

Prayer

By Joel Wood

Bible Text: Matthew 6:5-14

Preached On: Sunday, July 16, 2017

Trinity Reformed Presbyterian Church

4515 Sandy Spring Road

Burtonsville, MD 20866

Website: www.trinityrpc.org

Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/trinityrpc

Matthew chapter 6 verses 5 through 14. I'll be reading from the Modern English Version. Hear the word of the Lord. "When you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners that they may be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward. But you, when you pray, enter your closet, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly. But when you pray, do not use vain repetitions, as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their much speaking. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what things you have need of before you ask Him. Therefore pray in this manner: Our Father who is in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come; Your 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 Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen. For if you forgive men for their sins, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. [15] But if you do not forgive men for their sins, neither will your Father forgive your sins." The grass withers and the flower fades but the word of our God stands forever.

Well it's quite a week up in Pennsylvania, at Laurelville, listening to my dear friend and brother in ministry, Jared Olivetti, speak on prayer. And one of the things that he challenged us with this week stuck in my brain, particularly as I don't always get to sit by my wife while someone else preaches the Word. She is a pew widow and a pastoral widow, week by week. And- and so it's nice sitting by her, and when Jared touched on this, we looked at each other and she said, "That's convicting." And I said, "Yes, it is. That is very convicting." And that was his reminder to us that, in our fourth vow that we take as we bring our children to be baptized, that we say this: "To the end that he"-- or she, we'll use Jane as an example. I'm just going to preach to Steven today because I know he can take it, and everybody else can listen in, all right-- "to the end that she may grow in the Christian life do you promised to pray for her and to train her to pray?" And that stuck in my mind and it stuck as something that I wanted to dwell on a little bit today as we prepare to baptize our little sister Jane. And she showed up at Jennifer's party yesterday and I got to hold her for a few minutes and explain to her what was going to happen today. I think she's understanding that it might not be the most comfortable thing, but it's for her good. And it's a delight to reach these moments, to see the kingdom expanded. But church, we see families vow and, by extension, we vow as those who commit to praying for and encouraging families in the work that they have vowed to do. We vow to train our children to pray.

As the reformed church, we're committed to a lot of things. We want to train our children in Biblical worship. We believe desperately, not just THAT God requires us to worship Him, but He also has told us HOW we should worship Him, and that we should train our children up in that. And it's- and it's

great to- even last night at Merkel's as we're sitting around, we sang a few Psalms together- to hear the kid's voices. They're not the church of the future, they're the church of TODAY. They are the church, too. And just to hear their voices, and I love it when we hit one of those Psalms that we must all use regularly in family worship because the kids can overpower us and it's awesome to hear. We're committed to biblical worship and we're committed to biblical theology. We want our kids to understand Calvinism, to understand reformed orthodoxy, we want them to KNOW the Christian faith, we want to catechize them, we want to see them be able to say back to us the rudimentary and then the more developed thoughts that summarize the teaching of Scripture. And we're committed to that and we love that. Are we as desperately committed to teaching our children how to talk to their heavenly Father? How to engage Him in that biblical conversation where He speaks to us in His Word and we speak to Him in prayer.

And as we consider this today, that we are to be teaching our children how to pray and- and dwelling on this in a sense of intentionality and development in them, there are three things I want to emphasize. That we want to teach them to pray abidingly, we want to teach them to pray biblically, and we want to teach them to pray corporately. Firstly, to pray abidingly. The theme text for this last week was First Thessalonians 5 and Jared did a fantastic job of giving great context to this text throughout the week. But for our purposes we wanna hone in on verses 16 to 18. "Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing. In everything give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you." We're to pray without ceasing. A great example was given of solar panels, that there are two different kinds of solar panels. In fact, I was texting a little bit with Jared this morning and he said, "which of my sermons are you stealing for church today?" I said, "A conglomerate. #nojoke." One of the examples he gave was that of solar panels, that there are two kinds. There are those that are fixed- I think some of you have those on the rooves of your home- where if the sun happens to be shining on them, they happen to be taking in the solar power. And you try to put her on the side of the house that would get the most sun, but they're stuck. Whatever they get is what they get. Then there are those who are the- the smart solar panels that have been trained to move with the passing of the sun, so that they take in as much as they can of the solar power. And he spoke of this as orienting ourselves toward Christ. It's not always possible in every moment of every day to dwell in the language of prayer, necessarily, but it is possible, particularly through the spiritual disciplines, if we can accomplish those earlier in the morning, spending time in Scripture, spending time in prayer, to, throughout the day, orient ourselves toward Christ, to lean toward HIM, to seek to face HIM and have HIS face shining down on us.

