

"Jesus Prays for His Disciples"
John 17

Matt Matthews
From the First Pew at First Presbyterian Church
Champaign, Illinois
May 24, 2020

Today I want to suggest we seed all that we do with prayer. I want to suggest that we pray at the beginning of each day's journey. I want to suggest we pray in the middle. And I want to suggest we pray at the close of each day. I want to suggest that we seed all that we do with prayer.

Paul would call this prayer without ceasing, perhaps. That's a good way to put it. I want to call it praying at the (1) beginning of our day, praying in the (2) middle of our day, and praying at the (3) end of each day.

I. Here in John's Gospel today Jesus is praying for his disciples. Their ministry has not formally begun. Jesus has been teaching them. Jesus has been molding them. But they have not yet sent out on ministry alone.

So, this prayer, is a prayer at the beginning.

- Holy Father, protect [my disciples] in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one.
- I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them. Don't keep them out of harm's way, just protect them when harm comes.
- Sanctify them in the truth.

This is a prayer at the beginning.

Pray at the beginning of the meal. *Thank you, God for this food. By your hands we all are fed; give us LORD our daily bread.*

*Watch out mouth
watch out gums
watch our stomach
here it comes!
Thank you, LORD!*

This is a prayer at the beginning of the long journey. *Be good to me, dear LORD, the sea is so wide and my boat is so small* (Breton Fisherman Prayer).

This is the prayer at the beginning of the day, *"I lift up my eyes to the hills, from where does my help come? My help comes from the LORD, maker of heaven and earth."*

It is appropriate that we pray at the beginning.

II. It is appropriate to pray in the middle of our day, in the middle of the journey.

We begin every meeting of the Session with worship and prayer. We pray for members of our flock by name.

But sometimes I've been in Session meetings where an elder will stop us before we make a big decision and suggest we pray. We pause, and we pray in the middle. In some way this is an interruption. But what better way to be interrupted than by prayer, with prayer, in prayer.

Alex Wimberly's dad, William, was interim pastor here some years ago. He is a leader at the Corrymeela Christian Community in Northern Ireland.

He offers this prayer for the middle of a pandemic:

God with us and God within us: just because we're all going through it doesn't mean this is normal. Every body's a little stressed out, 'out of our comfort zone.' So, we need to find a reserve of patience with ourselves and everyone else. We all could use a bit more compassion, and the time to take a deep breath.

*Help us draw out our more tolerant selves, the ones who can cope with this mess. Give us the space to centre ourselves and find you. At peace. In our midst. **Amen.***
(from 15 May 2020)

This is a prayer that comes in the middle, in media res, on the way. It's good to pray in the middle, when things are underway. It's good to interrupt our journey with a prayer in the middle.

III. It is appropriate to pray at the end of our day.

In some way, that's what our Memorial Day prayers are. We pray at the end of the day for all those who came before and made sacrifices serving our country. I'll remember members of the 422nd and their struggles which began on December 16th 1944 in the Battle of the Bulge. We remember all men and women of all American wars.

We remember the firefighters who ran into the Towers as others were running out.

We pray for those who have died in battle, for their wives or husbands, for their orphans.

We pray that God would help us be agents of peace and that God would hurry the day when we study war no more.

Our funeral prayers are prayers we pray at the end of the day.

*O Lord, support us Lord all the day long
until the shadows lengthen,
and the evening comes,
and the busy world is hushed,
and the fever of life is over,
and our work is done...*

At the end of the day, we thank God for the race, for the winners, and the losers, and for the privilege of being able to participate.

*Now I lay me down to sleep,
I pray the Lord my soul to keep.*

*May God guard me through the night,
And wake me with the morning's light. Amen.*

We say our prayers at night. We pause at the end to remind ourselves that our passage was not made alone. But God-with-us was with us. So, we pause to say thanks.

We say our prayers at the end of each day. We say our prayers and sing our prayers.

*Day is done, but love unfailing, dwells ever here;
Shadows fall but hope prevailing calms every fear.
God our maker none forsaking
take our hearts of love's own making
watch our sleeping; guard our waking;
be always near.*

A prayer I often pray at the end is this: Even though we find our way to the end, even at the grave we make our song, Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.

* * *

A good life is a life steeped in prayer. Morning, noon, and night. We pray at the beginning for guidance, for protection, that God would make our steps holy. We pray in the middle as we are on the brink of decisions, mid-step in our day. And we pray at the end when the day is done.

At the beginning, in the middle, at the end we pray.

When we pray, we open ourselves up to the God who listens to prayer. And if we listen, there's no telling what God will say.

And it's worth remembering, long before we pray for ourselves or others, Jesus has prayed for us.

AMEN.

How Do I Pray?

I.
How do I pray?
What do I say
to a God from whom
nothing is secret?

II.
How do I say
What's in my heart
---a heart that is swirling and aching,
a heart that's a secret to me?

III.
God of the cosmos
Ruler of all
Lover of nature and nations
O Spirit of God I'm in awe . . .

IV.

I stand here before you
I shake in your sight.
Unworthy and broken and pleading
and seeking your light.

V.

How do I reach you
With a voice that's so weak?
Or do you do the finding
And into this darkness you seek even me—*even me?*

VI.

How do I pray?
What do I say
to a God from whom
nothing is secret?

--- *Matt Matthews*

John 17:9 and selected verses

" 9I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. . . Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one. 12While I was with them, I protected them in your name that you have given me. . . 15I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one. . . . 17Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. 18As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. 19And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth.

" 9I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. . . Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one. 12While I was with them, I protected them in your name that you have given me. . . 15I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one. . . . 17Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. 18As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. 19And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth.