For the past couple of weeks, we’ve been reading from the Gospel of Luke, as part of the recommended lectionary cycle. We’ve come across a few familiar stories such as the parable of the Good Samaritan two weeks ago and Jesus’ visit to Mary and Martha last week. But each time we hear these familiar stories, we resonate with the story in a slightly different way. That’s **one of the most fascinating parts of reading scripture as guided by the Holy Spirit.** Each of these stories challenges us to examine our own spiritual walks and invites us to respond with our actions, especially in terms of our relationship with one another, with our neighbors, and with God.

Throughout the Gospel of Luke, the writer placed particular emphasis on the importance of prayer in people’s lives. There were more mentioning of Jesus praying…both in public and in private, more so than the other gospel narratives in Matthew, Mark or John. From Zachariah the priest (that’s John the Baptist’s father) praying for a son in Chapter 1, to Jesus praying for those who put him on the cross, while taking his final breaths in Chapter 23, to the disciples offering prayer of thanksgiving in the temple after Jesus had left them and ascended to be with the Father in Chapter 24.

Throughout the gospel, Luke was portraying Jesus as a man of prayer, as he was trying to make the point that one’s prayer reflects not only his or her **lacking** and **inadequacy** but also his or her **devotion** and **dependency** towards God. **Prayer is the root and the foundation of our faith.**

**Jesus reminds us of how we ought to live both in faith and in action** through the **persistence of our prayers**. How we demonstrate and express our faith matter! How we pray, how often we pray, and what we pray for matter!

In our story this morning, Jesus was approached by one of his disciples asking him to teach him how to pray, just as John did with his disciples. This disciple was not embarrassed to seek out Jesus on how they should pray and also what they should pray for. Perhaps up until now, he has been praying wrongly and out of his own motives. He prayed for what he wanted from God, instead of what God wants from us.

However, the disciple’s simple request of learning how to pray was not just knowing how one should pray. It’s more than that. Prayer is a reflection of our intimate relationship with God…that we can be totally honest with our God in our thoughts and in our hearts. When we pray, we acknowledge God’s presence and God’s rule and sovereignty in our lives. **We put God back at the center of things, where God rightfully belongs.**

In the opening line of the prayer that Jesus taught his disciples was the most important. We should never ignore this…because it sets the tone of our relationship with our God…“***Our Father (Abba), Hallowed be thy name!***” Don’t ignore this simple salutation of our prayers. We are addressing and directing our prayer TO God and we are honoring God for who God is!!! **Through our prayers, God desires to seek the expression of our hearts and not just in words that are coming out of our mouths.**

Jesus was teaching his disciples more than how they should pray, he showed them the “discipline” or the “way” of a prayerful life. There is no standard form of how to pray. **Anyone can pray, at any time, and in any place, in any languages, we CAN and SHOULD pray**! **God can still hear us.**

But all of this might seem a bit abstract to Jesus’ disciples and other followers, so in order to further illustrate his point, Jesus offered them a parable concerning the discipline of prayer or the proper attitude and the persistence of prayer.

A man went to his friend’s home in the middle of the night, asking for three loaves of bread for his guests who were coming for a visit. Now since it was already late at night, all the children had already gone to bed asleep. Would you or would you NOT open your door for your neighbor? Chances are most of us would be upset if our neighbor comes knocking on our doors at 3 o’clock in the morning for a non-emergency situation, asking for a few loaves of bread. Why didn’t you prepare ahead of time if you had known that your out-of-town friend was coming? Why bother somebody else? This neighbor persisted in knocking and knocking and asking for the door to be opened and making his requests known. Now **because of his persistence**, this man finally opened the door and lend his neighbor a few loaves of bread. Perhaps just to put him off and get rid of him. We don’t know for sure.

But the focus of the parable, I think, has two parts. 1) that instead of focusing on entertaining the out-of-town guests, what about entertaining our neighbor and our friends who are in needs, keeping in line with what Jesus had taught earlier about “Who’s our neighbor?” in the parable of the Good Samaritan. Furthermore, we can also look at it from God’s perspective…of how God may meet our requests (often at OUR own timings…) when we are in desperate need of God’s grace and forgiveness, in spite of our outrageous and untimely demands. Would God ever turn us away in the middle of the night, making OUR requests, when we come knocking at his doorsteps? Of course not! Yet time after time, God has demonstrated His commitment and faithfulness in listening to our cries, hearing our prayers and meeting us at door. Jesus commended this man’s effort and his **persistence of faith.**

Now I don’t think Jesus was telling us to literally go and knock on our neighbors’ door in the middle of the night and ask if they have any bread, or to call upon someone at an inopportune time. What **Jesus wanted us to focus on was that we ought to develop a discipline of prayer and be persistence upon our request for God’s deliverance of grace, according to God’s will and not ours.** Are our prayer requests too narrowly self-focused and not considering the concerns or the needs of others? What about those who would be impacted as a result of our requests?

