

## "Thank You for Hearing Me"

John 11:1-7; 41-42

### Opening Comments:

- ✓ Appreciations
- ✓ Intro Jeanette
- ✓ Joy of Partnering together

### FMC, has heard you, the churches call, to shape our work around E3

- ✓ This is a Missional call where we are to be centered in Jesus Christ
- ✓ This Missional call carries within it the strengthening of the local congregation

Even as you have contributed persons to help fulfill God's call to all of us, your financial contributions have also been very critical;

- ✓ Because of your contributions to FMC, lives have been touched and transformed in the Mont/Bucks county to Mexico, Haiti, and beyond. Thank you.

**Biblical Text:** - *John 11:41-42* - <sup>41</sup> So the stone was moved away from the entrance of the tomb. Jesus looked up and said, **"Father, I thank you for hearing me.**

<sup>42</sup> **I've known that you always hear me.** However, I've said this so that the crowd standing around me will believe that you sent me."

- ✓ **The story in this passage is Jesus bringing Lazarus back to life!**

- ✓ What I want to highlight and focus on this morning however, are the words right in the middle of this particular text: **"Father, I thank you for hearing me.** <sup>42</sup> **I've known that you always hear me.**

### Context of Scripture

In this text we see Jesus praying to God. This morning I would like to note together how Jesus' perception and ensuing behavior in prayer might be informative for our own praying in life.

- ✓ I invite us to think together keeping our own congregational life in mind - both scattered and gathered.

### Some thoughts on Prayer

- ✓ Prayer is most popularly understood as 'talking with God;' it is communion with God.
- ✓ Prayer is and can happen in a multitude of ways, in any place and at any time.
- ✓ There are different types of prayers such as requests, intercession, thanksgiving, etc. (1 Timothy 2:1)
- ✓ Prayer is also an act of worship; but it is only one aspect of worship

Eleanor Kreider writing on the theme of **"Worshipping God in spirit and truth"** (Courier, 2005 Quarter 2; volume 20, no 2) shares three New Testament perspectives on worship.

- ✓ **First there is the formal practice of worship,** especially sacrifice - with its derived meaning of **prayer!**

- ✓ **A second expression is active worship, an expression in daily life of our inner devotion and commitment to God;** it has as a primary expression **Service**.
- ✓ **The third dimension of worship Eleanor talks about** refers to an emotional response; it's about using the whole body to express worship, especially the act of **falling down to worship**.
- ✓ She sums up her article with this statement:
  - "The challenge is recognizing that no one perspective can possibly encompass a complete expression of worship and therefore we need the insights of all three."

So, for us this morning we recognize that when we speak of prayer we are talking about one aspect of a life of worship.

**With this in mind, I ask the question: *What is our perception of God when we pray?***

- ✓ Is God inclining an ear towards us or
- ✓ Do we feel as though we have to persuade God to listen to us?

For Jesus his perception and experience was one of confidence that God always hears Him.

- ✓ ***"Father, I thank you for hearing me. <sup>42</sup> I've known that you always hear me.***
- ✓ His confidence is such that he starts his prayer with thanksgiving in the midst of this trying time!

**Sisters and brothers, our perception of God will greatly inform and shape our approach and experience in prayer!**

- ✓ *If we believe and perceive God to be someone whose ear we have to earn, we'll approach God in prayer a certain way.*
- ✓ If we believe and perceive God to be one who is holding us at bay, that will inform how we pray.
- ✓ *If God is one who is distant and removed we'll experience prayer differently.*
- ✓ If however, we perceive God as one who longs to be in communion and relationship with us and not only waits for us, but is constantly drawing us to himself, then our experience in prayer will be quite different as well.

***What if we understood that prayers first work is transformation;*** how would that shape our interaction with God?

- ✓ What if we understood and experienced that the first one being transformed in prayer is the pray-er him/herself!
- ✓ What if we would further begin to grasp that at the heart of prayer is a relationship!

