

St. Andrew's Anglican Church – Douglas, GA

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: Ephesians 4:17-32

“Time is On Your Side”

Have you ever heard someone declare, usually in frustration –

- “I prayed and God didn’t listen!” or
- “I prayed and prayed and it’s just not working.”
 - You might even hear them say:
- “Why doesn’t it work the way I want it to?” or
- “Why doesn’t God give me the answer I want, the answer I need?”

They may have gotten frustrated because they really never took the time to truly learn how to pray.

Well, I hope that they are not nearly as frustrated as the man who angrily brought his new chain saw back to the hardware store. He stormed through the door and flung his saw right onto the counter. This brand new saw was bent and beat up, with a lot of the paint chipped away and the teeth were bent at all different angles. He shouted to the poor man behind the counter “I’ve been using this all day and I haven’t cut even a handful of firewood!” The clerk, trying to be helpful, took a chance and yanked hard one time on the rip cord. Sure enough, after some gasps, coughs, sputters and chugs, the motor started to roar. The red faced customer sheepishly shouted “So, that’s what that string was for!” If only he had looked at the instructions – or better yet – if he had asked someone how to do it. Instead of really learning how to do something – we muddle through and end up like that guy with the chain saw.

Did you ever stop and think how very blessed the apostles were by having the absolutely most perfect example right in front of them, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. I am sure that they wanted to imitate Him and to know just how to do what He did, and they probably tried to “pick His brain” over the course of the entire three years that they were together. They had been eyewitnesses to Jesus’ healing of the terminally sick, to His forgiving sins as in today’s Holy Gospel, to His casting out legions of demons, His raising of the dead, and exhibiting an awesome authority over the forces of nature.

As far as we know – none of the Apostles ever asked Jesus

- to teach them how to preach,
- or how to run a youth group,
- how to do a Bible study,
- how to do personal or marital counseling,
- or even how to perform miracles;

Holy Scripture tells us that all they wanted to know was **“how do you pray like that?”**

The Apostles were eyewitnesses to the remarkable strength and incredible intimacy that only Jesus knew with His heavenly Father. It is important for you to know that the Apostles weren’t strangers to prayer, by any means. They had apparently been praying all of their lives. They were accustomed to praying all day long; at fixed intervals; and then they prayed before **and after** every meal! **The average Jew, during the time of Jesus, prayed about three to four hours a day!**

- In essence - what they wanted to know; what they asked Jesus to teach them - was to experience the intimate communion that Jesus had with God, the Father.
- They wanted to experience a personal relationship with the very Creator of the Universe.

The Holy Gospels from **Luke 11:1-13** and **Matthew 6:5-13** – clearly show how Jesus answered them. His words have become what we call The Lord’s Prayer – (some have nicknamed it the “Our Father”) and should be the very foundation of our own prayers.

So, I have just got to ask you:

- **What is your goal when you pray? Why do you do it – what do you expect?**
 - **Is your goal to have God grant your request?**
 - **Is your goal giving God your wish list?**

If the answers to the last two clarifying questions are yes, and yes, then I have got some bad news for you! You see, God does not exist so that He can give us what WE want. God knows our hearts. God knows our needs even better than we do! Instead, I want to suggest to you that prayer is seeking to spend time with the Father, in conversation with, and more importantly - in listening to His response to us. Remember the words that Jesus spoke in Matthew 6:32-33 *“Your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. **“But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you.”**”*

We should not be praying to inform God, but to enjoy true personal intimacy with Him, to spend time listening to what He has to say to us. When we read His Holy Word – we need to stop and reflect on what we have read – and **give God a chance to direct us**. Call it *“holy listening”* if you will. Some of us are so busy trying to TELL God what we want and what we need – that we don’t stop to see if He has an answer for us. On Wednesday afternoon – during our Chapel Time with the youngsters – we have been talking about prayer – the “how and the why” we pray.

