

The Book of James Part 5 – Prayer and You
 World Wide Communion Sunday
 October 4th, 2009 0900 and 1100 hrs – Jim Short Preacher

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James 5:13-20:

5:13 Are any among you suffering? They should pray. Are any cheerful? They should sing songs of praise.

5:14 Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord.

5:15 The prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise them up; and anyone who has committed sins will be forgiven.

5:16 Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective.

5:17 Elijah was a human being like us, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth.

5:18 Then he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain and the earth yielded its harvest.

5:19 My brothers and sisters, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and is brought back by another,

5:20 you should know that whoever brings back a sinner from wandering will save the sinner's soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

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I want to conclude my sermon series today by talking about Prayer and you – the individual...

Last week as James suggested at the end of his letter – we looked at prayer in the context of the praying church community...

A vibrant mission oriented church is a church that prays together...and whose foundation is collective and individual prayer:

I have three points to make:

- 1) I want to expose some of our myths around prayer
- 2) I want to talk about the difference between “Prayer” and “prayers”
- 3) I want to speak briefly about individual prayers

1) The myths around prayer that we need to let go of: to debunk (isn't that a great word)

- Only someone who is a public speaker and a trained theologian can pray
- Only someone who is eloquent can pray
- Only someone who understands all the aspects of prayer can pray
- only an ordained minister can pray
- only people who are worthy and perfect can pray
- Prayer is complex

If you know anything about baseball – you may recognize
The name of Yogi Berra – one of the greats...

When asked to explain the game of baseball in its technicalities – his response
Was (source unknown)

Someone throws the ball
Someone hits it
Someone catches it

And so it is with prayer:

God loves us.
Our hearts yearn toward God.
Prayer is conversation between God and us.

It is not complex.

2) The difference between “Prayer” and “prayers”

Prayer is a state

It's about being aware

It's about waking up to the consciousness and presence of God and God's relationship to us

Relationship is the key word...

Let's use the image of a relationship...

I can say that I know who the Queen or the President of
America is...

But that knowledge of them is not the same as a relationship with them...

I may know all kinds of things – information – about them but that does not mean that I have a relationship with them...

Despite being told all through my childhood to mind my manners in case I ever got to eat a meal with the Queen – it has not yet happened and I am 52 – time is running out.

The same is true with God...

I can know all kinds of things about God – in my head

Knowledge

Quote scripture

Read theology books

Study the theories of prayer

But a relationship with God is different – its deeper more intimate than just knowing about God...

If I meet someone and I want to really know them...be in a relationship with them...

I have to make that a commitment

I have to spend time with them

I have to listen to them

And share myself with them

And only then does a relationship begin to grow...

And...in a good relationship...the deepening happens

And continues to happen

And is endless...that is the amazing thing about a relationship isn't it – you can spend all kinds of time with someone and think its as good as its gets – and the next day you wake up and discover there is still more to learn and experience with that person...

And that goes on – well for ever....so it is with God...

And so prayer is really is a world to cover the

Intentionality

Of placing myself

In a relationship with God

Moving from head to heart

Intentionality...

Call that many things...

Making a commitment

Being born again/been for a above

Whatever you call it – it is an act of faith and trust –
And risk

As all relationships are

Knowing in my head that God loves me

That God desires a relationship with me

That God is – as James says the Generous God – the giver
Of all good gifts

Known most fully in the person of Jesus Christ
By faith

I feely choose to enter into that mystery

And trust – a relationship will form and deepen

And that goal – is described in that wonderful phrase found somewhere in Paul’s letters – to

“Pray and praise God without ceasing...”

To live all of my life and waking hours with a consciousness of God and an intention to be related to God in Jesus Christ...

3) Prayers

Remember the myths we debunked...

Prayers are one of the many disciplines available to us to waken up our consciousness to God...

Practices that God uses to shape us as disciples of Jesus
And people who live...

By what James calls the “royal law of love”...to love God and my neighbour as myself...

How do you pray...?

well one of the places we stumble on in prayer is all of those “shoulds” and believing that unless we are on our knees with our heads bowed and hands clasped – its not prayer – that’s one way to pray but there are all kinds of ways to pray...

Remember – God loves you. Your heart yearns for God. Prayer is conversation between you and God.

Well...easier said that done...

The ways we pray and the methods of praying we choose have a lot to do with who we are

How many of you are familiar with the MBTI – Myer’s Briggs Typology Indicator?

Tool/instrument to help us understand ourselves

Not a test

Not a psychiatric tool

Does not diagnose mental illness or any other illness

It’s sometimes described by the phrase “Gifts differing” – whoever you are – is a gift...