**We should be persistent in our prayers and believe that God will hear us, if our petitions and our desires are genuine and in line with God’s will. Keep in mind that God does not always grant what we ask for in our prayers. God doesn’t have to!!! Who are WE to tell God what to do? Therefore, when we pray, we shouldn’t pray that God will do this or do that for us. For that’s the wrong attitude! But instead, pray as Jesus taught his disciples, *“Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done…on earth as it is in heaven!”* We pray that God may manifest God’s will upon us, even if what God ultimately allows to happen, may not be what we hope for or desire. We choose to honor and embrace God’s sovereign and steadfast will upon us towards our overall benevolence and welfare.**

Furthermore, the lesson this morning also tells us about the **nature of who God is,** when it comes to responding to our prayers. As one theologian put it so well, he wrote, *“****could we trust that God is a God who will come after us when we are lost, dine with us when we are cast out by all others, welcome us home after we have wasted our lives, and who will keep us from falling too far?****”[[1]](#footnote-1)*

**God welcomes us and accepts us for who we are, in spite of our short-comings due to God’s unconditional grace and love as lavished upon us, through his Son Jesus Christ.**

**Prayer is a privilege of drawing close to God and not to be abused for any unGodly and personal gains.** **It is the foundation (or the DNA) of one’s relationship with God. Without prayers, in seeking God’s approval, nothing will be accomplished.**

God’s grace is sufficient for all of our needs and God commands us to share that grace with others around us. God’s grace is always enough, nothing more and nothing less. That’s why Jesus taught us to pray for our **DAILY bread**. Not the bread that we need for tomorrow or the next day…but only THIS day! Give us THIS day our daily bread. So do not be greedy with our “daily” prayer requests. God knows what we need and what is best of us in the relevance of our lives. **Don’t you think the God who created us already knew our every thought on our minds and in our hearts?**

So, instead of focusing on WHAT we pray for, we shall focus on spending “quality time” with God, like what Jesus commended Mary for. By doing so, we nurture a discipline and develop a trustful relationship with our God. Like our human relationships, the more we spend time with God, the more we will come to know God for who God is and to understand his will upon us.

One time I attended a workshop that focuses on the discipline of prayer. Here are a few simple tips that I picked up at that workshop….

* **Prayer is like breathing**…it should come naturally and without hesitation whatsoever. When we pray, we breath in the Spirit of God which gives us new hope and new life. And when we breath out, we release our concerns and worries to God. As the Apostle Paul reminded us that we should ***“Rejoice always, Pray without ceasing. In everything give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.”[[2]](#footnote-2)***
* Set aside a dedicated time devoted to **active listening and conversation with God**…like what we talked about last week with being Mary, instead of being Martha. Just be quiet and in solitude for 15 minutes each day, to spend some quality time in prayer with God. It could be anywhere, anytime. You may go take a prayer walk in the morning or evening and focus on communicating with God during that time and nothing else;
* Write down some of our prayers and read it later on. Have a prayer journal of some sort; and
* Seek a prayer partner in order to hold someone accountable;

Share your prayer request with someone whom you trust.

These are just a few suggestions in which we can improve the quality of our prayer life and to strengthen our relationship with God. **Prayer is a two-way communication.** **Not only do we speak to God, but we allow God to speak to us as well.** How can we listen to what God has to say, if we are so busy with our everyday lives or if we are too focus upon ourselves instead of God.

Friends, our persistence of faith shall lead us. Our persistence of faith shall guide us in seeking God’s kingdom first. God’s kingdom is not a place where we will go to, but instead, it’s the proper perspective and our right attitude towards God. It is what we ultimately seek in light of God’s soveign plan within us. ***Ask and it will be given to us; Seek and it will find; Knock and the door will be opened unto us.*** In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, Amen.

1. Jarvis, Cynthia A. *Feasting on the Word, Year C, Volume 3 p.290* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *I Thessalonians 5:16-18* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)