We see this communion spoken of as Christ takes the idea of abiding in Him and directly applies it to prayer in John 15 [vs 1-8] "I am the true vine"-- that might give us pause to think that there are false vines, as well-- "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that bears no fruit, He takes away. And every branch that bears fruit, He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. You are already clean through the word which I have spoken to you. Remain in Me, as I also remain and you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it remains in the vine, neither can you, unless you remain in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who remains in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit. For without Me you can do nothing. If a man does not remain in me, he is thrown out as a branch and withers. And they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned. If you remain in Me, and My words remain in you, you will ask whatever you desire, and it shall be done for you. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples." We must stay connected to Christ. And one of the primary ways that we do that is through prayer.

What does it mean to abide in Christ? It means that we have His life flowing through us by the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. It means that we are drinking in His words. But it also means that our words are flowing back to Him in prayer. And we will be so changed, our desires will be so conformed

to His, that whatever we ask, it will be done for us. Now, I know there are some of you who are extremely gifted in horticulture and in plants. I come from a long line of people with black and blue thumbs. You know, we're probably wanted in numerous states for plant murder. But you know what it is to perhaps even have a plant that's sick and to know what it is to re-pot it and get it the nutrients and nourishment that it needs. And you know that for different plants it takes different types of nutrients it takes perhaps different kinds of soil. And yet in our Christian walk so many times we- we lie outside of the pot, we separate ourselves, we cut ourselves off from the body of Christ, we cut ourselves off from the Christian disciplines, and we wonder why we're shriveling and dying. We wonder why we don't feel that life and that love for Christ and His church. Are you connected? Are you dwelling in Him? Are you abiding in Christ? And one of the most practical ways that this is played out is, not only in prayer, but also in church life together. This IS the body of Christ. I'm sorry, but it is. These are the members that you are called to engage with and to be connected to. That might be good news for some, it might be bad news for others. But let us be connected. One of the best things we can do together, therefore, is to pray, to talk to our head together as His body. We want to teach our kids to pray abidingly, that they would know the presence of Christ, that it's not just some spooky feeling that they have, but that He is the one walking with them that they can converse with and talk to in their life.

Secondly, we want to teach them to pray biblically. And this is where we get a chance to clarify some definitions: what is prayer? The catechisms tell us. [Q 98] "Prayer is an offering up of our desires unto God, for things agreeable to his will, in the name of Christ, with confession of our sins, and thankful acknowledgment of his mercies." As an aside, I would highlight that nowhere in that does it say that prayer is listening to God. That's dangerous. And you'll hear that definition. You can tell where someone is theologically when you just ask them "what is prayer?" If they say prayer is talking to God, okay, that's good, and prayer is listening to God, that's not good. Scripture is where we listen to God. Scripture is where we hear God speak to us. But if we start to wander off into this mysticism that says prayer is sitting quietly, waiting to hear a voice from the Lord, I don't know about you, but I have a hard time, you know, discerning between the voice of the Lord and too much pepperoni pizza last night. You know, we- we could be so driven by our emotions. It's amazing, those who engage in modern pagan spirituality, how their god always confirms to them what they originally wanted in the situation. Should I leave my spouse and pursue this other relationship? Well, I talked to God about it and I just felt like that's what God wanted me to do. I'll never forget counseling with a young couple who met in college and she had maintained a friendship with a young man that they had been friends with in college, and as they- as her husband graduated and got involved in the work force, and she and this friend were still together on the college campus, and they got closer and closer and closer, and one day they kissed, and as you can guess, this cause all kinds of problems in the marriage, as it should, and- and yet she sat there and said, "what if God allowed me to kiss him so that I would learn maybe I didn't marry the person I should have but needed to end this so I could really be with the one I was supposed to be with." I thought, "this is not going in a good direction." And so I pulled out John Piper's line. I said, "Do you wanna know if you're married to the right person?" "Yes, I wanna know, did I marry the right person?" I said, "Go home and get your marriage license out and see what name is on there and if it's the name of this guy sitting on the couch next to you then, good news, you are not married to the wrong person, you're married to the right person." But this is the type of fruit that we see when we start engaging in what is pagan spirituality and trying to whitewash it as Christian theology. It just isn't; prayer is talking to God, prayer is pouring out our hearts before Him.

