

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church
'Church at Home' - Sunday 17th May 2020

Welcome

"Welcome to our 'Church at Home' service for the 17th May. This week we are continuing our series exploring the essential questions about prayer by looking at the issue 'Does God always answer Prayer.' I am also encouraging us as a church to read through the book of Daniel together. Daniel is a story in the Old Testament about a young man who was taken away from his home, and found himself living in a world where he was separated from his family and from his usual forms of worshipping God. But Daniel lived his faith out loud and was dedicated to prayer, and God amazing things for him and through him. I believe that this book has a lot to speak to us at this time, and I've included the reading plan with this letter." - Rev. Andrew Gill

Call to Worship – Psalm 66:8-12, 20 (NV)

Bless our God, O peoples,

let the sound of his praise be heard,

who has kept us among the living,

and has not let our feet slip.

For you, O God, have tested us;

you have tried us as silver is tried.

You brought us into the net;

you laid burdens on our backs;

you let people ride over our heads;

we went through fire and through water;

yet you have brought us out to a spacious place

Blessed be God,

because he has not rejected my prayer

or removed his steadfast love from me.

Scripture Sentence – Matthew 7:11

If you, bad as you are, know how to give good things to you children, how much more will your heavenly Father give good things to those who ask him!

Collect for the Sixth Sunday of Easter

Merciful God,
you have prepared for those who love you
such good things as pass all understanding.
Pour into our hearts such love towards you,
that we, loving you above all things,
may obtain your promises,
which exceed all that we can desire;
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
who is alive and reigns
with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come;
thy will be done;
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation;
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
the power and the glory,
for ever and ever.
Amen.

Reading – Mark 11:20-26 (NRSV)

In the morning as they passed by, they saw the fig tree withered away to its roots. Then Peter remembered and said to him, ‘Rabbi, look! The fig tree that you cursed has withered.’ Jesus answered them, ‘Have faith in God. Truly I tell you, if you say to this mountain, “Be taken up and thrown into the sea”, and if you do not doubt in your heart, but believe that what you say will come to pass, it will be done for you. So I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.

‘Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone; so that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses.’

Sermon - ‘Does God always answer prayer?’

If you have any experience of praying, you will know that there are times when we ask God for something and then we receive it, sometimes even immediately. But then there are times when we pray and pray, yet nothing happens. It is as if God is silent, and we are left asking ‘did God hear me? why didn’t he give me what I asked for?’

This is part 4 of a series of sermons exploring the essential questions on prayer. So far we have been looking at how God invites us to talk with him and bring him our requests. But many of you reading this will know that there are times in our spiritual conversation when it feels like God has stopped listening to us. We ask and but don’t receive, we seek but don’t find, we knock on a door but it remains shut.

So if we are wanting to grow in our home prayer life we need to understand how God answers our prayers. Because the truth is that God does hear all our prayers and answers every one of them, but not always in the ways we are wanting or expecting. *“This is the confidence we have in approaching*

God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us.” 1 John 5:14 (NIV)

There are three ways God responds to our prayer; *yes, no, and wait*. Sometimes we pray and immediately we receive what we asked for, like when we pray about our worries and then instantly have peace about our troubles. When we pay attention we see that God answers ‘yes’ to our prayers all the time. We just don’t always realise it because we forget what we pray for and take some things for granted. But if you’ve eaten food today, that’s God answering your prayer to give you your daily bread. So remember to say thank you, *“Pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.” 1 Thessalonians 5:17-18 (NIV)*

Other times God responds to our prayers with a ‘no.’ Before we think about some of the reasons why that might be, we need to remember who God is. We can sometimes think of praying to God like writing our Christmas letter to Santa Claus, and if we are really really good then he will give us anything we ask for. Or maybe God is like Aladdin’s Genie, and if we say the right words in the right order, and rub our Bibles at the same time, then he has to grant our wish. But God is not our servant, it is not his job to answer our prayers. He is our creator, we exist to do his will and glorify his name, not the other way around.

The right image to have of God in prayer, the picture Jesus gives us, is that of a loving parent, a perfect Heavenly Father. Imagine if a parent automatically said yes to every request their child makes, it would be a disaster! If the thing we are asking for is not good, or could be harmful to ourselves or for other people then, like any good parent, God will say ‘no.’ God wants the best for us and he has good plans for our lives, and sometimes he says ‘no’ because he has something much better planned for

us. I can think of times when I have prayed to get a certain job, and God said, 'no.' At the time I was disappointed. But years later I look back and see the better things God had in store for me, and I am now so thankful that he did not give me what I asked for.

But sometimes the years go by and we still cannot understand why God did give us what we were asking for. Like when we pray for the healing of a loved one, and the healing never comes. All we can do is trust that from God's eternal perspective it happened for good. And in our pain go deeper into prayer and bring our questions and our tears to our Father in Heaven, just like the Psalmist who prayed, *"How long, Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?" Psalm 13:1 (NIV)*

But not every response that's not a 'yes' is a 'no', a lot of the time God replies to our prayers with 'wait.' This happens when what we ask for is good but the timing is wrong, or we are not ready to receive it just yet. And this can be frustrating for us, because we want everything now. But the reality is the faith grows in the waiting. The more we wait, the more we pray, and the more we pray, the more our hearts become aligned to God's will, and his desires become our desires. God's plans are better than our plans, and his timing is perfect. In the waiting we learn to examine our hearts and our motives, we repent of our sins, and we discover the freedom of surrendering to God's will.

Two things I would encourage you to do as we think about how we can apply this to our home prayer life. First is to pray for the things we know God will respond positively to. How do we do that? By asking God to do what he has promised. The Bible is full of God's promises, if we ask for what he has promised he will always say 'yes.' (There is a list of 6 prayers God always answers attached with this letter to help you as you do this.)

Secondly, keep praying. Jesus taught his disciples to always pray and never give up. God is a loving and powerful God, and he is doing big things in this world and in your life. Today could be the day when 'wait' becomes 'yes.'

Prayer

Father God,

May your 'Yes' teach me gratitude.

May your 'No' give me understanding of your will.

May your 'Wait' grow my faith.

Spirit teach me how to pray and never give up.

Amen

Closing Doxology (Ephesians 3:20-21)

Now to him who is able

to do immeasurably more

than all we ask or imagine,

according to his power that is at work within us,

to him be glory in the church

and in Christ Jesus

throughout all generations,

for ever and ever!

Amen