What if we experienced prayer as unceasing and our 'growth edge' was to: ***'become constantly aware of God's presence in all that we are already doing?'***

- ✓ What if our central understanding of prayer was:  
*"Finding out what God wants to do and asking God to do it."*

**Now think with me for a moment. If we could find out what God wants to do or say in a given circumstance then in essence we have discovered THE ANSWER..**

- ✓ *If having discerned God's intent for a particular situation, then how might that inform our praying?*
- ✓ *Might it not lead us to thank God and align our thinking with God's thoughts and shape our praying in accordance with that and direct our behavior accordingly?*

**This is what we see Jesus doing in this text.**

- ✓ His discernment of God's purpose shaped his behavior and praying.
- ✓ **John 11:3-6** <sup>3</sup> *So the sisters sent a messenger to tell Jesus, "Lord, your close friend is sick."* <sup>4</sup> *When Jesus heard the message, he said, "His sickness won't result in death. Instead, this sickness will bring glory to God so that the Son of God will receive glory through it."* <sup>5</sup> *Jesus loved Martha, her sister, and Lazarus.* <sup>6</sup> *Yet, when Jesus heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was for two more days.*

**[Death is final, except when it's not.** We can recover from many illnesses, but death is not one of them.

- ✓ Imagine walking in to church on Sunday and say 'well last week I came down with a really bad case of 'death.' But I am feeling way better now!' doesn't happen.
- ✓ The Bible affirms however that Death for those in Christ is not final; *'where oh death is your sting...]*

**Now, most certainly many questions** come to mind about how do we know that what has been discovered or discerned is **actually** the purpose or intent of God?

- ✓ *Our minds recall past experiences and stories about people who having thought that they heard from God, have caused great damage to others;*
- ✓ Not only at personal, interpersonal and collective levels, but also at national and international levels.

**Thomas Merton an American Catholic author of the** twentieth century is attributed a statement in a prayer:  
*"...the fact that I think that I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so. But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you. And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing."*

So we acknowledge that we 'walk by faith' (in biblical language) not by sight.

**Let me then remind us how we in the Anabaptist tradition discern the purposes of God."**

We can know 'the sense of the Spirit' in our midst through the interplay or interaction of three critical elements:

- ✓ *The Holy Spirit speaking to an individual;*
- ✓ *The Word of God being illumined in our hearts and minds;*
- ✓ *And the critical element of discernment of what has been heard and/or understood in the context of community.*

It is this last element that makes an Anabaptist understanding of God's purposes distinctive from other understandings.

*Now to be sure, this isn't simply a matter of the majority of people in a given congregation voting a certain way and that is God's purpose.*

- ✓ *We can note in scripture and history examples where the majority indeed missed the mark of God's communication (e.g. 12 spies; Munster)*
- ✓ *Because of our understanding of scripture, community plays a central role in our discerning God's desires.*
- ✓ *It's easy to 'do' the majority vote; yet I want to encourage us to continue growing in our capacity to be discerning.*

Graham Cooke (author, speaker from New England) in his little booklet the Nature of God says:

*'Whenever we move into a new spiritual dimension of our calling and our ministry, we must take the*

*time to upgrade our relationship with God. Every experience of God should enable us to see God in a different light. Therefore we need to constantly re-evaluate our relationship with God and take a deeper look at our walk in Christ.'*

Graham then shares this statement: *'What we think about God is the single most important thing in our spiritual journey.'*

- ✓ *Our image of God will drive every single part of our life and declare how we show up in the world.*
- ✓ *Do we live a life of faith, boldness and conviction?'*

*Here then begins the power of our praying; we begin to understand anew that the first 'center of attention' in prayer is God.*

For Jesus he begins his prayer by thanking God that God always hears him.

- ✓ *Beloved, we are called to enter God's presence with praise, thanksgiving, and adoration.*
- ✓ *David in the Psalms must have had some clues about this.*

**Ps. 100:2** - *"Worship the Lord with gladness; come before him with joyful songs."*

**Psalm 100:4** - *Enter his gates with a song of thanksgiving. Come into his courtyards with a song of praise. Give thanks to him; praise his name.*

***Yet as I have reflected in my own life, I have too*** often tended to enter God's presences not first with gladness, or joyful songs, but with requests, petitions and fear.

