

## **ANOTHER SERMON ON PRAYER**

**John 17:6-26**

**Preached by Dr. Cahill**

**Babcock Presbyterian Church**

**Sunday, June 9, 2013**

Last Sunday's sermon was about prayer's essential role in our relationship with God, and about confusing prayers with wishes, because we don't always get what we ask for. Instead, we're encouraged to pray for becoming in sync with God's will so our prayers will bring satisfaction and not disappointment

The sermon also emphasized praying plainly, honestly and boldly, plus realizing we needn't ask for God to come to us because when we pray we're actually accepting God's invitation to come to him. Another thing, never stop praying for yourself because you think God's too busy to listen to your little problems, or worse you fear God's so angry and disappointed with you, he's done with you so don't even bother.

Most important of all we need to acknowledge we need prayer as much as we need to breathe because not praying cuts you off from the source of life itself.

Of course, a twenty minute or less sermon on prayer can't cover all the bases. In fact any sermon always raises more questions than answers.

Case in point: As we were ending the Worship Team meeting last Sunday immediately after worship, Debbie Ellis asked, "Why's it necessary to get as many people as possible together to pray for the same thing? Isn't one person's prayer enough for God to get the message?"

That's a great question. Since God hears one prayer why do we bombard God with multiple voices? To get his attention?

Monica Addison-Walker jumped in with a great answer, "Knowing others pray for you is God's way of letting you know you're not isolated and alone. It's comforting knowing people aren't just thinking about you, but also lifting you to God. The prayers of the community are an important part of the healing process, because we're all in this together."

Debbie seemed satisfied, but being the pastor, I couldn't keep my mouth shut so I added one more thing, "Also remember this" I said, "We are the Church, what St. Paul called the Body of Christ. As members of Christ's Body, we're called to continue Jesus' earthly ministry by loving, serving and praying for others just as Jesus loved, served and prays for us. What's more, whenever we pray, Christ himself is praying through us, which when you think about is awesome and wonderful for us to know."

In John's Gospel we read about Jesus' last hours in the Upper Room with his disciples the night before his crucifixion. It was a time for final

instructions and affirmation but it was also time for Jesus to pray, “On behalf of those who will believe in me through their (the disciples) word,” which includes you and me.

After the Prayer of Confession there quickly follows a Declaration of Pardon. One of these declarations reminds us Christ didn’t come to condemn us instead,

Christ lived for us

Christ died for us.

Christ was raised in power for us.

(and finally)

Christ prays for us.

Christ didn’t stop praying for us after he stepped out of the Upper Room 2,000 years ago. He continues to pray for us through the Body of Christ. This is a consequence of the miracle of the incarnation we celebrate at Christmas: “The Word (Christ) became flesh and lived among us full of grace and truth.” (John 1:14)

You see, the incarnation wasn’t just a one time event frozen in history. Christ still becomes flesh whenever you, in the words of the Apostle Paul, “present your body as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God which is your spiritual worship.” (Romans 12:1) So whenever you invite Jesus to enter your life, to live with you, in some way far beyond our comprehension Jesus is born in you as surely as he was born in Bethlehem 2,000 years ago. In this way the mystery of the incarnation perpetually unfolds and expands through you and me and all the other members of the Mystical Body of Christ.

Jesus’ full prayer in the Upper Room is found in John 17 and can be subdivided into three distinct sections:

First, Jesus prayed about his own relationship with God the Father.

Next Jesus prayed for the twelve disciples and their own relationship with him and the Father.

Finally, Jesus prayed for us and our own relationship with God so the world would realize through us God’s love for humanity.

It’s that third part of Jesus’ prayer I’d like us to focus on today because it directly impacts us as Jesus prays for both our present and future as individuals and as members of Christ’s body on earth.

Once Walter Brugeman, a theologian and biblical scholar, delivered an address at a conference. The bottom line of his talk can be boiled down to this one phrase, “Are we going to make it or blow it?” We need to ask ourselves this question every day. Am I making it as a husband or wife, or am I blowing it? Am I making it as a parent, son or daughter, or am I blowing it? Am I making it as a human being, or am I blowing it?

You'd agree the answers to those questions will depend on the frequency and quality of our prayers. You can't entirely offer yourself as a living sacrifice without first talking about it with God. At the same time, each individual's prayers are meant to be fortified by the prayers of others. But it's especially comforting to realize every time someone prays, Christ is praying through him or her. But what's even more comforting, even if you don't pray for yourself and no one else is praying for you, Christ is still praying for us, lifting us up to his Father, and I can say that with assurance because Jesus has already demonstrated he prays for us in the Upper Room.

Jesus prayed, "Holy Father, protect them... While I was with them I protected them...I guarded them... But now I am coming to you... I have given them your word and the world hated them because they don't belong to the world. I am not asking you to take them out of the world but I ask you to protect them from the evil one." (John 17:11-15)

Jesus is praying that we won't be ever overcome by the world. "I pray for them...I do not pray for the world, but those you gave me for they belong to you."

In John's Gospel when we find the word "world," it means human society, including governments, economic systems, cultural norms and philosophies organized outside the authority of God and often in opposition to God's will. How can you resist the worldly things that charm you most if Christ isn't praying for you and we're not praying for ourselves? Remember what I said last Sunday, prayer, conversation with God connects us to the source of life. We need to pray as much as we need to breathe, not just for ourselves and circle of family and friends.

Listen again to Jesus' prayer. "I pray they may all be one."

Jesus prays for our unity with each other and God. Sometimes you hear about a couple so in sync with each other, that both are able to complete each others sentences. You've heard the expression, "I can read you like a book." Isn't that what Jesus prays for us, that we would automatically know God's will and do it.

Last week I quoted Paul's exhortation, "pray without ceasing," not meaning we're on our knees 24/7 but that we've become so in sync with God, so intimate with God we'll know his deepest desires for us and the world.

This is what separates "my will be done" from "thy will be done." This is what separates wishes from prayers and God's Kingdom from the world.

But we can't not pray for the world God loves, no matter how oppositional it may be. Remember Jesus' command to us, "Be in the world but not part of it."

How we obey this command will determine whether we make it or blow it as individuals and as Christ's disciples.

At the end of John's Gospel Jesus asked Peter three times, "Do you love me?" Maybe another way of putting it would be, "Peter, do you need me at the center of your life, do you need to become the man God wants you to be? Do you need me as much as the air you breathe?"

Jesus asked Peter this question to restart the conversation that leads to intimacy with God and each other.

Next Sunday there'll be still another sermon about prayer. To help you keep the conversation going next Sunday at 10:15 you're invited to gather downstairs for spoken and silent prayer for each other, your neighborhoods and the Loch Raven Village neighborhood and anything or anyone else that comes to mind. Until then, keep the conversation going. Pray for yourselves and pray for each other knowing Christ prays through and for you as you wait for God's Kingdom to come near.