But what should we pray about? Parents, if is this is a question to you, what should I be having my kids pray about, well, the catechism is the perfect resource for you. God has given us His whole word but He's given us the Lord's prayer, particularly. And it's not JUST an example prayer, it's not a form that we fill out, it's also a prayer. That's why we pray it weekly as a prayer of application. I've yet to preach

a sermon that, when we're praying the Lord's prayer together, I think "well, boy this has nothing to do with what I preach--" There's always something there that applies God's word to our hearts. [Q 100] "... Our Father which art in heaven, teacheth us to draw near to God with all holy reverence and confidence, as children to a father able and ready to help us; that we should pray with and for others." The catechism goes on: [Q 101] "... Hallowed be thy name, we pray that God would enable us and others to glorify him in all that whereby he maketh himself known; and that he would dispose all things to his own glory." In [Q 102] "... Thy kingdom come, we pray that Satan's kingdom may be destroyed; and that the kingdom of grace may be advanced, ourselves and others brought into it, and kept in it; and that the kingdom of glory may be hastened." In [Q 103] "... Thy I will be done in earth, as it is in heaven, we pray that God, by his grace, would make us able and willing to know, obey, and submit to his will in all things, as the angels do in heaven." In [Q 104] "... Give us this day our daily bread, we pray that of God's free gift may we may receive a competent portion of the good things of this life, and enjoy his blessing with them." In [Q105] "... And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors, we pray that God, for Christ's sake, would freely pardon all our sins; which we are the rather encouraged to ask, because by his grace we are enabled from the heart to forgive others." In [Q 106] "... And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, we pray that God would either keep us from being tempted to sin, or support and deliver us when we are tempted." And in the conclusion [Q 106] "... For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever, Amen, teacheth us to take our encouragement in prayer from God only, and in our prayers to praise him, ascribing kingdom, power, and glory to him. And in testimony of our desire, and assurance to be heard, we say, Amen."

Now, you might be saying, "Joel, did you miss that our-- the name of our church is 'Trinity REFORMED Presbyterian Church?' WE GET THIS. We KNOW this. We KNOW the catechism." Yes, we KNOW the catechism but do we DO the catechism? This is not just KNOWLEDGE to be attained unto, this is a PRACTICE that should be ENCOURAGED amongst ourselves and our children. It is not enough to simply sit around, patting ourselves on the back, because we KNOW that which we should pray for. Brothers and sisters, we should- we should drop to our knees together and pray for these things. We need to not just catechize our children, we need to help them ENACT the catechism in their spiritual walk with the Lord. We should teach them to pray abidingly. Sorry- Steven, you should teach them to pray abidingly, to pray biblically, AND to pray corporately. This was a great emphasis this week at Laurelville. The the joke/not joke was made: if you want to clear out a church building quickly, call a prayer meeting. One young couple asked about: "how much should we pray together as a couple that's dating? Should we pray alone?" And it took people a couple seconds, but I said, "if you want to pray alone, go to the prayer meeting together. You can pray alone there." And as I processed what was said this week, my heart was burdened, yet again, for just how far apart we all live from each other. I'm not quite ready to- to call for a vision of selling your homes, wherever they are, and gathering in Burtonsville, but I might be close, I might be close. To be able to see each other in the course of the week, to run into each other at the grocery store. Once in a great while I get to see Mrs. Porter at Giant, or Tim, we'll run into each other. And it's just not the same when we're all flung to the four corners-- not the four corners of the earth, but at least the how many-- I don't how many corners Maryland has, but we're flung to them, that's for sure. Even out into the into the abyss known as Virginia. But, um, but yet, brothers and sisters, we are called to pray corporately. And that goes beyond just when I pray, or one of the elders prayers, on the Lord's day and all of you pray silently in your hearts together. We should know what it is to hear the voice of our brothers and sisters crying out to our same heavenly Father. I've said this before, what makes it "our Father" for ME is YOU. And what makes it "our Father" for YOU is ME. This is a corporate endeavor that we are called to. I know some of you gather in twos and threes and you'll pray and encourage one another and spend that time, and we appreciate that. The first church I served in out in Carmel, California, the engine of that church- and there were great things that God was doing in that fellowship- but the ENGINE of it, I believe, happened on

