

Pray in Jesus' name...
Matthew 6:5-8, John 15:9-17

Brothers and sisters, It's good to be back with you after being away on vacation – and one of the things which always strikes me about being away is how much stuff can happen in our world over a few weeks.

I always update the prayer list in the bulletin with local and world events for us to pray about before I leave at the end of June.

And I always wonder how accurate and current or more to the point – how out of date it will be when I return in August.

This year, during July, there was an attempted coup in Turkey, we had the several fatalities from police shootings, several fatalities from people retaliating to those police shootings, the personalities and dynamics involved in those whom the U.S. political parties are putting forward for the presidential race is mind boggling...

And closer to home a terror suspect was apprehended and killed by the authorities before he could do any serious damage, there was a pipeline spill which affect the water supply of a couple of large community in Saskatchewan, and the weather has gotten a bit mixed up - mistaking Calgary for Vancouver this summer.

And that's just what's making the headlines – that doesn't include all the challenges and trials and situations that have come up in our personal and family lives over the last month...

And to be honest friends, taking a look at what's going on in people's lives and what's going on in the world around us... it can all feel a bit overwhelming.

So much so that even the strongest and most positive of people would say – well there's not much we can do in the face of all this, but pray.

So I would suggest that prayer is probably the most common of all religious practices.

Because we've all been in those situations where we're in trouble, or we need help, and we don't know what else to do, and when nothing else seems to work...

Like this situation which the guys from Big Bang Theory find themselves in as they anticipate getting tickets for the new Star Wars movies. *(play Sheldon prays video clip)*

Now, sometimes a little light hearted comedy can not only help alleviate some of the heaviness of all that is going on around us...

But it can also help us see how praying in such a desperate manner, sending up a "Hail Mary" prayer to God as a last resort is not really the kind of prayer habit that we want to engage in or develop.

Not to mention the fact that such kinds of prayers do very little to relieve our anxiety and worry... because prayer is being used as a last resort.

You see friends, when you throw a "Hail Mary" pass in football there's no guarantee it will be caught and in the same way a "Hail Mary" prayer to God has no guarantee of being heard and thus of being answered...

And if we are going to effectively use prayer to respond to all needs and challenges and situations going on in our lives and in the world around us then we need to learn how to pray.

So that we have assurance that God really does hear our prayers no matter how big or small, and receive confidence that He is able deal with whatever we bring to him in prayer.

Now brothers and sisters in Christ, the sad truth is that many people either don't believe in God, or they believe He is too important, too busy, too far away and not concerned with what might be happening in our lives.

Like some big shot celebrity, CEO, or politician who won't hear or won't answer, and if you have you ever tried to get in contact with someone like that... someone in the upper

echelons of power, someone who has resources and influence, someone who can help you with your cause – you know how difficult – almost impossible - this can be.

Maybe you have a great idea on how to boost employee morale at your corporation – so you just pick up the phone and call the CEO to tell him about it - right?

Or maybe you need some help interpreting a particular section of the income tax law – so you simply email the Minister of Finance – Bill Morneau to get his advice...

Right, it's so easy like that...

Back in the early '90's, when the internet and email was relatively new... one of my fellow students at University decided to send an email to the then President of the United States – Bill Clinton- to protest some U.S. foreign policy.

However - All he got back was a form letter, thanking him for contacting the Office of the President, blah – blah – blah...

He was left wondering if President Clinton had received and heard what he wanted to say – in fact he wondered if anyone actually read the emails that went to the Whitehouse.

So he sent another email. This time he wrote - “Dear Mr. President, I would like to kill you.”

Well, he discovered that someone actually does read these letters - because a few days later the RCMP showed up at the school to investigate who had sent this email threat.

Not exactly the kind of interaction with the President's Office that he was looking for.

But the point is friends - that if you don't know whether or not your concerns and needs and input are being received and heard... you might end up doing some pretty foolish things to try to get the attention you're looking for.

People end up doing the same thing with prayer as well, here are some examples...

1) Shedding blood – humans have offered blood sacrifices since before history in order to attract divine attention. In 1 Kings 18, the bible tells the story of how the priests of Baal would cut themselves when they were trying to get their god – Baal, to respond to their prayers.

2) Others use Posture, Position, Repetition and Hygiene. Muslims believe that in order to speak with God one must face east, and follow prescribed postures, hand gestures, and that your body and clothes and the place of prayer must be clean, and they must pray only in Arabic.