- ✓ *Something happens in my circumstance and immediately I respond out of what I know and what I feel.*
- ✓ I let the reality of my experience 'set the pace' for my praying!
- ✓ *The 'center of attention' becomes my need or circumstance!*
- ✓ Or the other thing I do is I let what I know (reality) dictate my praying.

**Story of José 'Pepe' Herraras** observation that we let 'reality' stop us from praying.

***Have we in the States, become so accustomed to walking by sight*** (i.e. by what we know and understand) that we no longer understand or practice ***walking by faith*** as a relevant, spiritual necessity in our relationship with God?

- ✓ ***Walking by Faith is not about denying reality, it is about trusting God in the reality!***
- ✓ Do we tend to magnify our problems as a first response in a given situation or do we tend to think in terms of magnifying God?

***When we magnify God, especially in the midst of very*** trying and difficult circumstances, what we in essence are doing is worshipping God!

- ✓ *This becomes our 'sacrifice of prayer,' if you will.*
- ✓ We center our attention on who God is and what God has done as a first response to life's circumstances.

In this time we are drawing close to God and God is drawing close to us.

- ✓ *This drawing close helps to form the mind of Christ in us and becomes the place from where we engage the realities we find ourselves in.*
- ✓ Jesus said it this way: "Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven!"

This process, repeated over and over again in all of life helps develop discernment in us.

***In this morning's text when Jesus heard the message*** about Lazarus he discerned that <sup>4</sup> "...*His sickness won't result in death. Instead, this sickness will bring glory to God so that the Son of God will receive glory through it.*"

- ✓ His confidence (not arrogance - there is a difference) lay in His relationship with God and knowing who He was in that relationship.

***It is sad to say that much damage has been caused in the church when people, believing they have heard from God, end up manipulating and 'enforcing' their understanding on others to the detriment of many.***

We are called to grow in our understanding that Discernment is rooted in the belief that God is looking to be in a personal relationship with each of us.

**During this time of discernment and because God is** looking to reveal more of who he is to us, we need to ask some questions, and especially if we are experiencing very difficult circumstances:

- ✓ *'What is it that God wants to be for me/us now that God couldn't be at any other time, in any other way?'*
- ✓ *"What is it about my/our current situation that is designed to bring me/us into a deeper relationship with God?"*

***Every circumstance in our life is about bringing us into a deeper relationship with God.***

- ✓ If you're being severely challenged right now, God wants to be something for you. Find out what that is.
- ✓ *Martha, Mary and other loved ones were being severely challenged in the death of Lazarus.*
- ✓ *What God wanted not only to reveal but to become for them through Christ was resurrection and life!*

### Ministry Time

Time does not permit this morning a brief look at another key and central component to prayer - stillness.

- ✓ ***So let me offer that without listening and silence we cannot know the Mind of Christ.***

**The challenge I want to leave before us all is this:**

- ✓ ***"Whatever you need, you be the first one to give it away!"***
  - If you need to be understood, seek to understand another;
  - If you need to be healed, seek to help in the healing process of another;
  - If you need joy, seek to bring joy to another;
  - This is how life in the Spirit is; it is how we walk by faith.

**West Phil Menn Church, you are the beloved of God!**

- ✓ Let yourself be radically loved by Christ.
- ✓ *Then give to others that which God has given you;*
- ✓ *As you do you'll find healing and hope flowing in and through you to those around you.*

***May you as a congregation experience in a deeper way***

- ✓ ***the perceptible presence and***
- ✓ ***knowledge - coupled with love - of God***
- ✓ ***through the posture of your praying***
- ✓ ***so that you to will have the confidence to pray in all circumstances like Jesus;***
- ✓ ***who prayed: 'Father, I thank You for Hearing Me/thank you for hearing Us.'***

Let us pray.