

A Reflection by Rev. Paul H. Kim, Campbell United Methodist Church

Title: “Calling God By Name”

Series: Lord, Teach Us To Pray, Part 3

Scripture: John 8:1-12, Luke 11:1-5

Date: February 24, 2013, Lent 2

I. Welcome to the School of Prayer, Lesson 1

Last week, we heard a definition of prayer given by St. Teresa of Avila: Prayer is nothing more than a conversation with God, who loves me. We learned that the disciples asked Jesus, “Lord, teach us to pray” and Jesus told them pray like this and gave us what we now call “The Lord’s Prayer.” That Jesus gave us this prayer means two things: 1) prayer is something we can all learn to do, and 2) prayer is something we can become better at – by praying. We all can pray. We all can pray like Jesus! So welcome to the School of Prayer.

II. Jesus - Our Prayer Mentor and the Lord’s Prayer - Our Prayer Model

There is a problem with the Lord’s Prayer – and it is that we are too familiar with it. It doesn’t surprise us anymore. And in fact, most of us can recite it even in our sleep. And we use it to end our prayers, like a bookend. We pastors like to end certain classes and meetings by saying, “Let’s end with the Lord’s Prayer.” And we say it so often, it just becomes a short 30-seconds of chatter. We treat it like a Christian mantra, some magical words that have some power because Jesus gave it to us. Jesus is our prayer Mentor and the Lord’s Prayer is our Model Prayer.

Martin Luther, founder of Protestantism, called it the model prayer. When his barber asked for help in prayer, Luther wrote him a long letter in response. He said, "I regard it (the Lord's Prayer) as the best of prayers -- superior even to the Psalter, which I am very fond of. Indeed, it turns out that it was composed and taught by the real Master. What a pity it is that such a prayer by such a Master should be babbled and gabbled so thoughtlessly throughout the world." Luther called the Lord's Prayer "the greatest martyr, for everybody tortures and abuses it." He encouraged his barber to use it as a model, saying one phrase at a time, then allowing the Spirit to help him fill in the rest. Luther spoke of it as the ideal prayer: "A Christian will have prayed more than enough when he has prayed the Lord's Prayer aright."

III. One Hour with Hilary Rodham Clinton vs. Every Pastor vs. God

According to CNN, former President Bill Clinton has given 471 paid speeches during his 11 years as a private citizen and raked in an average of \$189,000 per event – typically speaking for an hour. So to have a private one hour conversation with former President it will cost you nearly \$190,000. Interestingly, former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton will begin touring the lecture circuit later this year; she will be commanding more than \$200,000 per hour! – This will be more than her entire year’s salary of \$186,000 as the Secretary of State.

<http://www.theatlanticwire.com/politics/2013/02/hillary-clinton-speaking-fee/62341/>

Kobe Bryant plays 60 NBA games in a season, for which he is paid \$30 million dollars – that comes to an average of \$500,000 per game, which has one hour of playing time. In the 2011-2012 season, Kobe played less than 40 minutes per game; so for every hour, it comes to about \$750,000. http://espn.go.com/nba/team/stats/_/name/lal/year/2012/los-angeles-lakers

Average UMC pastor's salary nationwide was \$55,000 in 2011. If we figure that a typical pastor puts in an average of 60 hours per week, that comes out to \$18/hr – which is double President Obama's proposed minimum wage of \$9/hr.

http://www.ehow.com/info_7894311_average-salary-methodist-pastor.html

An hour with Kobe Bryant is worth about \$750,000. Former President Clinton demands about \$190,000, and your typical Methodist pastor is \$20.00. But is the value of the hour in money equal to the value of the hour spent with that person? Can Kobe give you something that's worth \$750,000 to you? Is one hour with President Clinton worth \$200,000? Is one hour with your pastor worth only a Jackson?

How would you measure one hour with God? What is it worth to you?

IV. Brother Lawrence's Example of Praying

One example of a prayer, who enjoyed a profoundly intimate, internal, and spiritual communion with God – 17th century monk named Brother Lawrence. John Wesley recommended all his Methodist preachers to read Brother's Lawrence's book, "The Practice of the Presence of God."

Born to a poor family as Nicholas Herman in eastern France, he joined the army to escape hunger. Then in the winter of his 18th year, he was converted by a tree, through which, "he received a high view of the providence and power of God...and it kindled in him such a love of God" that never faded from his soul. 6 years later he joined a monastery and took the name "Lawrence of the Resurrection." In the monastery, he worked in the kitchen, among the pots and pans, where he experienced a sweet communion with God.

Brother Lawrence said all of life was sacred. If people believed public corporate worship drew people close to God, they suffered from a "great delusion." He said don't try to experience God or become conscious of God's presence. God was closer than that. He said, "Is it not quicker and easier just to do our common business wholly for the love of God?"

He did everything in the kitchen, ever mindful of God's presence, with a heightened sense and imagination. It took an effort, but nothing could compare to it. "There is not in the world a kind of life more sweet and delightful, than that of a continual conversation with God; those only can comprehend it who practice and experience it."

