know you, that we may praise you;
and love you, that we may serve you.**

Opening Hymn *Alleluia! Laud and Blessing* #755

Call to Confession

God heals the broken-hearted. God binds up their wounds. Great is our Lord, and abundant in power. God's understanding is beyond measure. Trusting that God's mercy awaits us, let us confess our sin to God.

Prayer of Confession

Holy and merciful God, in your presence we confess our sinfulness, our shortcomings, and our offenses against you. You alone know how often we have sinned in wandering from your ways, in wasting your gifts, in forgetting your love. Have mercy on us, O Lord, for we are ashamed and sorry for all we have done to displease you. Forgive our sins, and help us to live in your light, and walk in your ways, for the sake of Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.

Assurance of Pardon

Anyone who is in Christ is a new creation. The old life has gone; a new life has begun. Know that you are forgiven and be at peace. Amen.

The Word

Prayer for Illumination

O Lord our God, your Word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. Give us grace to receive your truth in faith and love, that we may be obedient to your will and live always for your glory; through Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.

Scripture Readings

Old Testament Reading: Psalm 13

To the leader. A Psalm of David.
How long, O Lord? Will you forget me for ever?
How long will you hide your face from me?
How long must I bear pain in my soul,
and have sorrow in my heart all day long?
How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?

Consider and answer me, O Lord my God!
Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep the sleep of death,
and my enemy will say, 'I have prevailed';
my foes will rejoice because I am shaken.

But I trusted in your steadfast love;
my heart shall rejoice in your salvation.
I will sing to the Lord,
because he has dealt bountifully with me.

New Testament Reading: Luke 11:1-13

He was praying in a certain place, and after he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, 'Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.' He said to them, 'When you pray, say:

Father, hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come.
Give us each day our daily bread.
And forgive us our sins,
for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us.
And do not bring us to the time of trial.'

And he said to them, 'Suppose one of you has a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say to him, "Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; for a friend of mine has arrived, and I have nothing to set before him." And he answers from within, "Do not bother me; the door has already been locked, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything." I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because

he is his friend, at least because of his persistence he will get up and give him whatever he needs.

‘So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for a fish, will give a snake instead of a fish? Or if the child asks for an egg, will give a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!’

Sermon

God Always Hears our Prayers

The Rev. Marta Z Ukropina

This Spring, before the pandemic, our confirmation class spent two sessions studying prayer. In fact, the second of these sessions was the week before everything was shut down. My mom, Martha Zaborowski, is a trained spiritual leader and she taught these classes. Over the course of those two lessons, she talked with the class about many different kinds of prayer and they also spent time in small groups experiencing them. The kids practiced breath prayer, praying with color, walking the labyrinth, and talking about the Lord’s Prayer —which is part of our scripture reading this morning.

The confirmation class discovered that just like people, there are many unique forms of prayer. Prayers range from the very short, “help me” to endless in length — a life lived out in praise of God. There are rote prayers that we memorize, perhaps when we are very young. (*Now I lay me down to sleep, God is great God is good...*). Some prayers take the form of art or movement and others take the form of song. There are prayers that are poetic and beautiful and prayers that some might find almost silly such as the Superman Prayer or the Johnny Appleseed Prayer that you can find at many a youth or

children's camp. (*Thank you God, for giving us food.../O, the Lord's been good to me, and so I thank the Lord...*)

John Calvin called prayer “the chief exercise of faith” and as with any exercise program you have to make it a regular practice or it can easily be pushed to the wayside. One of our hopes for the confirmation class is to allow them to discover that it doesn't matter what shape their prayers take. What does matter is the act of praying and that God is glorified and sought out. Prayer is ultimately the worship fo God and a way for us to be in constant communication with our creator, redeemer, comforter, and sustainer.

There is really no end to the types or forms of our prayers. Sometimes, though, we may judge our prayer life on what we think it “should” look like. We may feel like our prayers are inadequate or we may wonder if we even know how to pray. This comes up a lot when people are asked to pray out loud. They worry that they won't say the “right” thing or that their prayer will not be “perfectly executed.” Just ask any pastor—everyone always asks you to pray out loud—as if our prayers are “better” than the prayers of others or we are “professional prayers.” Anxieties over praying should be lifted when we remember that our audience is God and God is not judging the form that our prayers take. The act of praying—giving our time and our hearts in communication with God is what is important.

