



The Rev. Alan Sutherland, Rector

October 21, 2007

Pentecost 21, 2007

My brother-in-law Tim told me a story of his father who was a Pentecostal Minister in California. He was having a theological discussion with a Baptist minister one day and it was obvious that no one was going to have his mind changed that day, so Tim's dad said to the Baptist minister, "I will pray for you." To which the Baptist minister replied, "Yes, I need the prayer and you need the practice."

Our Gospel reading this morning is a lesson in the practice of prayer. Some of us do not get very excited about prayer because many people are not fully convinced that prayer has any real meaning in their lives. We have tried it but it didn't seem to work. Some do not believe in it and some think of it as a religious obligation that is only done at church.

But when we look at the life of Jesus, he had a totally different attitude about prayer. To Jesus it was like eating or drinking. He told his disciples to pray and not lose heart. Prayer was a necessity of life, not an obligation. To Jesus prayer was an integral part of his daily living. It was imperative to his life. So why does it seem so optional to us?

I think part of the reason lies in our understanding of what it means to pray. Most people, I think, regard prayer as a method of getting things from God or persuading God to do things that we would like to see done. If that is all prayer is then it's a pretty useless exercise. We have all prayed for things that never came. We all have prayed to be spared bad things that happened anyway. Good and not so good things happen in our life whether we pray or not.

If the test of prayer is whether we get the things we ask for or be spared the not so good things then we must acknowledge that this kind of prayer did not work for Jesus either. Prayer did not bring Jesus material benefits. His days were not all sunshine and roses. It did not spare him heartache or suffering.

Because as far as I can understand it Jesus did not think of prayer in this way. He did not try to use it as a means of getting things from God.

In the gospels we have around twenty references to Jesus at prayer. The majority of these were expressions of gratitude. In the prayers that are recorded there is not one instance of Jesus asking for anything. One time he prayed to be spared the cross but that request was denied.

Jesus considered prayer as an integral thread that was woven through his life. It is something that should be done continuously and we should be persistent in making it our practice.

It was to this end he told the parable about the woman and the judge.

I can just imagine Jesus telling this story with a smile on his face. It makes one point and one point only. We

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cannot badger God into giving us what we want.

According to Jesus we should keep praying until it becomes a natural part of our living.

Prayer I believe is, like eating and drinking, a basic instinct in every human being. The way of life for Jesus was a way of constant prayer and if we are to follow the way of Christ then we need to see our life as a whole life of prayer. Seeing God and acknowledging God in every situation. Knowing the presence of God at all times. A life of prayer.

From beginning to end living in this life is not an easy assignment. Jesus knew that. He experienced disappointments, he knew discouragement, he felt inadequate. That's why he spoke of prayer as a way of life; a necessity of life. It was not that Jesus needed things from God. What Jesus needed most was God.

Prayer for Jesus was a visit with God that renewed his strength, restored his morale, and encouraged his mission.

One of Jesus' most famous times in prayer is in the garden of Gethsemane. He was almost overwhelmed by the load he was carrying. And he left there ready to face the most difficult decision he had ever made. The only thing that occurred in that garden was prayer. Jesus did not get what he asked for, but he did get the thing he most needed-strength to endure the cross.

It is time to change our thinking about prayer. We have thought of it as a religious obligation. To Jesus it was a necessity of life.

We have thought of it as a way of getting things from God. To Jesus prayer was the conversation, the essence, of a friendship with God.

If that is really true, if we and God can become friends, and our relationship with God is expressed in all our living in and through prayer, what else could be more important than that?

Amen

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