May 13, 2018 John 17:6-21

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“The Prayer of Jesus”

Have you ever overheard someone praying or having a very intimate conversation with someone? Maybe you have a memory of your grandmother or mother or aunt praying in the morning or at night. It probably felt awkward because prayer is such an intimate thing and it is between this person and God. And we can say all kinds of things in prayer, right. I think one of the amazing things about today’s passage from John’s Gospel this morning is that we are overhearing Jesus’s prayer with God the Father. And that the evangelist was able to record it and have it for us and for the church.

In the context of John’s Gospel, this prayer comes right before Jesus went to the cross to die, and most of his prayer is dedicated to the disciples. He prays for their ministry and witness to God’s love in the world. He prays fervently, with love, with care. It seems that first Jesus prays for his first disciples. But then we read in verse 20 that Jesus prays for all those who will believe later, for the future church. Some scholars think that it is not necessary to separate the first disciples and all those who believed and will believe after them. That we can look at this prayer as the prayer for all Believers. It means that Jesus prayed for you and me and for all those who will believe after us. It brings so much comfort to know that Jesus prayed for us. If you look at the prayer, Jesus prays for many things, for protection from evil in this world, for the church to be one in the witness to the love of God for the whole world. And Jesus prays for sanctification and for our joy to be complete. It almost feels like Jesus is worried about the disciples. It is time for him to go and he is anxious for the disciples and all this who will come after them, because now they will need to continue the mission and the ministry that he started here on Earth. It feels like when we are worried about something or someone, that we go to God in prayer.

Let’s admit that some of us are better prayer warriors than others. It seems that for some this task of prayer is just so much easier than for others. But none is off the hook. If you are Christian, you are supposed to pray. From the young age we are taught that we must pray, that we must start our day with prayer or finish our day with prayer. Some even prescribe us with certain amount of prayer for the day. And we feel like we are supposed to pray, we should pray, this is a discipline. And then, when do not pray, we feel guilty. Sometimes for me it feels like prayer is just another task on the list of things to do. We do so many tasks in our daily lives. I am sure if you are like me, you create a list of things to do for the week, for the day. Whether it is at work, or at home. It helps us be on track, be sufficient, and accomplish many things. But when it comes to prayer, is it really a task? Or can it be something more for us?

We are talking about prayer on this Mother’s Day, and I simply need to say and I am sure you would agree with me that many of our mothers, grandmothers, aunts, sisters, cousins, teachers, girlfriends and all those women who nurture us have prayed for us, how much they formed us into who we are today, as persons of faith, as disciples of Christ. We give thanks for all those women today. I give thanks for my grandmother. Some of you may know that my grandmother who is 86 had a stroke this week, and now we know that the whole left side of the brain is paralyzed. My husband and I almost left to Russia on Wednesday. My grandmother formed me into who I am since I was a child and she continues to shape me into I am as a person and as a Christian. For a whole year of my life I lived with her. She taught me how to read. She taught me how to write. And she taught me a lot about prayer. I very vividly remember seeing her silhouette standing in front of a shelf with icons and lit candles and whispering something. I remember seeing it a lot. When I moved to the US and talk to her on the phone, she would always tell me that she is praying for me and my husband and my job, my husband’s job, and for our relationship and every body in our family. My grandmother is a prayer warrior. Prayer is not a task for her. It is who she is. It is part of her identity. It is a way of living for her. It is the way she connects with God on the daily basis. Although she is not able to speak she is still connecting with God on some other level.

What if we move beyond looking at prayer as a religious task? What if we move beyond looking at prayer as something that someone told us we have to do and must do for 15 minutes a day, morning and night?

You see Jesus prayed many times to the Father, going away in the morning or at night to be alone with God. Prayer was a way of Jesus to connect with God the Father. And the prayer that is recorded for us in John’s Gospel is a simply an excerpt, a continuation of this ongoing connection and ongoing conversation that Jesus had with the Father.

Think about our electronic devices, but specifically our smart phones.

Some of us are connected to our phones 24/7. It is probably true for younger generation but I know some older adults who browse the internet on their iPod pretty often and can map things, look up the flights, and look at traffic. The point is this is how we live now. We reach out to the phone with any kind of questions or need for information, almost about everything in our life. Our electronic devices are a means by which we connect to those whom we love, to the world and to the information. And quite frankly, I don’t know what to do without my iPhone.

I wonder if we had such a connection with God. What if prayer was our iPhone or Android (I don’t know how to use them) or our tablet. What if think of prayer as a means to connect with God, and not only connect but deepen our connection with God. In fact, John Wesley, the founder of our Methodist faith, talked about prayer as a means of God’s grace. The means of grace are ways God works invisibly in us to strengthen our faith and our love for God, the way we are transformed and more and more aware of God’s presence with us. Prayer is one of those means. Prayer is a reminder that God is with us, that God is involved in our lives, in the lives of those we love, and in the whole world. Prayer is almost like a reality check. Oh, God, you are near. God, you are working all this out.

If I have to say what I wanted to say today in one phrase, I would quote Lysa TerKeurst who is a president of Proverbs 31 Ministries and the *New York Times* best-selling author of many books. She said, "The reality is, my prayers don't change God.  But, I am convinced prayer changes me. Praying boldly boots me out of that stale place of religious habit into authentic connection with God."

Authentic connection with God. Which means, my friends, there are no rules how to pray. We can pray anywhere: in the car, at home, at school, while running, while working, while on the plane. Prayer can be spontaneous and long and short. And can be filled with tears and laughter, anger and anxiety. And sometimes it is just venting to God. Sometimes it is just sitting still and listening in the presence of the Holy One. Sometimes it is giving the person whom you love into God’s hand and giving to God fears and worries about this loved one or a situation. Sometimes prayer is our song, sometimes prayer is our sleep. And sometimes prayer is just breathing out your anxiety, and breathing in the peace of God.

Jesus said a prayer for you and for me, for our lives, for our faith, for the way we are the church and his body in the world. The world will know about his love to the world through us, through our witness, and our faith, and through our prayers. My friends, pray.

School is stressful, pray for God to give you strength for finals. A relationship is not going well. Pray for wisdom. Pray when circumstances are changing. Pray when things are not going according to your plan. Pray when things are going according to your plan. If there is nothing you can do about a situation, pray. If an action or decision needs to be made, pray before you do it. Pray for those I need for the government for the world Pray, pray, pray.

May our prayer be our way of living. A way to continue our ongoing conversation and connection with God. A way of being in this world. A way of breathing. Amen.