

SERMON: PRAYER

“A Father Who Knows All” Matthew 6:5-8

I read this amazing story in Guideposts magazine. It was written by Mary Catherine Wallace. It is a story of God’s answer to an impossible prayer.

She writes: When I was eleven years old in Memphis, Tennessee, I prayed and prayed that God would direct my father to buy the big house that he and my mother had been considering for us, their growing family. The house of my dreams was located at 310 Montgomery Street in Memphis.

But there was an obstacle. My father was thinking about moving our family to a small town in Mississippi for a business venture. Starkville. I’d never heard of Starkville, Mississippi. I sure did not want to live there.

My father had the opportunity to lease and manage a hotel. But my roots were deep down in Memphis. So, I prayed over and over that God would make sure we would move to 310 Montgomery Street. I wore God out with that prayer. 310 Montgomery Street. I know God had that address memorized, I prayed so much.

Well, sadly, my father announced to the family that he had decided to move us to Mississippi. Once there, we lived in the hotel. I was so depressed. Then my father told us that he had found a suitable house for the family. I was only slightly interested. I did agree, though, to go with the family and see this new place, but I was not excited or interested.

As we started off in the car, I paid no attention...until I read the street sign as we drove into the block where the house was situated. Then as we parked in front of a pleasant enough-looking house, I read the numbers of the door...and caught my breath.

Here, 130 miles from Memphis, I found that God had answered my prayer with startling exactness, and I’m sure, with a twinkle in God’s eye.

The house my father had chosen for us in Starkville was located at 310 Montgomery Street.

We smile because we know that God is so perfect, so loving in all the ways God manifests answers to our prayers. We hear a story like this and we could add our own story.

We all have testimonies of the simple yet magnificent manner of how God says “Yes” to us. And we are humbled by all the times we have questioned if God is willing or even able.

Our Lord Jesus in the Gospel lesson before us this morning is not offering a course in Prayer 101, “How to Get Your Prayers Answered.” Jesus is sharing a truth about who God is and how much God loves us.

We tend to look on prayer as going to the gym or working on a self-improvement program. The goal is to learn how to pray right, act right, think right, so that the locked doors of heaven will open to our demands. Our goal is to be persistent in our prayer so we can change God’s mind and get what we want.

How opposite are the prayers of Jesus. Whether he is holding up the loaves and fishes. Or when he is speaking to God before he calls Lazarus from the tomb. To our Lord, prayer is the process of opening our hearts and minds and spirits to receive our blessings in whatever form or timeline God wishes to give them to us. For Jesus, prayer is always this basic two-way communication with a loving God who has already decided what will best meet the needs of God’s children.

In today's Bible reading, I believe Jesus is teaching us that God is more concerned with what is happening on the inside of us than what is going wrong on the outside of us.

You know how we do it. We believe if God really loved us, God would change our financial situation, change our child's rebellious attitude, change our spouse's constant alcohol usage.

"Now this is the great blessing that I need, God. Just answer my prayer. Do you even care God? Prove it, God."

Faith is more than a dare or a plea or having the code of how to act in a certain way so God will reward us. Faith is learning how to receive and respond to the blessings which are always and already on their way to us as God's children.

God does not say, "My answer will be yes to everything you ask through prayer." God is still God. God still operates God's way, according to God's will. That's why the Bible tells us, in probably the most overlooked statement about prayer, that we are always to pray according to God's will. Sadly, most of time, we don't know God's will. Haven't even given it a thought.

The greatest power of the face of the earth is not money. It is not the military. It is not powerful and destructive weather. No, the greatest power on the face of the earth is prayer.

But I ask you, have you gotten around to testing the power of prayer? Are you confused when God answers "No" to your prayer?

Careful here, let's not take God out of context. Because if you are like me at all, I've prayed for things that the Lord, out of love, refused. God knows the future as though it is the past. God wants to bless us even more than we want to bless ourselves. Therefore, do not forget, God knows when and how to answer every prayer...but that's confusing to us sometimes.

Putting it in the simplest words, the power of a Christian is to come as a daughter or son, as a child of the living God, to come to God as Heavenly Father, asking God for the necessities of life. But first, what? First, you have to know that you are a daughter or son of God. A child of God. We can't love others and serve until we first love God. We have to get the God relationship right.

I once heard an old rabbi say, "A prayer is as near to God as the ear is to the mouth." The Lord desires to hear your personal prayer. Know God, love God, pray to God.

It is always God's desire, always, to bless God's children. It has nothing to do with knowing a special code or figuring out the mystery of what God wants us to do so that the closed doors of heaven might be opened by our righteous words and acts.

No, God's greatest desire is to be in a right relation with you and the way you maintain that special relationship is the same way you maintain any special relationship: through spending time together in conversation, having ongoing dialog.

It is hard to hear God's voice when you have already decided what you want God to say.

Your prayers make a difference. You must decide what kind of difference you want to make. Amen.