

Prayer Requires Faith

Luke 18:1-8

The Twenty-second Sunday after Pentecost, October 9, 2016

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Broadlands

There are two ways to approach prayer.

The first way is the way of our modern thinking. Christians under the influence of contemporary thought think something like this. They pray, but they do not pray often. They pray when formally prodded to pray, but they do not pray out of necessity.

The reason that they do not pray out of necessity is either because in spite of the fact that they confess publicly that God exists, they do not in fact believe it. There are many who deceive themselves and tell themselves that they believe that God exists, but then they never pray, or at least they pray rarely. The reason that they do not pray is that they do not in fact believe that God exists. They do not believe that prayer will receive an answer. They do not believe that there is a God there who hears and answers. They may confess that there is a God, but in their heart of hearts they are atheists.

When trouble comes to such people they seek answers other than prayer. They seek medical answers for medical problems. They seek psychological answers for psychological problems. They seek practical answers to practical problems. They believe that the answers to all of these things will be found in these things and not in God. They do not believe that God will answer prayer.

Some of them actually take the time to think through what they believe. They may believe that God exists well enough, but they may not believe that God exists in such a way that He answers prayer. They believe in a philosophical god who serves as an explanation for the existence of the universe, but as one who does not answer prayer. God for them is not personal and even if He were they think of Him as one who does not interfere in the workings of the universe, much less in the affairs of men.

So without any faith they seek answers elsewhere. They seek answers in their own intelligence or in the intelligence of others. They seek answers in their own abilities or in the abilities of others. You get the idea. They are problem solving people. When a problem comes up they work the problem. And even when God sends them a problem that they cannot solve, they work and work at it convinced that they can solve it and prayer does not occur to them. They do not have faith.

One wonders when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?

The second way to approach prayer is to believe that God does in fact exist, that He is a personal being who listens to prayer, that is He is almighty such that He can hear all of the prayers of all of His people at once, and that He is almighty enough to answer them.

The advantage of this way of approaching prayer is obvious. It gives you multiple reasons to pray that the one subjected to modern thinking does not have.

First of all, this line of thinking confesses that God exists and actually in fact believes that He is exists. No one prays to who is not there. Believing that God exists has the great advantage to prayer life because the one praying knows that God is there.

Secondly, such a line of reasoning knows that God hears prayer. Such a person acknowledges that God has enough power to hear multiple prayers at one time. God is not confused when millions of people are speaking to Him all at once. This gives the one praying the attitude that God is hearing them as if he were the only person praying at that time.

Thirdly, such a line of reasoning acknowledges that God has the power to answer prayer. If a person believed that God existed and believed that He heard prayer, but did not believe that God had the

power to answer prayer, then there would be no reason to pray. If God cannot do it, why bother with God? But these people believe that God is almighty. They believe that He can do it. They therefore have a really good reason to bother with God. Not only can God solve any problem, He can do it in ways that they haven't even thought of yet.

You would think that this type of reasoning would be a great boon to prayer. Yet many who genuinely hold that these things are true still do not pray. They are precious little better than an atheist, but their problem is a different problem. The atheist believes that God is not there to hear. The despairing is a person who believes that God is there to hear, and can answer, but does not answer because He is holding something against the person praying. There is nothing that kills prayer faster than guilt or shame.

The guilty and the ashamed do not approach God in prayer. Their problem is not some kind of lack of faith in God's almighty power. Their problems is a lack of faith in His gracious mercy. Like Mr. Cupman from last Sunday, this person believes that they have sinned such that God is angry enough with them to punish them by not answering prayer and so they avoid God. Obviously one cannot actually avoid God, but these people will try to avoid Him. They will avoid Him by avoiding prayer. They will avoid the Word and the sacraments and they will avoid prayer. They are ashamed of themselves and so they do not pray. They are embarrassed of themselves and so they do not pray. They cannot bear the thought of standing before God.

There is faith and then there is faith. It is not enough to believe that God exists. Even the demons believe that and they shudder. Genuine faith is a faith that takes God at His word of mercy and believes it. Faith is that which hears that its sins are forgiven and believes it. Even in the midst of the shame of one's own behavior the person who has faith will still cling to the word of promise that for Christ's sake its sins are forgiven. His shame is removed.

Genuine faith believes that God will hear and answer prayer on the basis of his mercy and not on the basis of the goodness of the person doing the praying. And so a faithful person will pray in spite of his sins. A faithful person will pray in the midst of their shame. In fact a faithful person will pray because of their shame knowing that their only hope is in their Lord Jesus Christ who died for them. Genuine faith inevitably leads to prayer.

And so our Lord's question is even more legitimate: when He comes will the Son of Man find faith on the earth?

And then there is the third problem and this problem is with God Himself.

There are people who believe in God. They believe that He is almighty. They believe that He can hear all of the prayers of everyone all of the time. They believe that God is able to answer. They believe that God hears them in His mercy. And they have prayed and they have prayed and they have prayed and they have received no answer. As one Christian put it to me once, "I have prayed my guts out," and he had not yet received his answer.

Some of you have prayed and prayed for your children to return to the faith and the Divine Service and they have not yet done so. You have prayed for them for years and they still have not come back. Some of you have prayed for your husband or your wife or your son or your daughter who was sick with some kind of terminal disease. You know that God answers prayer. You know that He hears you when you pray. You knew that He listens to you in His grace and mercy. And you prayed and you prayed and you prayed and you prayed and your loved one died. You did not get the answer that you want. And the question arises in your mind, "If God did not do anything to save my loved one, what

happens when the next loved one gets ill with a terminal disease? Shall I even bother with prayer then? It did not work the last time! Why should it work this time? If God did not save my husband when he was ill, will God save me when I am ill?"

And this is not the special temptation of Satan although Satan will try to take advantage of the situation and use it to tempt you to believe that God does not exist, or that He is still angry with you over your sins, or that God is a contemptible brute who puts people to death for His own delight. No, this problem is with God Himself. When will my answer come? What shall be the motive for my praying?

And so the Lord tells you the parable. There is an unjust judge in a certain city. He neither fears God nor respects people. There is a widow who keeps coming to him and asking him for justice against her adversary. One gets the impression from the way our Lord tells His parable that this woman has been coming to the unjust judge numerous times, over and over again, she asks for justice. And the unjust judge grants it to her, not because he is righteous, but because he wants to make her go away and quit bothering him. Now the point of the Lord's parable is simple. If even an unjust judge will finally grant the request of someone about whom He does not care, then how much more will God give justice to His elect who cry out to Him day and night. Don't despair of the answer of God. Even if your constant prayer still ended in death, that does not mean that He will not answer. After all you are praying to the almighty, are you not? You are praying to the one who raises the dead. We are not done praying yet for those things which we think are all over with and done.

He will give you what is right and He will give you what is right speedily. Once it comes you will see how speedily it came.

And the question remains then: when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.