

Pastor Roy's sermon from March 23, 2014

Children's lesson: Speed dialing God. When do you pray?

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Prayer is pondering. Mulling over the details of our lives and holding them up to light of God's love. Offering the details up to God. Giving them over to mercy. Sometimes this includes learning to allow dysfunctional thought habits to cease.

Moses takes his troubles to God. In the middle of the desert, Israel demands water. "God, they are going to kill me! How can I give them water?" Soon he is able to draw water from the desert rock—to do the impossible because he prayed.

Paul learns that suffering produces endurance, endurance produces character, and character reveals hope. This strong hope is the gift of the Spirit revealed in prayer. Paul held up his difficulties to God and learned this pattern of growth in faith. His faith did not come because he had natural wisdom or talent for understanding God. No, his faith grew out of his difficult experiences, his pain, his hardships and his joy in caring for those God had placed in his path. In prayer he listened to the Spirit sifting the details of his life. A mutual process of listening, and speaking, and struggling. Then Paul follows the Spirit of his Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus prayed with a listening ear to the Spirit's voice. This Voice called him to question some common assumptions of his people. Assumptions that foreigners and persons of mixed race and faith were unclean, bad, to be avoided at all cost, and that this was actually part of being a good Jew. The men assumed that women were unclean and to be avoided lest they cause a righteous man to stumble and sin. Women who had "checkered" marital histories were even more unclean and to be avoided. Jesus learned to question these assumptions, obviously, when he openly talks to a likely shunned woman. Perhaps this is all summed up well in Jesus' statement, "I have food to eat, about which you know nothing."

In prayer we slowly learn to depend upon those things which truly matter. We learn to follow faithfully. Faithfully does not mean perfect. Faithfully means "with faith." Succeeding or failing, with faith. Faith is patient, humble hope. Faithfulness is not goodness, it is openness to the voice of the Spirit. Faithfulness is the decision to pray and hope in God's mercy which teaches us to be merciful. Moses, Paul, and Jesus were merciful. It was not easy. The price for their faithfulness was great.

It demanded all. No, it did not demand perfection—whatever that might be. It demanded commitment to letting go. In prayer they faithfully pursued mercy. They were full of emotion and conflicted thoughts, but they finally came down on the side of mercy. In prayer, faithfulness is an all consuming force. Through one struggle after another. One weary confession of need and error after another. But it is the orientation of the faithful, in life. Openness and desire for divine faithfulness. It's a refusal to give up or give in to the darkness, to the hatred, to the judgment that another is evil and deserves to be ignored or set aside. Mercy sensibly gives another chance, hopes for a "Yes" response to God.

We must continually reorient ourselves to the light of God's love in prayer. Animals who live outside understand this on chilly or downright cold days. Their bodies face the sun. Sure, if it is windy, their

backs go to the wind. But if possible one side will face the sun. The sun warms. The light of God's mercy warms our spirits and souls. It fills our souls with light and life. Prayer is a constant reorienting of ourselves to God's mercy.

In this season of preparation, of waiting, of hoping—let us pray. Let us follow the Spirit's call to listen. To live faithfully. Not perfectly, just open to the Spirit's lead. May we follow that nudge to orient our decisions, our reactions, our goals, our assumptions, our attitudes, our commitments Godward. Is it easy? You know it's not. Is it convenient? Is it enjoyable? Perhaps not, but it is the only path into joy and peace that cannot be taken away from us.

Paul suggests, “We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ—which is what I'm talking about here—living with faithfulness--through whom we have access to grace, and we boast in God's glory. And in our sufferings, knowing that they produce endurance, character, and hope. All of this is a gift of the Spirit received in prayer.

So Pray. Be reoriented to the Spirit of God's mercy, love, peace, and joy. This is the life of faith. Thanks be to God! Amen.