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Mark 10:46-52
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Petition and Intercession

When my children were little, it was not uncommon for one of the them to ask, “Daddy, will you play with me?” Or “Daddy, will you help me with this or fix that?” Now that they are older, they don’t ask me to play with them very much, but they still call whenever they need help sorting out adult challenges.

As we continue our series on Prayer, we turn our attentions to the asking part of it. That we are typically very good at. But asking can be two fold. Asking for ourselves...that is petition. And asking for others...that is intercession.

Our scripture story today is clearly one of petition where Jesus and his disciples were traveling on their way to Jerusalem when they encounter a blindman who unashamedly asked Jesus for what he wanted. Turn with me to Mark 10:46-52 and we hear for ourselves.

46 Then [Jesus and his disciples] came to Jericho. As [they], together with a large crowd, were leaving the city, a blind man, Bartimaeus (which means “son of Timaeus”), was sitting by the roadside begging. **47** When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”

48 Many rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, “Son of David, have mercy on me!”

49 Jesus stopped and said, “Call him.”

So they called to the blind man, “Cheer up! On your feet! He’s calling you.”

50 Throwing his cloak aside, he jumped to his feet and came to Jesus.

51 “What do you want me to do for you?” Jesus asked him.

The blind man said, “Rabbi, I want to see.”

52 “Go,” said Jesus, “your faith has healed you.” Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus along the road.

Let us pray. Prayer of Illumination.

I love the simplicity of this story. While it may not model precisely what we’ve come to know what prayer is, it reflects everything that Pete Greig has encouraged us through this series. “Keep it simple. Keep it real. And keep it up.” So this morning I’d like to look at this story in more depth as an example of authentic petitionary prayer. I want to consider what happens when we pray by petitioning? Then we will look at a few examples of intercessory prayer in the

bible and ask what makes them different. And finally, we will ask how is God inviting us to pray in this way?

The word to pray comes from the Middle English ‘to ask earnestly’ and the Latin *precari* which means ‘to entreat.’¹ *Precari* is the root of precarious because life is precarious.

Several times in the Gospels, Jesus said, “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be open to you. For everyone who asks receives, whoever seeks finds; and to them who knock, the door will be opened.”²

In John, Jesus said, “I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.”³

Bartimeaus was desperate. The fact that we know his name is significant. Many who received Jesus’ healing were nameless. But this man was not. Perhaps he was a well known fixture along the road up to Jerusalem. Strategically planted to beg alms from worshippers on their way to celebrate the high holidays.

But more than money, when he heard that Jesus of Nazareth was coming by, he had something else on his heart. Mercy. Notice that that is what he asked Jesus for first.

The Greek word for mercy is *eleison*. It means to have compassion or to show mercy. I believe there were two things that Bartimaeus asked Jesus by saying this. The first was “Jesus, walk in my shoes and see what it is like to be blind.” That is compassion.

The second was mercy. But how odd that he begged for mercy. In biblical terms, mercy is defined as God's compassionate and loving kindness towards humanity, particularly in showing pity and forgiveness, even when it's within His power to judge or punish. It's not just about withholding punishment, but also about actively alleviating suffering and showing care for those in need. So if it was believed in their day that a person’s afflictions were on account of something they had done wrong, then Bartimaeus must have thought that himself. He was blind because of some wrong doing in his life.

That was why he asked for mercy first. He thought he deserved punishment, while his heart longed for something more.

Notice how Jesus’ disciples totally wrote off Bartimaeus. “Quiet old man. Jesus is too busy for you. We’ve got more important things to attend to. Like making it to the temple on time for worship.”

¹ Pete Greig, *How to Pray, A Simple Guide to for Normal People* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2019), 77.

² Matthew 7:7-8

³ John 14:13-14

So Bartimaeus yelled even louder, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” The fact that he called him Son of David was also very significant. It was another way of calling him “The Messiah.” It showed the depth of his faith. He was willing to make a scene and a fool of himself if it would garner an appointment at Jesus’ feet.

Which it did. And Jesus commanded him to come to him asking, “What do you want me to do for you?”

Now, again, I believe that Bartimaeus was a well known person along this route. His blindness would have been obvious. Jesus knew actually what he needed and wanted. But by having Bartimaeus plainly state his need or petition what he wanted, Jesus invited Bartimaeus into the work of regaining his sight.

Pete Greig says that the act of asking is important for at least three reasons. First, because the act of asking is relational in a way that mere wishing is not. It would have done no good for Bartimeus to simply sit by the roadside and wish that Jesus would stop, talk to him, and heal him. No! He needed to reach out, engage Jesus in conversation, and then boldly ask.

The second reason that asking is necessary is that it is vulnerable. Bartimaeus risked rejection by Jesus. We see how his disciples wanted to write him off as unimportant. What if Jesus did that too? “To make a request is to admit to some area of personal need [or weakness].” I’m sure many of us do not share our prayer requests on Sunday mornings because it’s just too risky or vulnerable. Prayer is just that.

As part of Jesus’ teaching on prayer he told his disciples two parables.

“Suppose one of you has a friend, and he goes to him at midnight and says, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves of bread, because a friend of mine on a journey has come and I have nothing to set before him.’

Then the one inside answers, “Don’t bother me. The door is already locked and my children are with me in bed. I can’t get up and give you anything. Jesus continued, “I tell you, though he will not get up and get him the bread as he needs because he is his friend, yet because of the man’s boldness he will get up give him as much as he needs.”⁴

The Greek word for boldness used here is *anaideia*. It means shameless audacity and implies a rudeness or impertinence. Jesus says, this is how we should pray. With a shameless audacity and boldness for God to do exactly what we need.