It is a tool to help us understand:

How we get energized

How we take in information

How we make decisions

How we organize our lives

16 combinations of four opposites

Four opposites – a dominant one and a secondary

Let’s consider the first letters – E and I - how we get energized...

Extraverted – introverted

Now you have to put aside your immediate first reaction and definition to these

Two words to describe people – because you will immediately use a definition that is negative and in MBTI typology – whatever you are drawn to naturally is strength and your secondary way is a growing edge...

When we hear extravert – oh the life of the party – the

Loud one who never listens

When we introvert – the wilting violet at the dance that clings to the wall...

Let go of those definitions...

Rather it works this way:

An extravert is a person who gets energized by being with people...

An introvert is someone who gets energized by being alone

Now – the truth is we are all a mix of both – but likely we have one – either extravert or introvert that we lean naturally to...

To be a full and happy human we need to both understand and function out of both our introvert and extravert...

Take a moment – where are you (not where you wish you were –
Where are you?)

One is not right or wrong – it simply is

And we each have a dominant or stronger preference...so I'll pick on our Minister Emeritus as an example...

Cliff McMurtry

How do we know Cliff is an extravert – an extravert is the
Last one to leave the party

Most Sundays Betty is in the hall with her coat on – her
Hands folded and a smile on her face

Waiting for Cliff

The party is not over...there is still someone to talk to – being with people energizes Cliff...

And Cliff comes down the hall – most everyone is gone and
He's energized...

Does that mean he does not enjoy or not need introverted time?
Of course not...Cliff also uses his introverted nature...

Here is how it affects prayer for example...

I'm a strong extravert...I lean that way naturally and I certainly know my introverted side – but introversion
though necessary does not energize me in the same way extraversion does...

Given a choice to attend a seven day silent prayer retreat
Or a conference with a speaker, break out groups, worship, singing and some silent prayer

Likely I'd choose – the conference...lots of time with people and limited time alone....

I did a seven day silent retreat once

Day one was awesome

Eating in silence

Quiet time

Reading the bible

One half hour of talking to your spiritual director

Day 2 came along and on this lovely multi acre retreat center

I had found the hole in the hedge that took me out to the street that had the Tim Horton's at the end...

Day 3 – I went for a coffee after lunch – but still
Enjoyed the silence...but I needed something more...

Day 4 – well – I did breakfast at Tim Horton’s as
Well as mid afternoon coffee

Day 5 – well I was ready to go home and write my sermon in
The local coffee shop

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There is no right or wrong way to talk with God...

Some people pray with scripture

Some people use prayer guides

Some people journal

Some people use art

Some people pray at a set time each day

Some people walk and pray

Some people jog

Other’s join a small prayer group

Some people pray while they knit, they garden, they crochet They work in their shop While they read Walk in nature or along the road...

Some people use centering prayer

Some people use complex and disciplined forms of Ignatius prayer

Some people dance

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In that relationship of “Prayer” that I spoke of...

We each find a way or the ways that work...

I’ve wrestled with prayer all my life...and failed many
time

Thankfully God’s love for us in not dependent upon our
being perfect with our prayers

Remember I spoke about intent...its not conquering a method

in praying that counts – it's the process of waking up
and being transformed by Grace that makes the difference

In other words – am I growing in my consciousness?
Of God's Grace
Of gratitude towards God
Of love towards my neighbour
And that in life and death and life beyond death – I am
Not alone

This I know about me and my prayers...

When some one speaks about praying every day for an hour –
I immediately feel guilty

And commit myself anew to such discipline...by day 2 I've
Failed and feel miserable...

But I know for me – in the uniqueness of who I am – I
Have to explore some different ways...

Mutter a lot – talking to God

Walk by me at the coffee shop – I might be in prayer

By my computer – a Celtic daily prayer book and a book of prayers as well as the Lion's Book of prayer by my
toilet

I like things – icons, crosses, candles, statues – they
Remind me of my relationship with God and job me to consciousness

I occasionally journal

I have a alter in my office and a portable one I travel with

And it is in those ways and others – that I nurture my side
Of the relationship with God

Which is intent
Availability
Listening and talking

God listens and listens and listens to our prayers no matter what form they come in...

Let me end with this beautiful but simple prayer – written by someone in the initial stages of dementia:

Dear Lord Jesus
I don't know who I am,
I don't know where I am
And I don't know what I am . But please love me. (Lyn Klug from The way of Healing – Oxford: Lion 1999) p. 35.

