

Sunday, July 31, 2022  
The Eighth Sunday after Pentecost  
Pastor Matt Duerr

## That Special Place

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen. As we continue with our sermon series dealing with favorite hymns, I'd like to begin with some questions. Questions not dealing necessarily with hymns, but questions dealing with prayer. You don't have to say the answers out loud, just think them to yourself. Question #1, when do you pray? Question number 2, where do you pray? And question #3, how do you pray?

As we look at our gospel this morning, we'll see that that is the focus of what Jesus was talking about with his disciples. He made the point to show how not to pray first of all. And He used the Pharisees as an example go to love to pray out in the open with their wide flowing robes so that they could be seen and since they wanted to be seen they also wanted to be heard so their prayers were rather verbose but yet distinctly eloquent or fancy filled left what Jesus said were empty phrases. His advice to His disciples was to go into your room and when you look at that and the structure that houses were built back at that time; maybe a little bit of a better rendering of it would be going to the inner room or go into the closet, pray in secret, and pray as if you were talking to your earthly father. You don't need the eloquence; you don't need the lofty phrases and everything. Go to the closet and just talk to God. I guess you could say it does give coming out of the closet a whole new meaning, doesn't it?

But this is advice that it appears Peter followed in our New Testament reading this morning. What we do know about Peter is that as the church was growing. And following his Pentecost sermon, he became very popular. People would bring individuals who were sick to see Peter, or just so that his shadow might touch them so that they could be healed. So, finding a private place and in a room for Peter was difficult. In Acts, chapter 10 we find that he wasn't at his own home, he was in the home of Simon the Tanner who lived in the seaside village of

Joppa. When it came time to pray, you do it in the living room where everybody could see him. So, he went up on the roof because that was probably the most private place he could find. And as he began to pray, he had a vision a vision from God. It was a vision of this sheet coming down out of heaven by four corners. Now four corners representing the whole earth. And it comes down and we see that it is filled with all kinds of unclean animals, reptiles, and birds. And the Lord speaks to Peter and says, "rise Peter kill and eat." Peter's response is, "by no means Lord, I've never eaten unclean or common animals." To which God replies and says, "what God has made clean, do not call common or unclean." And this vision is repeated three times. Again, within the Bible, three is the number of God, so this is a very godly vision. It's not lost on Peter. This perplexes by the meaning but then it's revealed to him.

It's revealed to him that there's a man that his door, right at this time, a Gentile named Cornelius, a Roman centurion of the Italian cohort. What do we know about Cornelius and why did he come? Well, we know this about Cornelius. Scripture tells us he was quote: "a devout man who feared God, and his whole household with him." That tells you something about him, he was an excellent father, and he was passing his faith onto his family. But not just his family; to all those he worked with. So, he was a devout man who feared God, who shared his faith with his family, he gave alms generously, and he prayed continually. And like Peter, during one of his prayers, he had a vision. A vision where God told him go to Peter. You're going to find him in the home of Simon the Tanner and the seaside village of Joppa.

Cornelius went to meet Peter. He went because he had a vision when he was praying. And Peter is coming out of a vision when he was praying and the two meet and Peter goes with Cornelius that to his home in Caesarea Philippi. He preaches there and the result is remarkable. The Holy Spirit comes on Cornelius, his family, his household. All who were there, they begin to speak in tongues, they begin to proclaim the good news of God. And Peter has just left them down did here are these Gentiles, unclean people and that's moving in. It opens a whole new door

of ministry for Peter and for the entire early Christian Church. And it all started with private quiet simple prayer.

And that's the simple message of our hymn today. I received a letter, a postcard with a nice little dog on the front while I was on vacation. It's from Sandra Marshall. She writes a bit smaller than my eyes see with just my contact, so bear with me as I put on my old man glasses. She says, "dear pastor Matt, I'm replying to your asking what our favorite hymns are. I have a favorite, In the Garden. When I am in the garden, my Lord really speaks to me and me to him. I had 117 roses to care for in a beautiful garden in the foothills. All His creations surrounded me in great beauty and peace. My husband and I hosted many garden parties, and our children were married in the garden. To God be the glory, in His glorious creation.

