

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost  
Jeremiah 7:5-7  
Psalm 146: 5-9  
3 John 1:2-8  
Luke 11:1-13

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Grace and Peace to you all from God our Savior and our Redeemer – Amen

The late great Catholic theologian Henri Nouwen once said *“Prayer is the most concrete way to make our home in God.”* So perhaps it is fitting that from a young age many of us become steeped in the practice of communal and individual prayer as we are welcomed into communities of faith as beloved children of God.

Some of us can vividly remember our earliest experiences of prayer – experiences that likely even happened within this very church. Whether it was our parent’s caring hands folding around our own as we first learned how to sit still in a posture of prayer or the way we have been invited to respond *“hear our prayer”* as our community of faith raises its concerns for the church, the world, and all who are in need – this sanctuary is one place many of us came to know we could ask for, and be joined with, in prayer.

But maybe for some of us, our earliest memories of prayer take us back to shared family graces, clasping hands with aunts, uncles, cousins, and friends over a warm blanket of food at thanksgiving. Prayers formed in great gratitude and joy for all our family was blessed to receive that year.

Or perhaps, for others, our lasting impressions of prayer come from the faith filled promises of our grandparents who often told us they remembered us in prayer each and every day. Prayers that have carried our life at times whether we have known it or not – and prayers that have sustained us in the great love of God we have come to know through the care of the great company of saints who have gone before us.

No matter where our earliest memories of prayer come to rest – they laid a foundation for us to connect not only with God, but also with our deepest longings as children of God within this world. For this reason, prayer has become not only a mark of our life as people of faith – but also a very personal and intimate way we come to connect with God in the company of those we are invited to pray.

To pray with and for one another takes a level of vulnerability our world simply doesn’t teach us to embrace. And if we are being truly honest with ourselves – we know there aren’t many places within our lives where we are encouraged to freely share what we are grateful for, to name the ways we hope to be healed, or to even have space held for us to share our deepest needs. And it’s important to lift up that it not only takes

vulnerability to share these deep longings with others – but it takes a degree of vulnerability to hold sacred space for the prayers of another to be spoken aloud or held within their heart as we are invited into a deeper relationship with God and our neighbor.

Leaning into that kind of vulnerability can be a scary thing to embrace.

It can be hard to set aside our own self-doubt and accept the fact that we might not feel we have the “right words” to say - yet we trust that God will meet us there in the midst of that moment anyway.

It can be difficult to “simply be” with someone in the midst of deep pain or worry – but it helps if we can be open to holding space for God’s Spirit to move and breath among us in that place.

And it can take some courage for us to step out of our comfort zone and offer to pray for someone we might not know very well – because in praying with another we are opening up ourselves to the ways we have come to see and hold space for God’s promises within our world.

So how do we unpack our very real feelings, worries and concerns surrounding this holy practice - both for those we love and care for - and also those we may not know well? How do we begin to approach prayer within our own lives and world?

In the midst of our gospel this morning we hear a freeing truth about our call to this holy practice of prayer through the anxious questions of the disciples – mainly that it’s okay for us to admit – just as they did many years ago – that we still don’t quite have this whole prayer thing completely figured out, and that it’s more than okay to ask for guidance and help as we grow throughout our life as followers of Christ.

And I think one of the first things to take to heart from this exchange between Jesus and his disciple is that prayer isn’t about having the right technique or even the right words memorized to satisfy God in some way. Prayer is about being open to the process of being molded and shaped by the Spirit to be in right relationship with God, our neighbors, and our world.

I have a feeling that as Jesus was teaching the disciples about prayer as it’s recorded by Luke in our gospel this morning – he didn’t necessarily set out to institute a prayer that all of his followers would come to share in unison whenever they gathered for worship in his name. I’m not saying there is anything inherently wrong with how we’ve come to

use the *Lord's Prayer* as the body of Christ - but the fact that we have come to pray this prayer across the centuries as a community of faith does tell us something about the posture of prayer Jesus has asked us to embrace.

Through this call to prayer Jesus actively models for his followers – and for us – the power of prayer within our lives and world. A power not centered in our own abilities or voice but in the great promises of God we have come to trust and know to be true. Promises that rightly proclaim that no matter what comes to happen to us in this life that God will:

- hear us.
- provide for us.
- forgive us.
- protect us.
- and continue to call us to be generous in all we have been given.

And it is out of these promises that we trust and know we can ask for God's guidance, accompaniment, and care through prayer. Asks that are not made to God as if the Triune One was as some magical "genie in a bottle" who will grant our every request – but asks made in great trust and love for the one who holds our lives and our world in the holy promises of reconciliation, restoration, and grace.

Throughout my life of faith there has been no greater honor then to bear witness to the in-breaking presence of God with another when I have been asked to pray for their guidance, healing, or care within our life and world. In these moments of deep vulnerability, I have found myself sharing holy ground with others in unexpected ways that have not only changed my relationship with the one for whom I have been able to pray – but also my relationship with the One to whom I pray.

The Danish theologian and Pastor Soren Kierkegaard once wrote "*The function of prayer is not to influence God, but rather to change the nature of the one who prays.*" Likewise, I have grown to understand that through prayer God also calls us to better see, hear, know, and accompany our and our neighbor's greatest needs within the world.

As it turns out, prayer doesn't just change things - it changes us. And if we are diligent in seeking God not only for our needs but also for the needs of our neighbor, we open ourselves up in a new posture of listening and leaning into the Spirits call within the world.

A call that simply does not ask us to just send "thoughts and prayers" in response to the world's greatest needs – but to be moved by the promises of God in which we pray – to

actively use the gifts we have been given to seek justice, hold space for truth, provide care, and be present in the midst of our community's greatest hurt.

In teaching and calling us time and time again to a life of faith bound in prayer – Jesus is inviting us to live into the fullness of being the beloved children of God. An invitation that enables us to enter into a collaborative relationship with God. A relationship where we are actively being called into a deeper more honest and trusting relationship with the creator of all – who desires us to know and live into the promises of God we long to hear ring out within our world.

So may we, as followers of Christ, hear and embody the prayer we have come to hold so dear as we go from this place and into a world in need:

*Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come,  
your will be done,  
on earth as in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.  
Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.  
For the kingdom, the power,  
and the glory are yours now and forever.*

And may this be so among us – Amen.