Tuesday nights when two or three ladies would gather in the lobby of the church. And there are a couple of tables and chairs and they'd pull the chairs around one of the tables and they would sit there for two, sometimes three, sometimes four hours and share in the Word and share in prayer for that church. Brothers and sisters, we cannot underestimate what it means to pray together.

And here's one way that we can begin to change this. We will converse with each other on the Lord's day, we might reach those moments of honesty and humility where we share struggles that are going on, maybe aches and pains that we're having, maybe problems with the kids, maybe problems with the spouse, I don't know. And what do we often say? We often say "I'll pray for you" and then we walk away from each other. Let's- let's begin to change that habit. Let's pray for each other. Right then, right there. The rest of us will be respectful. We'll go around, or we might come and put a hand on the shoulder and- and pray with you. We might say "clearly there's a need." But let's begin to pray together for one another. And hold ME accountable. If I say, "Hey I'll pray for you." Say-- just bow your head right there, remind me what I said. Say, "pastor, let's do it now." Let us pray corporately, together.

The example that's held forth for us is in Acts chapter 12. [vs 1-17] "About that time King Herod extended his hands to harm certain ones from the church. He killed James the brother of John with the sword. Seeing that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to arrest Peter also. This happened during the Days of Unleavened Bread. When he had seized him, he put him in prison and handed him over to four squads of soldiers to guard him"-- How intimidated must he have been by the apostles?-- "intending to bring him before the people after the Passover. So Peter was kept in prison. But the church prayed to God without ceasing for him. The very night when Herod would have brought him out, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains. And the guards before the door were securing the prison. And suddenly an angel of the Lord approach him, and a light shone in the prison. He struck Peter on the side and woke him up, saying, 'Rise up, quickly.' And the chains fell off his hands. Then the angel said to him, 'Dress yourself and put your sandals on.' And he did so. Then he said to him, 'Wrap your cloak around you and follow me.' He went out and followed him, and did not know what was done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision. When they had passed the first and the second guards, they came to the iron gate leading to the city, which opened to them by itself. And they went out and went forward one street. And immediately the angel left him. When Peter had come to himself, he said, 'Now I certainly know that the Lord has sent His angel and delivered me from the hand of Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting.' Realizing this, he came to the house of Mary, the mother of John, whose name was Mark, where many were gathered together praying. As Peter knocked at the door of the porch, a servant girl named Rhoda came to answer. When she recognized Peter's voice, from joy she did not open the door, but ran in and announced that Peter was standing at the door. They said to her, 'You are insane.' But she insisted that it was really so. So they said, 'It is his angel.' But Peter continued knocking. And when they open the door and saw him, they were astonished. Motioning to them with his hand to be quiet, he described to them how the Lord had led him out of the prison. And he said, 'Go, tell these things to James and to the brothers.'..."

Well, this must've been the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Jerusalem because they were praying and couldn't believe it when God answered their prayer. How often do we pray that way? How often do we pray, not expecting God to really do anything? Expecting only the secondary blessings of patience, of diligence, of obedience, that we learn in prayer when our prayers go unanswered for a time. But do we really cry out to God expecting Him to hear and to answer our prayers? See, because we're not just teaching our children to pray, we're teaching our children what it means to walk in faith with the Lord. And we're also, as will be vowed today, praying FOR them. Do we expect our God to hear us and to answer our prayers on behalf of our children? Do WE pray abidingly, biblically, and corporately? Do WE pray with one another in all the things that Christ has given us to pray? And do we do it in a way

where we are constantly walking with Him and abiding Him? "To the end that she may grow in the Christian life, do you promise to pray for her, and to train her to pray." Brothers and sisters, let us be faithful to train our children to talk to their heavenly Father.

Stand with me as we pray.