Daniel Migliore, in his book Faith Seeking Understanding, writes:

Prayer is a concrete expression of our love of God. It is personal communication with God...Maturing in prayer does not mean mastering certain techniques or becoming virtuosos of the spiritual life. It means, on the contrary, being open and honest with God,

praising God, but also crying to God in our need and even sometimes crying out against God.¹

I find Migliore's sentiment very comforting. God does not tell us to master certain techniques of prayer, but God does ask us for open and honest communication—it whatever form that may take.

We learn much about what God wants out of our prayer life from scripture. Praying is a common activity in both the Old and New Testament. Moses prayed to God, Miriam praised God in prayer on her tambourine, David prayed honest human feelings in many of the Psalms, Jesus prayed all throughout his ministry, the disciples prayed, and in our scripture reading this morning, Luke shares with us a prayer guide book so to speak. The version of the Lord's Prayer found in Luke is a bit different than the one we say together each week. We are more familiar with Matthew's language. But listen again to Luke's prayer: *"Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread, and forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us. And do not bring us to the time of trial."* In that short prayer, there are petitions of praise that praise God for who God is. And, there are petitions for those praying the prayer: for daily bread, for forgiveness, and for the ability to forgive, and for safety from trial and evil. It is a communal prayer, not an individual one. It does not say, give me my daily bread, but rather give us our daily bread. It is a prayer that places us in community, in Christian fellowship with each other.

What we learn here is not only a beautiful prayer that has been said by Christians for thousands of years, but we learn more about who God is. In the parable that immediately follows the prayer, the point is made that if a friend is willing to answer his door in the middle of the night, our God is even more willing. It is an assurance to

¹ Faith Seeking Understanding, 179

us that God does hear our prayers and answers them. The hard part for us is that we do not always see how they are answered.

I have been thinking much about prayer lately because during this time when we cannot gather together in worship, we can gather together in prayer from wherever we are. We also know that we should “pray without ceasing.” Here we are in the first week of September 2020 which marks 6 months—half a year— of not gathering together at the church. We are in the midst of a pandemic that is constantly changing and shaping our lives; there is division, destruction, and unrest in every headline. People are suffering. People are struggling. People are overwhelmed. People are getting restless. We should be calling out to God in faithful prayer. But, you may also find that you have had a hard time praying lately. Perhaps you just do not have the energy, or your mind is wandering and your concentration is fleeting. Or, you aren’t feeling like your prayers are heard or answered. When one feels so overwhelmed by everything going on around us, it is easy to begin to wonder, why even pray? Are my prayers even heard?

We all have stories where we feel like our prayers were not answered. We may feel like we are currently living in the midst of that story as we process our current world: “How long, O Lord?”

When Eric was a toddler, we lived just a couple of miles from my parents' house. A young family lived down the street from my parents and our families became friendly. Their youngest child, Caroline, was Eric's age and sometimes they would visit and play outside together as young toddlers do. One day, she got out of their house and fell into their swimming pool. What they say is true—it only takes a minute. My prayers and the prayers of so many was that there would be a miracle and that she would wake up and be the same, sweet, smiling Caroline we had all known. She died after 5 days in the ICU at

Cook Children’s Hospital in Fort Worth. All of us have that story—different people, different situation, but the same story—an ending that did not turn out the way we so fervently hoped and prayed. It is hard—it is impossible—to make sense of something so horrible and tragic. And we pray...we pray for God not to bring us to the time of trial...but there it is staring us long and hard in the face. We ask, seek and knock as Luke tells us, but we feel like the door is shut in our face. And so we think—why pray? Why pray if bad things are still going to happen?

We know that we live in a fallen world that is filled with pain and suffering. We all know that because we have been there—we are there now. But, we also know that we are all children of God who have been promised the eternal kingdom of God. We know that we believe in a God who can handle our prayers even when they are prayers of lament and frustration. We know that God meets us in our darkest moments. We know that God sent his only son to take on all the pain and suffering of the world; to die so that we might live. We know that in Christ, God has overcome the power of death in the world. But sometimes we feel that the darkness is going to overtake us and extinguish all the hope we have.

