

Sermon, September 17, 2017 – Fifteen Sunday after Pentecost  
Ask, Seek, Knock- Prayer Sermon Series.

## Theme 1 - The Power to Pray Various Verses



Dear Friends in Christ!

Last week we learned that we need to take care of our ship, we need to restore our boat. But to do that is going to be hard and messy work.

And because it is hard and messy we need to start where we ought to, with prayer. Nothing can happen unless we pray, that's what Jesus taught us to do. So today I would like to start this series of meditations on prayer to equip us to be prayer warriors and labourers.

Prayer warriors not only for our church, but we need to pray for ourselves, our families, our

communities. Satan seems like is winning all over and in many ways. And we can't seem to even stand our ground, but Jesus commands us when it comes to works of the evil one: "This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer." (Mark 9:29)

Prayer is effective, yet it is the one resource that we don't use much, or not at all. We don't know how to, or simply we rely the prayer on somebody else. But today we shall get a different understanding, view and practice of prayer. We will know how to pray better, we will know how to be prayer warriors.

Now, when it comes to prayer, it seems that we don't like to pray out loud, from our own words. We have hard time to even pray with one another, or even trust prayer so we don't pray. Among the reasons we give are:

**Fears.** Yes fear, we fear what people might think about us praying, or that I would say the wrong words, or that we aren't used to it, fear of the unknown. And I'm sure you will have other ones too... which yes, they are real, but...

The reality is that we don't pray because there are **Things in the Way**. Things that are like barriers that prevent us from praying. Martin Luther knew this very well. He writes: "The first thing that hinders and delays us is the thought, inspired by the devil: Why, at present you are really not yet fit for praying; wait another half hour or day, until you become better prepared or have done this or that. Meanwhile the devil is there to lead you away for the half hour. Accordingly, you think no more of praying throughout the day, and so you go on from one day to another, rushed and hindered by other business. . . . Besides [this], he finds his advantage in our flesh and blood, because these are lazy and cold to begin with..." (From What Luther Says § 3456)

Therefore we cannot pray as we should Luther says. Has that ever happened to you as well? Does it happen to you? We allow ourselves to be distracted by our thoughts and activities.

Next, we don't pray because we feel **Tongue-Tied**. In Biblical times, many people also had trouble approaching God in prayer. But there are reasons for that. All

through the Scriptures we find examples of people facing barriers for prayer. And to list a few which are crucial, we have:

Sin - Genesis 3:1–10

God's majesty versus our sinful flesh - Job 9:1–20

God's holiness - Hebrews 12:18–21

Although we have the privilege to face God today through Christ, we still face God like the Israelites did in the Old Testament which the letter to the Hebrews remind us: "For you have not come to what may be touched, a blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest<sup>19</sup> and the sound of a trumpet and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken to them.<sup>20</sup> For they could not endure the order that was given, "If even a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned."<sup>21</sup> Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, "I tremble with fear."

We become tongue-tie because we don't listen to God's Word. Proverbs 1:28–29: ""Then they will call upon me, but I will not answer; they will seek me diligently but will not find me.<sup>29</sup> Because they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the LORD,<sup>30</sup> would have none of my counsel and despised all my reproof..."

We become tongue-tie because of the lack of knowledge or doubt that **The Holy Spirit brings us to God**. It's true that on our own we can't pray, that what we confess in the creed is true, that "I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him." (The Explanation of the Third Article of the Apostles' Creed)

Now those barriers are real, so real in fact that God wants us to overcome them. God wants to overcome those distractions and barriers. The problem is that on our own we can't overcome those barriers there is no way for us to be prayer warriors on our own.

How then do we cross those barriers? In the Letter to the Hebrews we are given the answer, it is through and by the blood of Jesus!

From Hebrews 12:22–24 we read that what removes our barriers is the Blood of Jesus Christ. Hebrew says: ""But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering,<sup>23</sup> and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect,<sup>24</sup> and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel."