Our Hymn for today was written by a gentleman named Austin Miles who was a pharmacist. But he was a very intellectual person, and well gifted person as well, because he also was a musician, as a result he was a music director in his church and at Christian camps, and Christian gatherings. He loved photography and his basement was his quiet place where he would go to pray, have devotion, contemplate scripture it was also his dark room. He developed his own film. And it was there in this quiet solitude during a visit to the darkroom while the film was being developed that he was praying, and he had a vision.

I'd like to share it with you from his words. The year is 1912, it was March. He was studying his favorite chapter in the Bible, which is John chapter 20, which is the account of Jesus's resurrection. And Miles wrote, and I quote, "as I read it that day, I seemed to be part of the scene. My hands were resting on the Bible while I stared at the light blue wall. As the light faded, I seem to be standing at the entrance of a garden looking down at a gently winding path shaded by olive branches and women in white with head bowed hands clasping her throat as if to choke back her sobs, walks slowly into the shadows. It was Mary. As she came to the tomb upon which she placed her hand, she bent over to look in and hurried away. John, in a flowing robe, appeared looking at the two, then came Peter who entered the tomb, followed slowly by John. As they

departed, Mary reappeared leaning her head up on her arm at the tomb. She wept. Turning herself, she saw Jesus standing there and so did I. I knew it was Jesus. She knelt before him with arms outstretched and looking into His face, cried Rabboni.” I awakened in full light gripping my Bible with muscles tense and nerves vibrating under the inspiration of this vision. I wrote as quickly as the words would be formed, the poem exactly as it has since appeared. That evening I wrote the music, and such was born, “I come to the garden.”

It came out of prayer that came out of a vision from God. I know for some of us that sounds strange. Maybe even sounds it couldn't be true. The reality is throughout scripture our God has come to his people in visions and that God who does not change still can come to people in visions. Most likely it will come when people are alone, in solitude, in deep prayer pouring out their heart before God. I know of people who have experienced this, and I know in those situations these were not hallucinations or anything because in each case it dealt with death. Where good Christian people talking to God. I can't speak to them and say you're coming home; you're coming home today. In one case, “your coming home today, you won't see your 100th birthday tomorrow. And in another, my mom so coming home real soon, you're going to have dinner with your husband in heaven. It's a vision like this that Austin Miles had. And it impacted him because he knew it was God. And his response, like so many others who had the captain music, “let's write a song.

First, he wrote the words of the poem and it's really three simple verses; and then he wrote the melody that night. It's all about Jesus spoke. When he spoke, his voice was so sweet, so sweet friend to hear that even the birds had to stop. I was thinking about that because I love birds and at our cabin I I've got a bird feeder. And in the morning, we have 20 to 30 case and finches and starlings and Blue Jays, and Red Wing blackbirds, and Stellar Jays, all there. And they're chirping and making a noise and it's just as sweet as can be. And yet here's the vision that he has. There's all these birds chirping and singing in the morning. They're melody, greeting the sun, and Jesus speaks of client here the Master

speaks for Austin Miles it was a melody ringing in his heart. And it sounds like so beautiful he wanted to stay but she's list bids me go, turn the voice up wow the voice of law indeed under

This takes place in 1912, the world was in a bit of an uproar. World War One was less than two years away, he was living in a corrupt world, that voice was bidding him go. It's the same words that Jesus gave to his disciples, "go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I commanded you." It's exactly what Peter did with Cornelius. He went, he baptized, and he taught them everything he knew, and the Holy Spirit moved in a mighty way.

And this is what Austin miles got from that vision, He is supposed to go. I don't need to worry because Jesus will walk with me, he'll talk with me. One of the things that he will talk about is that I am his own. I belong to Jesus. I am His instrument of the gospel and I have to go and share that joy. And I think that is something that right now in this day and age, that we can hang on to. For some people, they'll look at us and they'll be exactly what Austin Miles writes about. Something that others may never know; that peace, that joy of being able to talk directly with their Savior and to know that He's right there, He's walking with us and read it, He'll talk with us.

And so, I invite you to go to that garden as well; the garden of plenty, the garden of prayer. In that special place, with that special language, which is just an open heart, pouring out everything that's on that heart to your Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. He'll walk with you, He'll talk with you, He's going to tell you, you are His own.

In our Saviors' Name, Amen.