You have got to admit that trying to set aside time each day is tough, right? I know - - - there’s that important phone call to make or receive, that text or letter, or that meeting, and then there’s that TV show that you’ve just got to watch – or maybe you’re running to the soccer, hockey, football, or baseball game. There is always something going on that keeps you from spending some time with God. Imagine if you will:

- A football team that never practices (*I don’t think they will be too successful!*)
- An orchestra or band that never tunes its instruments (*OUCH - I wouldn’t pay to hear them!*)
- A farmer who never plants any seed (*I don’t have to tell you - no sow – no reap!*)
- A salesperson who never gets off his... chair --- to go out to meet clients
- An artist who never buys any paint

To never do something is the absolute worst way to ever get better at it! God did not sit back and wait for things to happen – no, He sent His Son, Jesus, into the world to save us – to die for us. Jesus willingly took our place – took our punishment – just to have a relationship with us for all eternity. And if we are going to have a relationship – any kind of relationship, like a marriage, – it takes work – it takes hard work – but the reward is great indeed! So let me repeat what I just said: **To never do something is the absolute worst way to ever get better at it!**

In communicating with God in prayer, the amazing and precious reward is being in the glorious presence of God the Father. This reward is reserved for those who seek His heart and His will – not His attention!

My brothers and sisters in Christ, remarkable things happen when we spend time with God. When God's people pray –

- people are healed,
- people are transformed,
- lives are changed.
- and Revival happens.

I could go on and on – telling you my thoughts on why we should pray – but I believe that it is far more important for me to share with you God's point of view regarding prayer. He clearly tells us in His Word. Time is on our side – the time we take to pray and speak with God brings rewards that are beyond description – eternal rewards.

God has spoken to us through the Bible - His Holy Word to encourage us and to instruct us regarding prayer:

1 Timothy 2:1-2 *“I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone-- for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.”* That is why we pray for the president and our other leaders. It is Biblical!

Ephesians 6:18 *“And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.”*

Matthew 26:41 Jesus said: *“Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak.”*

1 Thessalonians 5:17 *“Pray without ceasing”* or as it is in the NIV *“pray continually”*

1 Peter 2:5 *“you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”*

Ephesians 1:4-5 *“For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will”*

Proverbs 15:8 *“The LORD detests the sacrifice of the wicked, but the prayer of the upright pleases him.”*

Hebrews 4:16 *“Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”*

Let me tell you – that as you spend time talking with God, listening and reading through His Word --- your prayers will begin to reflect the heart, mind and Word of the Lord. **God's Word is the same yesterday, today and forever!** God will meet you right where you are - using the amount of knowledge you have. He knows you better than anyone and He will give you the time that you need to be with Him.

Here is something interesting to try - ask God to give you a verse that applies to the situation that you are praying for – and pray it. For example --- you might pray all 29 verses of Colossians 1 by replacing the word you with your name or the names of loved ones - family or

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friends. God Himself said that His Word will not return to Him empty: **Isaiah 55:11** “*so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.*”

We shouldn't pray the Word of God for the sake of religious activity –instead, pray it based on Faith, believing that you are in agreement with God's will for the circumstance.

Remember you have an enemy. The Apostle Paul reminds us in Ephesians that “*our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.*” **(Ephesians 6:12)** Each of us are called to do spiritual warfare through prayer over Satan's strongholds until you win! The devil usually attacks us in our greatest area of strength. In our weakness we are more apt to pray and call upon the Lord, relying upon Him. In our areas of strength, we usually try to go it alone and rely on our own self and often we burn out from fighting our battles alone. Make no mistake about it - every area of your life is subject to enemy attack, so you have got to fight on your knees before you can stand on your mission field.

Knowing that God is on your side will help you enter into the rest He offers. Give Jesus your problems; lay them at the foot of His throne:

1 Peter 5:7 “*Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.*”

Matthew 6:25-26 Jesus reminded us “*Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?*”

Psalm 55:22 “*Cast your cares on the LORD and he will sustain you; he will never let the righteous fall.*”

And so, my dear friends of St. Andrew's – today we have been given a reminder – if you feel like you have been “spinning your wheels” - stop trying to do it all on your own. Partner with God. He loves you and longs to share His heart with you. He has called you, to rest in His love as you come away with Him in prayer. I pray that you say yes to His invitation today!