

Intro: I've put slips of paper in your pews and I want everyone to take one right now. And what I want you to do is search your heart and mind with honesty, look deeply into your life and ask yourself, where do I need help from God? What is it that troubles me, takes my breath away, what makes me long for relief or an answer? Perhaps you need transformation. Or maybe someone else's problem weighs heavily on your mind. When you are ready, write something down. During the offering, the acolytes are going to collect them in a separate basket. If you can't bring yourself to write it, leave it blank and put your slip in the basket anyway. You can sign it or not sign it. And here's the deal, I am promising to add your prayers to my confidential prayer life for the next month. I want you to know they will not show up on a prayer list unless you put them there. This is between you, your pastor and God. Together we will pray mightily.

**Occasionally, I get asked to repeat a sermon.**

It can be very flattering but it is usually the topic that has hit home, not my words.

When I am asked, I **do try to address the topic again**, because I assume that if one asked there are others who need to hear the message again.

**However, there is only one sermon that I have been asked on numerous occasions to repeat**, and that is my prayer dot sermon. I first preached it in 1998 and again in 2010. And recently I was asked to preach it again.

I went back to look at those sermons and discovered they were really more like prayer dot paragraphs in sermons on larger topics. But it was the idea of the prayer dot that connected with people.

**The idea of the dot, itself, is not all that profound.**

It was just something I picked up at an evangelism conference. What touched people's hearts, I think, was the issue of prayer.

**Prayer is probably the easiest and yet the most difficult of our faith disciplines.**

For some, it feels like a writing assignment in a confirmation class.

What do I say first, second, third?

**Adoration:** Give God praise and honor for who he is as Lord over all.

**Confession:** Honestly deal with the sin in your prayer life.

**Thanksgiving:** Verbalize what you're grateful for in your life and in the world around you.

**Supplication:** Pray for the needs of others and yourself.

How do I address God?

**With poetic beauty:** *Oh Heavenly and Mighty God, Ruler of the Universe, mysterious are your ways...*

**Or like talking to a buddy:** *Hey Jesus, it's just me, Cath Mode here, and if you are not too busy, I would just like to talk a bit about ...*

If those are your questions, I'm not really going to address that this morning. I do have a couple of prayer guides on the back table that you take home with you.

I think the real questions are more like

**Does God even listen to my prayer?** Does he know my heart?

**And Is God moved by my prayer?** Can I change God's mind?

**And hardest of all: why are some prayers answered and others not?** I remember a moment in my life when I was praying for my father. He had been undergoing tests for cancer. We were praying hard that the results would be negative. I was at a Bible study and one of the participants announced that her father had just heard that his test for cancer had come out negative. Later that day, we heard my father had cancer.

**You see the problem.**

There is so much that I can say about prayer but today I am going to limit it to three things our lessons teach us about prayer.

**1) In our Old Testament Lesson** **Jeremiah is a faithful prophet who loves the word of the Lord but the people will not listen to him** and now he is rejected by all of those around him, abandoned really. **And God listens to his prayer of complaint.** God hears his plea and his answer to Jeremiah is: *I am with you to save you and deliver you.*

*I am with you* is God's first answer to every prayer.

Jesus told his disciples just before the Ascension, I am with you always. Always.

**So, you pray about a job.** You get the job or you don't get the job. **The first answer to your prayer before all that follows is *I am with you always*.** That's huge. It means no matter what, you are not alone and you are not abandoned. That's the same message of Jesus' incarnation and later his death and resurrection. God is with us.

**2) In his letter to the Roman's Paul tells these early Christians to persevere in prayer.** Furthermore, earlier in this same letter and again in 1 Thessalonians Paul calls us *to pray without ceasing*.

Someone once asked me if that was really possible.

Can anyone really pray without ceasing?

I think I can and do because **praying always is an extension of God's promise: *I am with you always*.**

**I still carry a lot of what I learned in Sunday School with me.** I remember being very young and a teacher telling me that God heard everything I thought.

I also remember being told that I could pray silently.

God heard me even if I didn't say it out loud.

So it occurred to me that everything I thought was a prayer.

**Of course some of what I was thinking was not prayer-worthy! But then there was forgiveness.**

So, all day I am talking to God, whether I know it or not.

As I have grown in the faith, I have come to understand **prayer as an openness to and orientation toward God.**

It is less about the "what" what I want and more about the "who" who I am addressing.

This idea has shaped my ministry and my life. I am in prayer all day. God is on my mind all day, just as is my husband and children. **God is my partner in life... and in death...and in new life on the other side of death.**

**3) Finally and most importantly, running through the whole New Testament is the good news of Jesus' sacrificial love given for us.**

Prayer is an expression of that love. Love for God, for God's creation, love for our families, our communities, our church, our neighbors and all those in need, including our enemies. And if we love something enough to pray about it then we love enough to do something about it.

Prayer is intended to motivate us to action, to be God's love in the world. Remember: next week is **God's Work; Our Hands Sunday**. ☺

**Okay, now about the dots.** They are in your pews. Take one and put that dot on your watch, computer, smartphone, or some other place where you look frequently. Then every time you look at that dot for the next month say a prayer and sometimes include me and Our Savior's.

When someone notices it, use it as an opportunity to tell them the story: *"It's a prayer dot that I got at Our Savior's. It helps me to remember to pray for others in need."*

That simple answer may be the start of an amazing **faith-conversation**.

You may even have someone ask you to pray for them.

Remember God promises ***"I am with you always."***

This is the good news of prayer. This is the good news of the gospel. Amen