

## **“The Prayers of God”**

*The Rev. S. Shane Nanney – March 17, 2024*

*Hebrews 5:5-10, John 12:20-33*

When I was in Seminary, I worked at a church outside of Cincinnati. During one of the special services that the youth were doing, one young man read a prayer from God. It was an adaption of the Lord’s prayer called the Prayer of Humanity. The prayer goes like this:

My children, who live on earth,

Holy is your name.

Your work is coming along.

As you do my will on earth, as it is in heaven.

I give you this day as your daily bread.

I forgive your debts as you forgive your debtors.

I lead you by my love as I deliver you from all harm.

For you are to share in the kingdom, the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

After hearing this prayer, I do remember thinking, is that what God would really say to us? And over these years, I have thought back to that time quite often and pondered what would God pray for us if God would do just that.

Time and again, I come back to what Jesus said long ago. Love your God and love your neighbor as yourself. In a nutshell, that is the whole message of Jesus. There are no hidden messages. Jesus may sound confusing in the many words that he continually speaks to us today through the scriptures. But when the confusion is swept away, here it is. And this is God’s prayer for us.

Too often we think of prayer as something that is poetic and it is a roll of the tongue. Others think prayer is for the pious. Or for those of us who are close to God and are humble, for God only hears the prayer that comes from the good and saintly. And still others of you feel that it is for those who have had some dramatic event, either good or bad, in their lives. For they can see God at work in their lives blessing them or punishing them for their deeds.

None of this is true. Prayer comes from the heart and not the tongue. It is for all people not only for those who have practiced being God’s servants. And it is not only for those who have something to rejoice in or to mourn about. God does not bestow his blessings or punishment in this way.

If we take Jesus as an example, we find that during Jesus' life, he prayed and quite often. Prayer for Jesus was a lifeline in this world to God who gave Jesus strength to go on even when he did not want to. Jesus prayed for those who needed the Holy Spirit. He prayed for Peter to have a strong faith. He prayed when he was alone and with others. And most of all, he prayed for himself.

How selfish we might be tempted to say. But Jesus knew his limitations, which many of us, may need to learn one day. He prayed for strength, he prayed for the cup of death to pass by, and he prayed to lead the disciples in an example.

But the most famous prayer is the Lord's prayer in which we all know by heart, without even thinking about the words that we pray. This is the greatest gift to us to learn; how to pray in intercession as Jesus did for us.

I come back to wonder why!? Why is it that God wants to hear prayers from us? Why does Jesus even bother to pray an intercessory prayer for the people who act more like an enemy than a friend? In this time of Lent, we focus on just how unworthy we are. We hear that if we say we are without sin, then we lie to ourselves and to God. Why would God want us, lying, cheating, and sinful beings that are as far from God as east is from the west?

We are reminded, "GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD, THAT HE GAVE HIS ONE AND ONLY SON THAT WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM, SHALL NOT PERISH BUT HAVE ETERNAL LIFE. FOR GOD DID NOT SEND HIS SON INTO THE WORLD TO CONDEMN THE WORLD, BUT TO SAVE THE WORLD THROUGH HIM." More than anything, that tells me that we are special to God. God really does care about us even if we are sinful and act as enemies more often than friends. We are not perfect, just forgiven. If we are perfect, then we would never have needed to have a savior in the first place.

That is God's assurance that we are not all bad. God sees good in us and treasures us as if we are special. That is the assurance that keeps me going and pressing on. It lets me know that no matter how bad I mess up, that God reassures me and what type of person I have become. I have potential to God and even though none of us live up fully to that potential, we are loved.

But there are choices that need to be made. Today is a new day, even though we may see it just like yesterday and the days before. Today is a new day, and our lives are new from here on out, if someone asks you what's new, you can easily say, "I am part of a new Covenant!"

I realize in saying this, just how easy this sounds, with pie in the sky theology. Life is too much of a fight. And too often we find ourselves walking down the cold winter streets of our lives. We look around and not liking what we see, we wonder how in the world did we ever end up here? No one here can deny that we are prisoners of this time and age. We are afraid of everything and everyone who could possibly be a threat to us. We have tried to deny all but find that as we walk down that street, darkness is quickly coming upon all of us.

But it is on that same cold winter street that we find our freedom. Yes freedom! It is there we find that we too are worthy of what Jesus is praying for us. We meet God, face to face, and realize that I am worthy of giving my prayers and letting God receive prayers about me. It all comes to our realization like a favorite song. From the heart, it slips up into our mind. We start to hum it and before long, we sing it. The more we walk, the louder we sing. And the louder we sing, the more we realize the freedom we have been given by grace. It's like a wind that comes from who knows where. Out of the depths of our hearts, we sing the words of a faith we never realized we had. It is power to believe. We let the chorus get louder and before we know it, we have shed the darkness that we too often settle for and the pain that we too often dwell in.

There is no other way to say it. Sing your freedom. By grace we have been set free. God has said so. Let that song of freedom and love that God has for us ring out. And when we accept that freedom, we open our hearts in the shower of his love and feel the love that God has pouring down over us. This warm healing water sets us free. And we rest our lives, safe in the arms of eternity and are held in the wonder and mystery that is God.

What does God pray? He prays that one day we will come to the point where we can be fully aware and that through God we can say, "Love is pouring down over me. I can feel his mercy flowing over me." God wants us to hear his prayer. He loves us, making it possible that we can sit in His presence. Thanks be to God for all his love and mercy. May it not be wasted on us. Amen.