Then Jesus told his disciples another parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. He said, ‘In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared about men. And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, ‘Grant me justice against my adversary.’

⁴ Luke 11:5-8

For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, ‘Even though I don’t fear God or care about men, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won’t eventually wear me out with her coming.’⁵

The third part of asking is that it is intentional. It involves the activation of our wills.”⁶

Pastor Timothy Keller states that the two purposes of petitionary prayer are external and internal. Externally, God effects the circumstances of history and the world around us as we pray. And internally, we receive peace and rest.⁷

Bartimaeus models this beautifully for us. He is vulnerable. He is bold. He is rude. He is shameless. And he is intentional. All aspects of his faith...which according to Jesus was the reason he received his sight. “Your faith has healed you.”

My friends, if we were sitting on the roadside and knew that the person who had the power to heal us would be walking by shortly, what we beg of Jesus today?

The next thing that I want to dive into this intercessory prayer. This is asking on behalf of another. Oswald Chambers said, ‘The real business of your life as a saved soul is intercessory prayer...Prayer does not fit us for the greater works; prayer is the greater work.’⁸

Pete Greig wrote, “Intercessors are those who stand in that gap, mediating between heaven and earth as equal friends of both, pleading with God on behalf of people, and with people on behalf of God.”⁹

Richard Foster writes, “If we truly love people, we will desire for them far more than it is within our power to give them, and this will lead us to prayer. Intercession is a way of loving others...[It] is selfless prayer, even self-giving prayer. In the ongoing work of the kingdom of God, nothing is more important than Intercessory Prayer.”¹⁰

We see this in Genesis when Abraham pleaded with God to save Sodom from destruction because of its evil character...which by the way was not because of homosexuality but because they violated ancient rules of hospitality by wanting to

⁵ Luke 18:1-5

⁶ Greig, *How to Pray*, 82-83.

⁷ Timothy Keller, *Prayer, Experiencing Awe and Intimacy with God* (New York City, NY: Penguin Books, 2014), 231.

⁸ Oswald Chambers quoted in Pete Greig, *How to Pray*, 100.

⁹ Greig, *How to Pray*, 97.

¹⁰ Richard Foster quoted in Tyler Staton, *Praying Like Monks, Living Like Fools, An Invitation to the Wonder and Mystery of Prayer* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2022), 99.

sexually exploit their guests.¹¹ God said he would destroy them because of this sin. Abraham says, 'what if there are fifty righteous people in the city, will you destroy it?'

God says, "If I find fifty people, I will spare the whole place for their sake."

Abraham bargained all the way down to ten righteous people. God said he would spare the city if there were ten righteous people.

But then it was destroyed, so I guess we know how that story went.

But what we see is Abraham interceding, or loving people through prayer, on behalf of Sodom before God.

Pete Greig writes, "Intercession is impossible until we allow the things that break God's heart to break out hearts as well."¹²

Tylor Staton writes, "Intercessory prayer simultaneously restores our world and restores the God-given identity that was breathed into us first. It is the active experience of restoring creation."¹³

Other examples in the bible of intercessory prayer include Moses praying for God to spare his people after their idolatry at Mt. Sinai.¹⁴

Daniel, a prophet in exile, prays fervently for the restoration of his people and the city of Jerusalem, acknowledging their sins and pleading for God's mercy.¹⁵

Elijah, a prophet, prayed for drought to end, and God answered his prayer, demonstrating the power of addressing specific needs.¹⁶

Paul, the apostle, regularly prayed for the Colossians, seeking their spiritual growth and well-being, even though he had not met them in person.¹⁷

In his farewell prayer, Jesus interceded for his disciples, praying for their unity and protection. He also prayed for future believers, demonstrating the nature of his intercession.¹⁸

So how should we intercede in prayer?

Get informed. Learn about the issues or situation for which you are feeling led to pray.

¹¹ Genesis 18:16-33

¹² Pete Greig quoted in Staton, *Praying Like Monks, Living Like Fools*, 108.

¹³ Staton, *Praying Like Monks, Living Like Fools*, 106.

¹⁴ Exodus 32:31-21

¹⁵ Daniel 9:4-19

¹⁶ 1Kings 18:41-45

¹⁷ Colossians 1:1-14

¹⁸ John 17:6-26

Get inspired. Know that our prayers make a huge difference. Like raindrops in a reservoir in heaven which collect until the right time that God unleashes them to achieve the purposes for which they were sent forth, our prayers make big impacts.

Get indignant. Be honest with God about how you really feel about the issue. Walter Wink said, “Intercessory prayer is the spiritual defiance of what is in the way of what God has promised.”¹⁹

Get in sync. Gather other people to pray with you on this subject. Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three gather in my name, there I am with them.”²⁰

And get consistent. Don’t give up. Those prayers may not happen in our time frame, but they may!

I want to close with a story that Pete Greig shared recently on his Facebook site that shows the power of intercessory prayer. As we have come to know, Pete Greig is the founder of the International 24/7 Prayer Movement. Twenty years ago, he began praying for the Church in the United Kingdom, a country where it was once thought that Christianity and church involvement was dying out. Specifically, Pete started praying for younger generations to come to faith and find their place in the Church. Since that time, Pete reported a great revival taking place among young people. The number of people in the Church aged 18-24 has more than quadrupled...from 4% to over 17%. That is tremendous. That is the results of intercessory prayer.

What if we started praying like that?

What if we really took Jesus seriously on the invitation to pray? What would happen?

What would happen to our families?

To our church?

To our country?

To our world?

What would happen to us?

Prayer is the arm of God who moves us.

I say let’s start now.

¹⁹ Walter Wink quoted in Greig, *How to Pray*, 104.

²⁰ Matthew 18:19-20