

SCRIPTURE TEXT: Luke 11:1-4

SERMON SERIES: Prayer: A Living Relationship

SERMON: Getting Acquainted

Martin Luther once said that, *To be a Christian without prayer is no more possible than to be alive without breathing.* And I think understand how he reached this conclusion. After all, the gospels all agree that Jesus prayed. Jesus also taught his disciples to pray. Luke, for example, tells a story that contains both of these elements. The story is found in the 11th chapter of Luke's gospel, verses 1-4. Jesus is heading toward Jerusalem. I invite you to listen for the Word of God.

[Telling of gospel story.]

So Jesus prayed and Jesus taught his disciples to pray. I guess Martin Luther was on to something. Prayer is essential to following Jesus Christ. So we're going to spend some time learning about prayer over these next weeks. This morning we begin a three-week sermon series entitled, *Prayer: A Living Relationship*. We'll be using the analogy of human relationships to talk about growth in prayer from getting acquainted to becoming friends, to falling in love. I'll also be teaching a 10-week study called *The Way of Prayer* that begins next Sunday in the Family Life Center at 9:30 a.m. And then we'll hold a spiritual life retreat over the weekend of October 26-28, entitled *Experiencing Prayer*.

On top of all of this, we're kicking off a new ministry this morning called *Partners in Prayer* that will give all of us the opportunity at the close of each of our worship services every Sunday, to have a brother or sister in Christ pray for us. So this is where we're headed.

But now to the task at hand: A simple question. How did you learn to pray? In my case, I learned from my parents. They prayed and they taught me to pray. They taught me those typical childhood prayers that you learn by rote. The words weren't mine, but they at least got

me started. At the dinner table I would pray: “God is great, God is good, let us thank him for our food.” At bedtime I would pray: “Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep. And if I die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take.” And then I would say, “God bless mommy and daddy and Mike and Matt...” and on and on I would go through my entire family including grandparents, aunts and uncles and cousins.

And then I learned another prayer from my parents and from the good folks at First Methodist Church in Beeville (my home church). It was the Lord’s Prayer. Now it wasn’t Luke’s version of the prayer; it was Matthew’s version of the prayer taken from the King James translation of the Bible and some of the wording slightly revised by the Church of England. It’s the same version of the Lord’s Prayer that we say every Sunday morning in this congregation. This is how I learned to pray.

And the amazing thing is that when my mom and dad and my church taught me how to pray, they were doing exactly what Jesus did with his disciples. They were following Christ and teaching me to be a Christian. Just with that simple prayer, I learned something about who God is and how God is to be honored; I learned about the kingdom; I learned how to petition God; I learned something about seeking and offering forgiveness. I learned how to begin living in relationship with God.

Come to think of it, that’s what prayer is really all about—living in relationship with God. And at the beginning of any relationship, it’s important just to get acquainted with one another. Now frankly, when it comes to our relationship with God in prayer, we’re ones who have to do most of the work of getting acquainted. After all, God is already pretty well familiar with us. In fact, God knows us better than we know ourselves.

So how do we get acquainted with God? Two things come to mind: communion and communication. Now by communion I simply mean being with one another—and this requires some intentionality on our part. We have to make time to be with God. Someone once said that if we're too busy to devote our time to God, then we're too busy. Even Jesus had to make time to be together with God in prayer.

And it's important that we spend time in prayer in a place where we can focus our full attention on our relationship with God with as few distractions as possible. This is why Jesus sought out lonely and deserted places to pray. He needed to get away from his disciples and the crowds to pay attention to his relationship with the Father through prayer.

But then the question arises: What happens when we actually come together? We communicate. We speak and we listen. Isn't it true that communication is essential to any healthy human relationship? Well, it's the same with our relationship with God.

Now when Jesus taught his disciples to pray by giving them words to speak, he was helping them to find their voices. When my parents and the church taught me those rote prayers like the Lord's Prayer and those mealtime and bedtime prayers, they were helping me to find my voice. And that's a good thing because sometimes when we meet a new person, we get tongued tied and we don't know exactly what to say—and that makes it hard to get acquainted. So those prayers I was taught as a child helped me to speak before God so that the two of us could get acquainted.

And sure enough, it wasn't long before I was speaking to God from my own heart in simple, direct and straightforward language. And kids are great at this. We can learn from them. These are some prayers spoken by children: From 8 year old Angela, "Dear god: This is my prayer. Could you please give my brother some brains. So far he doesn't have any." 7 year old

Hank, “Dear Lord: Thank you for the nice day. You even fooled the TV weather man. Diane, age 8: “Dear God: I am saying my prayers for me and my brother, Billy, because Billy is six months old and he can’t do anything but sleep and wet his diapers.” 6 year old Agnes, “Dear God: Please bring me a new brother. The one I got socks me all the time.” Finally, Susan age 9, “Dear Lord: Tomorrow is my birthday. Could you please put a rainbow in the sky?”

Kids are so unpretentious and unassuming. They say what’s on their hearts and that’s a great way to get acquainted with God through prayer. God isn’t impressed with long flowery orations when we pray. Heartfelt simplicity is the key not only at the beginning of the relationship but all the way through.

And if we’re not sure that what we’re saying is appropriate to share with God in prayer, just say that very thing. “Lord, I’m not certain that I should say this, but this is how I feel. This is what I desire.” I mean, God already knows what on our hearts, so why not speak it. I’ve found that’s it’s always best to say what’s on my heart, and then leave the rest to God.

And once we’ve said what’s on our hearts, why not just enter the silence and listen for God’s response? We’ll say more about this in a couple of weeks.

Now I wish that I could say that my growth in prayer since those early days of getting acquainted with God has been on a straight, upward trajectory, but this is not the case. My life in prayer has involved ups and downs. Indeed, there have been times when I’ve lost my voice and found it extraordinarily difficult to pray because I was either angry with God, or disappointed in God, or just empty inside.

Someone once said that in difficult circumstances like these when you’re at the end of your rope, just tie a prayer knot and hold on. Well, when I’ve been in the valley, distant from God and with no voice for speaking to God, the Lord’s Prayer has been the prayer knot that I’ve

held onto until I could find my voice and get re-acquainted with God. I've even used prayers written by others, like the ones in this prayer book, to help me stay connected to God until I could once again speak to God from out of my own heart.

My brothers and sisters, I invite you today into a relationship with God through prayer. If you have never entered this relationship before, then I encourage you to get acquainted with God. If you have been in this relationship but the relationship has grown stale, then I encourage you to get re-acquainted with God. If you have a fruitful relationship with God in prayer, then I encourage you to remain open to growth in the relationship.

But remember, talking about prayer is one thing, but actually doing it is quite another. As Thomas Merton said: "If you want a life of prayer, the way to get it is by praying."