

Text: [John 17:1-10, 15-23](#)
Date: March 10, 2019 – Lent 1
Title: “Prayer: The Urgent vs. The Important”
Theme: We have allowed our prayer lives to focus on urgent concerns rather than the important work of knowing Jesus & becoming one with him.

Intro

This Lent, we are going to focus on the gospels
And we’re going to explore them using the themes of discipleship we find in our membership vows
When we join the church, we commit to support this community through our prayers, presence, gifts, service and witness
We believe that these are important dimensions of discipleship
And so our “Disciples’ Path” small groups that we’re offering flow through these same themes
BTW there’s still time to join one if you’d like to get involved – in fact, if you come out to the one that meets tonight you really haven’t missed any content since we cancelled last week’s due to the weather

Today’s topic is PRAYER
And instead of looking at the traditional scripture for this day – Jesus’ temptation in the wilderness –
We decided to look at another time of crisis – the prayers Jesus prays in a moment of great difficulty
On the night before he goes to the cross

Question

What is your favorite way/time/place to pray?

Sermon

1

John’s gospel is different from any of the other gospels
That has been recognized from the beginning
Matthew, Mark and Luke share many of the same stories
They include many of the same teachings

But John is unique
Jesus talks in these long, sometimes very convoluted speeches
We have a hard time keeping up
And to hear John tell it, the disciples did too
They often come off looking very thick

It's clear in John's gospel that Jesus is no mere man
He is the Son of God
He seems at times to float above the ground rather than walk on it

For example, in John's gospel, there's no crisis in the Garden of
Gethsemane
In all the other gospels, after the Last Supper, Jesus goes with his disciples
to the Garden
And he prays, while the disciples struggle to stay awake
Do you remember what he prays?
"Father, let this cup pass from me. Yet not MY will but YOUR will be done."

If Jesus was tempted in the wilderness, certainly this temptation is every bit
as great – maybe greater
It's the temptation to run away when things are difficult – to flee from the
cross

Have you faced that temptation?
It's the temptation to run from conflict
To go along and give in rather than stand on your integrity
To do what's easy rather than what's hard
We know that temptation – it's very real

2

We know that story about the Garden
And we love it, we love that prayer he prays because it helps us to see that
there were moments where even Jesus – in his humanity – struggled
to discern God's will
We identify with those kinds of prayers

"Lord, I don't really know what's going on here, but get me out of this
mess!"
How many of you have prayed a few of those in your lifetime?

No question that I have
Circumstances spiral out of control
The things you thought were intended to do good, end up backfiring
Someone you thought you could trust turns their back on you
And now you're in the middle of it, saying,
"Lord, get me out of here!"

There are so many times when our prayer life is centered in on what's
URGENT

Because life seems to demand that of us
We can sometimes feel like we're going from one crisis to another

And if not us, then the people we care about
So today I'm praying for a situation in my own life,
tomorrow I'm praying for a situation one of my kids is facing,
the next day it's about Mom or Grandma or a brother or sister,
or someone we love here in the church

We are good at praying for the things that are URGENT
And we take that role seriously
Most of us, when we say we're going to pray for someone, we really do it
Just this week, an old and dear friend asked me to pray for a situation
And you can believe I took it seriously
This is a high honor that someone gives us, when someone identifies us as
a person of genuine faith whom they want praying for them

These are the things that are URGENT
We pray about them because we don't know how we CAN'T pray about
them

3

Now, John's gospel doesn't have a scene in Gethsemane
Yes, Jesus goes to the Garden
He goes there after about 5 chapters of what's essentially one really long
speech, including this prayer he prays in the Upper Room
John's Jesus doesn't pray prayers like "let this cup pass from me"
John's Jesus would NEVER do that

But his prayer is instructive for us this Lent – and here’s why
Jesus’ prayer in John’s gospel sidesteps what’s URGENT
In order to focus on what’s IMPORTANT

Now, frequently there’s a lot of overlap between what’s urgent and what’s
important

And stuff can move in between the categories
I filed our taxes this week – later than usual for me
Where are my last-minute people out there?
Filing taxes is IMPORTANT

But it’s not yet URGENT – there’s still what, about 5 weeks left?
We get to April 14, though – and it will be URGENT
If you’re not done by then, you’ll drop everything to get them done

There is an art to making time for what’s IMPORTANT
When you are inundated with things that are URGENT
And Jesus models this in the contrast between these two prayers we have
described in the gospels

4

Matthew/Mark/Luke – “Get me out of here! Let this cup pass from me!”
There seems to be a real possibility Jesus will NOT choose to drink this
cup

But in John’s gospel, there’s no doubt
Look at how he begins: “The hour has come”
Jesus has spent the whole of John’s gospel telling people: “my hour has
not yet come” (the idea arises in chapters 2, 5, 7, 12 of John)

But now, what does he say?
“Father, the hour has come.” (v.1)
There’s no doubt in John’s gospel that he won’t run from the cross
In fact, he talks about it as a completed thing:
“I glorified you on earth by FINISHING the work that you gave me to do.”

John’s Jesus doesn’t seem to worry about what seems URGENT because
he trusts fully in the nature of God
He trusts his Father to manage this moment, as hard as it is
And so he goes, even to the cross, in complete and utter peace

He's even able to SHIFT the CONTENT of his prayer
He's not praying for relief from this freight train barreling down on him
Instead, he's taking a longer view
What's he praying for?

He's praying for US
He's praying for his disciples first – here's what he says:
“This is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus
Christ whom you have sent.” (v.3)
He's praying that his people may KNOW him, first of all

And then he's praying, that they may be ONE
This is no superficial sense of unity
But a deep sense of oneness with each other that's based on our oneness
with GOD
“As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us...the
glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be
ONE, as we are ONE.”
Jesus desires that we have the same unity with him (and with each other)
that HE has with his Father

So these are the prayers of Jesus on the night before he goes to the cross
The URGENT prayer says, “Get me out of here!”
But then the stepped-back, calmly considered prayer is for the long-term
It's the IMPORTANT prayer:
That my people may KNOW me
And that my people may be ONE with each other, and with God

Now, I'm not sure which is a more accurate view – John's view or the other
Gospel writers'
But both are instructive – and necessary

5

We spend a lot of time in prayer focused on the things that are URGENT
We pray for the people who are hurting
We make intercessions for all those people we love and care about

The case I'm trying to make today is that there are other dimensions of
prayer that are just as important
That we can't allow to get crowded out

Prayer has other purposes
The first one being that we might KNOW Jesus
And the second one that we might become ONE with him
And through him with EACH OTHER

That seems like so much to ask
But I think it simply requires us to rethink how we approach prayer
It's not just about asking – whether on our own behalf or behalf of others

We don't get to know someone else by talking all the time, do we?
So knowing is about something else – being quiet, listening, reflecting
It's about meditation and praying the scriptures

It's about learning to trust God with what's URGENT
So that in our prayer time we can get down to what's IMPORTANT

To help with that, from Monday-Friday of this week,
we're going to send out an short email and post to our Facebook page a
new prayer practice for you to try
So if you're not getting our emails, take time today to email the office
Or make sure you like our Facebook page

The goal of prayer isn't for us to solve the world's problems
Instead, it's to do two things:
That we might KNOW Jesus
And become ONE with him

This week, resolve to set aside what's URGENT for what's IMPORTANT
And see how your prayer life changes
Amen.

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