And Hindus believe that “Ohm” is a divine sound, so if you repeat it enough and meditate on it for long enough - you may be able to connect with the divine in your prayers

Other branches of Hinduism use repetitive phrases like “*Hare KRSNA, KRSNA KRSNA, Hare Hare, Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare*” and they repeat this over and over and over when they pray.

3) And there’s a third option as well – for those who are a bit squeamish about blood and who can’t speak Arabic, and are short on the time needed for repetitive chanting... we might offering God a bargain, ask for a sign, or deliver Him an ultimatum.

Usually it goes something like “Dear God if you get me out of this situation I promise that I will... “ _____,” be a kinder person, go to church, read the bible, give to charity, etc... just fill in the blank.

Or we ask or look for something wildly impossible to happen, that’s not related to our prayer as an assurance the our prayer will be answered, or we let God know that if he doesn’t answer our prayer – we’re done with him.

Friends, the truth is that none of these things guarantee that God will hear and answer our prayers. Praying longer, more intensely, more eloquently, in specific patterns or languages does not get God’s attention.

Nor does strange events indicate that God has heard us and will grant our request, and who are we really... to give ultimatums to the Almighty??

So brothers and sisters in Christ, all this is why our Lord Jesus instructed his disciples, and us in Matt 6:7 not to “*babble like the pagans*” when we pray – that doesn’t get God’s attention.

Instead, Jesus tells us in John 15:16 that “the Father will give us whatever we ask for - **in his name.**”

So there are no requirements to shed blood, use certain postures, or positions, languages, or sounds in order to have the assurance and confidence that God will listen and respond with to our prayers.

Rather we are simply to ask in the name of Jesus.

But... asking in the name of Jesus is not a magic phrase that you tack onto the end of your wish list which somehow guarantees your wishes will be granted.

Rather, the larger context in John 15 teaches us that praying in Jesus name is about three things - Agape Love, Relationships, and Kingdom business.

One of the first things you will notice when you read this passage is how many times love is mentioned in it, nine - to be specific.

And it’s a particular kind of love too – it is Agape.

Agape is considered the highest form of love because it is doing what is best for someone else, even when that person will hate you, hurt you or could possibly even kill you for your efforts.

It is to draw close to someone who is toxic and poisonous and to absorb that into yourself in order to heal them. Agape describes God’s actions of love for us as human beings.

Because of Sin we naturally hate God and want to rebel against Him, ignore him, but God “agape’s” us.

He draws close to us in covenants – through Noah, Abraham, Moses, King David – until finally He Fathered Jesus Christ – His Word became flesh, uniting with human nature in its rebellious sinful toxic state.

Jesus Christ proclaimed that He was salvation to other humans who didn't believe him, who hated him, and who eventually killed him.

And He did so because He knew his death was the only way to pay for prior covenant unfaithfulness and also to begin a new covenant relationship with them.

So in this passage Christ says – “As the Father *agaped* me, so I have *agaped* you....my command is this- *agape* each other as I have *agaped* you”

Friends, to pray in Jesus name is to speak to God with an understanding of how humans have been rescued by God through Christ when God had every right to destroy us because of our rebellion...but he didn't.

So, when we pray – we need to acknowledge our sins, confess them if need be, and ask for forgiveness...

It also means that we are praying that others will come to an awareness of their own sin and will be given forgiveness through Jesus.

And it especially means that we are asking God to help us love others the way He loved us.

Remember Jesus taught us that we should “*love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us*” (Matt 5:44)

Additionally this means our prayers will be characterized by humility, thanksgiving, gratitude, and joy... because we have been forgiven.

In fact Jesus says he's told us this “so our joy may be complete.” (Matt 15:11)

So it is knowing God's agape love and experience those actions of his in our lives that moves us on to the next aspect of praying in Jesus name- relationship.

These two passages are full of relationship terms: father, friend, servant, master...

So this teaches that prayer is not **what** you know or do - it's **who** you know.

Now if my friend who tried to email President Clinton had known someone who worked for the President – he might have had an easier time trying to get in touch with Him.

For example, my wife is an early childhood education professional - and she has lots of great idea and insights that our provincial gov't could use to improve things for young children and their families.

She recently had an opportunity to speak with Brian Jean, leader of Alberta's Wild Rose Party, about some of these ideas and sending him some more information about them.

Now she had this opportunity because she is good friends with someone who is well connected in provincial politics and active within that party and she was invited to a function and introduced to Mr. Jean by her friend.

And friends it works the same way with prayer.

In this passage we hear Jesus telling his disciples that their relationship with him has grown to a point where they are no longer "students" or servants – instead they are his "friends"

And when Jesus calls them his friends it means that He is entrusting his mission to them, he is taking them into his confidence so they can carry on in his place... *"you are my friends if you do what I command"* (vs 14)

So it would be comparable to the disciples being made full partners in the firm, they are no longer contract employees.