V. Prayer as A Private Conversation With God

What would my wife Christie say if I were to show her pictures of the food from the best restaurant in the Silicon Valley like Gary Danko's French Laundry in SF or La Foret or Maya's Cafe in San Jose? Would I be able to convince her how great their food is by giving her a colorful menu, with pictures of tender scallops or Kobe beef from La Foret, or bacon-wrapped prawns and pupusa from Maya's Café, and ask her don't they taste great? I would have a hard time convincing her how great the food just by showing their menu and price, pictures of their best dishes or give her the YELP or ZAGAT OR MICHELIN reviews to read. She'd think I was crazy.

It would be a different story if I were to take her there – to La Foret, which has a tasting menu for about \$135 per person. If we would sit down for a three hour meal, then she would most likely agree with the people who say it is the best French restaurant in the San Francisco Bay area.

It's the same if I were to tell you how great praying is, how close God is, how intimate... I maybe able to describe for you how great it is, what it can do for you. But the only way you can know the benefit and greatness of praying is for you **to pray for yourself**. So we are being mentored by Jesus and peer-coached by our Trios, aren't we.

The greatest spiritual experience I can offer you: communing directly with God versus all other intermediaries – my best sermons and prayers cannot match your own conversation with God. What I can do is to mentor you and show you how you may pray better. But you must do your own prayers – to know God.

VI. Mining the First Phrase: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

1. The first word is “Father” or in Jesus’ Aramaic, “Abba,” a word children use in calling their moms and dads – Daddy, Papa. It is a term of endearment, intimacy and relationship. We are God’s children, and that’s how we approach God. That’s the name we call our God. To this God – our Father and our Mother, we can speak tenderly, honestly and confidently. Let’s not get tripped up by the term “Father.” It doesn’t mean God is a male figure; it uses a human language of relationship. You can use any words that children use in calling their loving parents.

2. But the words also indicates that this intimate being is also the Creator, the Source of all life and all things in the universe. As majestic, heavenly Creator, God provides for all of creation.

3. But this Abba is “Our” Abba. But this “our” is not a possessive terms like we use when we say, “This is OUR car, not YOURs.” God is not our property, not some vending machine we possess into which we push our coins and outcomes whatever we want. God is “Our” Abba because this One who created the universe and everything in it – the great God of heaven and Earth – wants to be our, willed to be, promised to be OUR God, to love us, to protect us, to be for us – even before we’d done a single thing.

4. When Jesus teaches us to pray “Our Abba”, he is saying that we dare not pray and ask “our Father” to bless this nation at the expense of other nations. We dare not pray and ask “our Father” to bless our business deals at the expense of our employees or other workers. It means we dare not pray and ask “our Father” to intercede on behalf of our military personnel without praying for all military personnel around the world.

In fact, when we utter the words, “Our Abba,” we include in our prayers of blessing, healing and forgiveness everyone of God’s children – our brothers and sisters” who pray “our Father.”

5. In Jesus’ day, the prayer also had a political edge to it. Rome referred to the Caesar as the “Father” of the Empire, just as we American call George Washington, the “father of the nation.” In praying “Our Father” Jesus was subtly and clearly stating that his followers were living by a higher authority – One Abba of all people – who desired all human beings to live as one family, as brothers and sisters – transcending the limited powers of Roman Caesars and all rulers of all times.

6. Hallowed be thy name – holy be your name: that we do not defile the name of God. We reject any and all idols and false gods. Only God, the Abba, deserves our trust, obedience, worship and loyalty. It is to recognize that God is holy – about his love towards us and his purpose for our world.

VII. Mary's Gift and Our Greatest Asset of Time

Mary gave Jesus her best. What will we give to God? Our greatest asset – as American thinker Napoleon Hill says – is our time, something we possess outright.

A student came before his spiritual mentor.

“What is the real value of human life?”

The teacher handed his disciple a precious gem stone, saying,

“Take this to the marketplace and ask what its value is, but don't sell it for any price.”

He took it first to a fruit stand: “What will you give in exchange for this gemstone?”

“I'll give you two oranges.”

He took it to a vegetable stall. The seller said, “I'll give you 4 lbs of potatoes for it.”

He then went to the black smith – who knew something about gemstones. He said, “I'll give you 500 coins for it.”

After a few other stores, he went to the biggest jewelry shop in the market. The jeweler looked at it carefully and said, “This gemstone isn't something that can be sold. This gemstone is priceless.”

The disciples returned to the teacher and told him what he had encountered in the marketplace.

The teacher said, “Do you now know what the real value of human beings is? A person can sell himself for 2 oranges, or 4 pounds of potatoes or 500 coins. Or she can make herself so valuable that she is priceless. It all depends on how you think of yourself.”

VIII. Doing What Comes Naturally: Pray

God awaits for us – as Our Abba in heaven. He invites us into his own presence – without any conditions. We go with what we have – our time and our priceless selves. And when we can pray like that, we would have learned what it means. Our longing to connect with God, to taste eternity here on earth, will not be satisfied by anything the church or any religious activity can offer you. It is satisfied only by the dwelling of God within.

Vincent Van Gogh said it like this: “But the difference is great – yes, very great, indeed – between delight in the Creator and in the creature, in eternity and in time, in Light uncreated and in the light that is reflected.” What we do here on Sundays is offering you light that is reflected: that's what the church offers. The Light uncreated – pure communion with God – that's accessible only through prayer, conversation with God who loves you. May you pray this week, following our Mentor Jesus, praying as Jesus prayed, and be filled with Light uncreated. Amen.

Skye Jethani, *The Divine Commodity*, 80-84 on Brother Lawrence and Vincent Van Gogh