So why pray? Well, it is moments like that when we need to remember that prayer is a two way street. God loves us and seeks us out. God is always there listening even when we are too overwhelmed to utter more than a deep breath or a desperate cry. When I worked as a chaplain at Children’s Medical Center in Dallas, I started on my drive home. One of the interesting things about this story is that 95% of the time, I took the commuter train, but this one particular day I drove. I had just lost two young patients to senseless, untimely deaths and was feeling like the darkness was consuming me. The sky even matched my mood: it was pitch black from storms we had been having all day. And the sky in Texas is big, y’all— when it is heavy with black storm clouds, it seems to envelop everything in its midst. But, as I drove farther away from the hospital, the clouds

began to part until there was a large, bright ray of sunshine coming down from the heavens through the darkness. It did not erase the pain of the day, but it reminded me that in the midst of the darkness, the light is there. It was God's message reminding me to have hope and faith knowing that one day we will all meet again in God's eternal kingdom where crying and pain will be no more. Until then, as we go through the days of this life, God's Spirit is there with us to sustain us and to hold us as we walk through the darkness. Our prayers show our complete dependence upon God. I once read somewhere that, "prayer is where we bring our need to God's love in faith." There is no right or wrong way to pray as long as we are recognizing that it is not all about us, but instead is all about God's unfailing love for us that is with us every step of the way.

Let us pray together the words Jesus taught us in the Lord's Prayer:

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be 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 debts, as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen.

Responding to God's Word

Affirmation of Faith—from A Brief Statement of Faith

We trust in God the Holy Spirit, everywhere the giver and renewer of life. The Spirit justifies us by grace through faith, sets us free to accept ourselves and to love God and neighbor, and binds us together with all believers in the one body of Christ, the Church. The same Spirit who inspired the prophets and apostles rules our faith and life in Christ through Scripture, engages us through the Word proclaimed,

claims us in the waters of baptism, feeds us with the bread of life and the cup of salvation, and calls women and men to all ministries of the church. In a broken and fearful world the Spirit gives us courage to pray without ceasing, to witness among all peoples to Christ as Lord and Savior, to unmask idolatries in Church and culture, to hear the voices of peoples long silenced, and to work with others for justice, freedom, and peace. In gratitude to God, empowered by the Spirit, we strive to serve Christ in our daily tasks and to live holy and joyful lives, even as we watch for God's new heaven and new earth, praying, "Come, Lord Jesus!"

Prayer Litany

Lord, teach us to pray.

So we might awaken to the wonder of your presence

So we might feel gratitude for your gift of life today

So we might discover your kingdom as revealed in
our sisters and brothers

So we might find safety beneath the shelter of your
wings

So we might declare your glory as we gather
together:

Lord, teach us to pray

So we might forgive those who have wronged us

So we might lead free from pretense and hypocrisy

So we might trust your perfect plans
and not replace them with our own

So we might love you with our whole hearts,
and love our neighbors as ourselves

So we might declare your glory as we gather
together:

Lord, teach us to pray

So diverse hearts might harmonize as many voices
become one
So our bodies might praise you in bowed heads and
raised hands
So a spirit of criticism is replaced with an offering
of sacrifice
So we consider others more important than
ourselves

So we might declare your glory as we gather
together:
Lord, teach us to pray

So the truth of your Word resonates in what we say
and sing
So we might prepare a way through the wilderness
of chaos and pain
So our eyes are alert and our souls awake to your
movement in our midst
So our good work is fruitful in the reign of your
kingdom

So we might declare your glory as we gather
together:
Lord, teach us to pray

So our voices bring a pleasing sound to your ear
So the notes of our instruments rise sweetly to your
throne
So our singing is a light in the darkness, drawing
nations to your grace
So our songs vibrate with the voice of the Lamb who
was slain

So we might declare your glory as we gather
together:
Lord, teach us to pray

So the lonely and hopeless find comfort in your
abundant presence

So those in war and famine find the everlasting
peace of your Spirit
So we are not indifferent to the suffering of the
world around us
So our songs help to make us look more like you

So we might declare your glory as we gather
together:

Lord, teach us to pray

~ “Lord Teach Us to Pray: Responsive Reading,” by Chuck Fromm and Jeremy
Armstrong, as found in “Lord Teach Us To Pray,” Worship Leader Magazine (September-
October 2015). Posted on Preach the Story. <https://preachthestory.com/>

Sending of God’s Word

Closing Hymn: *Seek Ye First* **#175**

Benediction

May the Lord who made heaven and earth, the
Christ who lived and died for all, and the Spirit who
renews our minds and hearts abide with you and all
God’s people, now and forever. Amen.