Thus everything Jesus has learned from his Father he has made known to his disciples, who in turn have passed it on to us through the gospels.

So Luke records Jesus announcing in 4:18-19 of his gospel that Jesus announced he was sent *“to proclaim good news to the poor, freedom for the prisoners, recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, and to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”*

So praying in Jesus name is to ask for the things that Jesus was sent into this world to do – to ask for signs of the Kingdom of Heaven to be given – healing from sickness and disease, deliverance from evil spirits, miracles over nature, for people to know God has sent salvation!

Praying in Jesus name is praying that people’s eyes would be opened to see that salvation.

They would know and accept the truth about who Jesus Christ is! As He says in John 10:30 *“I and the Father are one”*

Friends – Jesus Christ is God – fully human yet fully divine, so if there is one thing you remember from this message as to why God hears prayers offered in Jesus name... it’s because Jesus IS the mediator between human and divine. He is fully human and fully God!

So, the final aspect of what it means to pray in Jesus name then has to do with the Kingdom of God.

You will remember that when Christ taught us to pray He instructed us to ask *“your Kingdom come your will be done – on earth as it is in Heaven”* (Mat 6:10)

So in our passage this morning when Jesus says *“I’ve chosen you to go and bear fruit that will last.”* (vs. 16) he is speaking about how we manifest the Kingdom of God – instances where we help to make it *“on earth... as it is in Heaven.”*

So what I mean by this is more than people believing in Jesus, and living better moral lives... it is human beings doing life, doing what we were created to do in relationships, family, business, sports, arts, in everything - and consciously doing that for God as King, and doing it in a way that recognizes, honors, and obeys the design of God as Creator.

Does that start to explain it? It's a big subject – it has to be. God's Kingdom encompasses the Universe, the Cosmos... because “*God so loved the Cosmos – that he sent His only son!*” (John 3:16) Jesus – in whose name we pray.

So as we pray about anything and everything in our lives and in this world - our prayers will become more effective as we frame what we are praying about in terms of Christ's mission, in terms of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Now I'm not just saying this to you as nice sounding stuff to say about prayer. It's what I have had to learn to do.

When I receive some unsettling news which makes me rather anxious and worried, often that verse from Philippians will come to mind “*Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.*” (Phil 4:6) So I pray about it.

But, often friends I'm feeling so anxious and worried that I'm a bit consumed by it and my first attempts at praying things are like “*agh God I'm really worried about this – please help me feel better... in Jesus name amen.*”

Which, truth be told doesn't really help me feel any better.

Then by God's grace I come around to realizing I need to be a bit more intentional about what I was praying about to God, but what to say???

And then the Holy Spirit often gives me some direction on how to pray about my situation – often times it has to do with God's agape love, the specifics of a relationship with God, or in terms of the Kingdom of God.

And then I can articulate my prayers far better and pray specifically and directly about the situation.

And then just as the scriptures promise - I have peace, and the anxiety and the worry are held at bay or disappear.

And this isn't just talking ourselves out of feeling worried, like we can do sometimes...

No... brothers and sisters we will be given peace because what we are asking for – Is in Jesus name! Amen?!

Friends, it is absolutely true that we can pray to God about anything and everything – but, to pray about anything and everything in Jesus name means that we need see our concerns in the light of God's agape love, his relationship to us, and His Kingdom.

So friends, when you are anxious and worried, when you have problems and needs, when life is overwhelming and your initial prayers don't seem to bring any comfort...

I want to encourage you friends – at those times, ask the Holy Spirit to help you pray about your situation in light of God's Kingdom.

And I'll give you a few scripture verses, which the Holy Spirit might use to help you do that ...

Col 3:17 "And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him."

Gen 50:20 "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives."

Luke 4:18-19 "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me - to proclaim good news to the poor, freedom for the prisoners, recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

Rom 8:28 *“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”*

Pray about your situation in light of what God is doing in you – His relationship with you because of His Agape love ... and around you, because we are part of making it on earth as it is in heaven – and friends you will then be praying in Jesus name.

You know, there are few things more frustrating than trying to get ahold of someone, trying to communicate with someone, trying to send information and not knowing if your messages are being received – especially in an urgent situation.

Friends – give glory to our Lord Jesus Christ, that because of who He is, and because of what He has done – we have assurance and confidence that our Heavenly Father hears our prayers... and He will respond.

In Jesus name... Amen.