As you see we cannot cross over the barriers between us and God by ourselves. Just as we can't cross from sin to holiness, from death to life, or from condemnation to salvation, so we cannot communicate with God. Unless, unless the blood of Christ enables us to do so. But how, how does the Blood of Christ enables us?

The Scriptures tells us that the Blood of Christ justifies us, that is declares us clean, that is forgiven of sins. In Romans 5:1–2 we read: "Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>2</sup> Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God."

It is through Christ that we come to God in prayer. But only because he was able to pay the price of our sins and brought about the forgiveness of those sins.

Now, because of Christ, we pray as the Lord Prayer teaches us: “Our Father who art in heaven.” In the Small Catechism, Luther writes about this petition: “With these words God tenderly invites us to believe that He is our true Father and that we are His true children, so that with all boldness and confidence we may ask Him as dear children ask their dear father.”

Because of Jesus Christ and his work on the Cross, the barriers are removed and when the barriers are removed we can approach God with confidence, with the help of the Holy Spirit just as we hear in Romans 8:14–16: “For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.<sup>15</sup> For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!”<sup>16</sup> The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.”

That’s how we pray barrier free. There is the beginning of the power to pray. We are forgiven, and as forgiven children of God we can pray to Him as “our Father.” Because of what Christ has done, prayer works and is powerful.

However, what of all of those times when we don’t feel forgiven, don’t feel like praying to the Lord? What if our hearts have been overwhelmed, our minds just don’t work, and our mouths can’t form the words we know we need to say? What if we can’t even seem to get a handle on the problems facing us? What then? Good news! God has provided for all our needs! He has provided a constant power source.

And that power source is found in the Holy Spirit. Paul tells us in Romans 8:26–27: “Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.<sup>27</sup> And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.”

Are you tongue-tied when it comes to prayer? You don’t know what to say? Then you need to know and rejoice in the fact that you have a way out. You pray constantly? Good for you, because Holy Spirit “himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.” In other words your prayers are not ignored or rejected because you didn’t say the right words, or what people will think of you, or that you are not used to pray out loud, look and hear, the Holy Spirit translates your prayers to God the Father. The Holy Spirit pleads for us!!

Remember that at times when the words won’t flow easily, don’t know what to pray, for, remember this: “...the Spirit helps us in our weakness.” V. 26a

Aa!! But that we keep on praying, dear friends, we need to stay plugged in. The fact is that even when we know how to pray or that prayer works, yet we feel powerless. Friends, we lack power in our prayer, not because it is unavailable, but because we fail to stay “plugged in.”

Just as with any holy desire, we are not the initiators of our impulses to pray. God is. But we need to keep connected to God, we need to attend God’s initiatives, attend his invitation and his instruction.

Just as Jesus says: “<sup>4</sup> Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. <sup>5</sup> I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.” (John 14:4-5)

“Whoever abides in me” in other words, “Whoever is plugged in me.” And as we are plugged to Him, he himself will move us to pray, pray with confidence, pray with trust, and know when to pray, after all he desires that we talk to him constantly.

Dear Friends, we need to take care of our ship, restore our boat. Prayer is the tool we need to use the most. And more, God invites us to pray constantly, you and I know that we need to pray, prayer is needed always, and there are times when we ought to pray more and more, like our present times. The Church needs our prayers, our families, our friends, we need to pray with one another. But sometimes we find barriers that prevent us from praying, whether be that we are not used to pray out loud, or that things are in the way, or we are tongue-tied. We know that those things are caused by our sins, our sinful flesh, and our lack of reading God’s Words, and the knowledge of what the Spirit does for us.

But thanks be to God for the work of the Holy Spirit and for Jesus Christ that removes all of those barriers, granting the forgiveness of sins, and for the Spirit interceding for us when we can’t pray.

And as we conclude this meditation, I would like to leave with you, the words from 1 John 5:14–15:

“I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life. <sup>14</sup> And this is the confidence that we have towards him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. <sup>15</sup> And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him.”

In his name, amen.