

July 24 2016

Scripture Lesson

Psalm 138

Luke 11:1-13

Sermon *Just Ask*

Can you tell me the key word from the message last Sunday?

What did you say?

Last week the message was about listening and this week the message is about talking, or more precisely, praying.

I have to admit that when I read the passage from Luke that Susan read for us, the first thing that came to mind was not praying or prayer. As I did some research on the passage, however, prayer was the thing that everyone talked about.

I understand that the first part of the passage was about prayer because Jesus taught the disciples the prayer that would become our Lord's Prayer. Now I understand why Pastor Russ always said, let us now pray the prayer that Jesus taught us to pray. The light bulb came on.

At the end of the passage, is the part where Jesus says, "Ask and you shall receive, search and you will find, and knock, and the door will be opened. That is the part that I didn't at first make the connection that he was talking about praying. They are all metaphors for praying to God. I have to admit that praying is not a strength of mine. I do pray or more accurately I would say, talk to God but I have not really grasped the reason why it is so important. So thanks to books and the internet, I did some research and found some thought provoking ideas that have helped me to better understand the importance of prayer. Hopefully it will also help you to understand the importance of prayer.

I especially enjoyed an article titled "Seven Reasons to Pray" by Dan Hayes who is the executive Director of Atlanta Community Ministries. I would like to share a few highlights from his essay.

First Dan admits that prayer is hard and even confusing to him. That is what caught my interest right away; he felt the same way I do. He did some studying about how and why Jesus prayed. Dan says that Jesus got more answers than anyone else and He prayed for the right reasons; and He prayed all the time. He was perfect; He really didn't need to pray for forgiveness of sin or anything like that but Jesus prayed.

Prayer is the key way to building a love relationship with Jesus Christ. Dan says, and I agree with him, that Christianity is not primarily rules, it is a relationship. There are commands that we are to follow but we become Christians because we receive Christ, who loves us, died for us, and lives in us daily. We

need to build our love-grace relationship with Jesus. The longer that we work on building this relationship and the love we have for Christ, then we realize the main reason for the gift of prayer is that we learn to receive, experience, and return His love in a genuine relationship. Prayer is one place when God can get at us, speak to us, and minister to us. Prayer isn't just about us getting at God; it is a give and take process. We talk/pray and we also listen. God also listens and He talks back to us.

One way to look at the part of the passage about asking, searching, and knocking is looking at prayer as a continuing action. To keep on asking, implies a faith that makes requests; to keep on seeking indicates a sincerity that is more than casual; and to keep on knocking shows that initial barriers are not to be seen as final refusals. We need to be persistent in our prayers. Remember that we don't want God to give us what we want; we need to trust Him to give us what we need. We have to remember that He is infinitely wiser than we are so we need to be confident that He will provide.

As someone who has asthma, this analogy was perfect. Think of yourself as a spiritual asthmatic, wheezing your way through life, gasping for air because our spiritual lives have been constricted by not praying enough. When we pray, we admit that we can't do it on our own, that we need God. When we pray, we also experience God, enjoying His presence and receiving His answers. A believer lives by knowing and asking God.

So, prayer is important but does it matter how we pray? Do we have to kneel, do it at a certain time, and say our prayer in a certain way? I don't think so. We are all unique in who we are as Christians, so why shouldn't the way we pray be as unique as we are. We can kneel if we want, we can pray out loud if we want, or we can have a "conversation" with God as we are driving down the road, mowing the lawn, or taking a walk. We can find a quiet place to go and just listen, then pray. Remember we talk and we listen. God listens and He talks. The important thing to remember is that we need to pray, however we decide to do it.

Another thing I found in my research is a lesson for children about prayer and it was based on the Nike slogan "Just Do It". It said that Nike is in the business of making sports equipment which means when it comes to sports; don't talk about it- "Just Do It." Don't just talk about running for instance, go out and run or don't just talk about basketball, go out and play the game.

It talked about prayer in this way. One day Jesus was with his disciples and they asked Him to teach them how to pray. Jesus didn't say, "Well, first you get down on your knees, like this; then you fold your hands like this; then you close your eyes; and then you start to pray. After giving them a model prayer, he said to them, "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks, finds; and

to him who knocks, the door will be opened. “In other words, Jesus told his disciples that the most important rule of prayer is – “Just Do It!”

Pray that is. Amen.