

Short Notes on Prayer

Len Hjalmarson, 6/2009

- prayer is subversive
- prayer is submissive
- prayer is effective – always
- prayer is Trinitarian
- prayer is spiritual

At our meeting this past week Jesse exhorted us to pray, and suggested that we need some teaching.

While teaching is always a good idea, Jesus seems to tell us that the classroom is life. He sends out his disciples and he tells them that they will have a teacher that will go with them wherever they go (John 14-15)

It's while we are on mission that we learn to pray.

In both Luke 9 and Luke 10 Jesus sends his disciples out with bags loaded full of food.. plenty of cash.. and a strategic plan. Not. They go out with nothing. No wonder they learned to pray! When we are vulnerable we learn dependence; we exercise faith.

Prayer is subversive

When the disciples asked Jesus to teach them, he taught them the prayer of the kingdom.

*May your name be Holy.
May your kingdom come on earth...*

We pray "Your kingdom come." Not *my* kingdom, and not my way – but God's. Not another king for this world, not another Caesar or President promising the good life if we'll just keep our levels of consumption high – but God's kingdom and *his shalom*. His kingdom always confronts the rulers and the ways of this world. It's a subversive kingdom, and an enduring peace. Brian McLaren put it like this:

"The Kingdom of God.. is a revolutionary, counter-cultural movement-proclaiming a ceaseless rebellion against the tyrannical trinity of money, sex, and power. Its citizens resist the occupation of this invisible Caesar through three categories of spiritual practice. First.. generosity.. second.. prayer... finally.. fasting."

When this world is running after all the things we think we need, it is those who have their lives saturated in God who will demonstrate an alternative way of living – the presence of the kingdom. As Hauerwas put it, "The church doesn't *have* a social strategy – the church **is** a social strategy." (*Resident Aliens*)

Prayer is submissive

We tend to pray in lists. But Jesus tells us that our Father knows what we need before we ask him. The way to learn to pray is to learn to listen. Good listeners are good pray-ers, because they are more interested in learning what God's will is than promoting their own needs.

One brother said that prayer is "reporting for duty." If God is really in charge, and if it really is his kingdom, this makes sense. So maybe we need to be quiet a little longer and ask the Lord for his agenda. If we pray in his will "we know we have what we ask."

Prayer is effective – always

The problem is that it's not always effective the way I want it to be; or in the time I prefer. See the last point. It's God's kingdom, not mine.

There is really only one thing I can count on when I pray. If I really pray, I come away differently. My eyes and my ears are open a little wider to the kingdom perspective. My faith is a little richer. He increases, I decrease.

Prayer is Trinitarian

The Spirit prays in us. Christian faith is unique in that it is the only faith that claims to know God as a Trinity – a perfect unity of love. Not only does God reveal himself as Father, Son and Spirit, but it is the only way we know him. As Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 2,

The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God.

11 For who knows a person's thoughts except that person's own spirit within?

In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.

12 We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us.

13 This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit..

and then in Romans 8

the Spirit helps us in our weakness.

We do not know what we ought to pray for,

but the Spirit himself intercedes for us

through wordless groans.

So without the Spirit, no prayer – at least, not Christian prayer. It is the Spirit who prays in us, in words given by the Spirit and offered back to the Father. But for that prayer to occur, we must either listen to the Spirit and then speak what we hear or be silent Which brings me to the final point.

Prayer is spiritual

We don't necessarily need words to pray, and sometimes it's better to do without them. Any intercessor knows that the most effective prayer is not one that sounds the best, but one that comes from the heart and goes right back to the heart of God.

But if all this is true, then one of the questions we have to ask about the life of our community is this: how do we help people avoid being so busy that they can no longer hear the voice of God, who speaks in silence? Because finally the point of prayer is to deepen our life in God until prayer is no longer something we do but like our breath itself, springing out of our life in Christ. Ultimately the heart's prayer is wordless because it is resting in the continuing work of the Spirit who upholds all things.

"No longer I who live but Christ who lives in me."

"For from him, and to him, and through him are all things..."