

Matthew 6: 9-13, John 14: 11-14, Romans 8: 14-17, 26-27; Ephesians 6: 18-20  
Olivet Church, June 11, 2017

### *Why Don't We Pray to the Holy Spirit*

We begin our summer worship schedule and sermon series today. The sermons through Labor Day Sunday will be based on about 20 suggestions or questions shared by members of the congregation, that I was able to get down to 13 by grouping similar questions together and accommodating one of the suggestions of a couple of people who submitted more than one.

A month ago it seemed like a pretty good idea to do this special sermon series but realizing this week the extra sermon preparation work I will need to do I found myself thinking, "What was I thinking." And yet I am excited, both for me and for you, that by digging a little deeper this summer into some theological, ethical, spiritual life, and discipleship matters we will all grow and bear greater fruit as followers of Christ. And summer is the season of growth, flowering, and fruiting, right?

Now, as you review the list of sermon topics you will notice that, in baseball parlance, a few of them are nice slow lobs right over the plate. A few are fast balls. And a few are wicked curve balls. I don't expect I will hear Marv Reese tell me every Sunday "you hit it out of the park today." But I promise you, I will give it my best, and with God's help, there won't be a Sunday this summer that at the very least Dale, Seth, or I don't "go down swinging."

Now today's sermon addresses a question that fit perfectly with this Sunday in the liturgical calendar as it is Trinity Sunday. It is not unusual to have someone ask, "If Jesus was fully God, was he talking to himself when he prayed?" But the question that was posed was, "If the Holy Spirit is fully God, why don't we pray to the Holy Spirit?"

Now although the persons of the Trinitarian God remain one, they are distinct. And though I am sure any one is quite capable of stepping in for the other regardless of which person of the Trinity we name. For our purposes of interacting with God in our prayers, there is a more logical division of labor among the three. And so it is that Jesus directs us to pray to God our Father. And he tells us we should pray in his name; as he is our intermediary, our intercessor, and our advocate. And finally scripture tells us that we pray in and by the Spirit. Hence the usual and more scripturally guided form of prayer is directed to God, in the name of Jesus, and by the Holy Spirit.

However, one answer to the question "If the Holy Spirit is fully God, why don't we pray to the Holy Spirit?" is that we can, and we do. Particularly when we are speaking about God's transforming, regenerating, sanctifying work in our hearts, minds, and lives we tend to address the Holy Spirit directly.

"Spirit of God descend upon by heart"

"Spirit of the Living God, fall afresh on me."

“O Holy Spirit, I humbly implore you, be with me always so that in all things, I may act under the influence of your holy inspiration.”

“Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful, and enkindle in us the fire of your love.”

“Holy Spirit, powerful Consoler, sacred bond of the Father and the Son, hope of the afflicted, descend into my heart and establish in it your loving dominion. Enkindle in my tepid soul the fire of your Love so that I may be wholly subject to you.”

Though in our reformed, Presbyterian faith tradition we tend to direct most prayer to God the Father, my sense is that in more evangelical faith traditions there may be more praying addressed to “Lord Jesus.” And I suspect in Pentecostal and charismatic traditions there may be more praying to the Holy Spirit.

The doctrine of the Trinity reminds us that though God is three persons, God is also one. So whoever we are naming, and whatever loving work of God we are claiming, it is not like we are calling upon one person to step away from the others. It is not like the three persons of the Trinity are standing against the wall each hoping we will choose them for a dance partner; and becoming jealous or upset if they are not chosen. When we go onto the dance floor of prayer, regardless of who we address by name, we enter into a dance with all three; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who are one. In fact the three persons of the Trinity are already in a loving dance with each other.

Personally I find one of the most beautiful, inspiring, and convincing validations of the Trinitarian nature of God arising from God’s essential nature of love. To say that God’s very nature is love; that from eternity and before there was a creation to love, God was still in essence love; is to say that God is relational and communal in God’s very being. Or as the doctrine of the Trinity affirms; God is one but three, is three in one. From eternity to eternity the essential dynamic and the underlying reality of the universe is a dance of love; the Father, Son and Holy Spirit mutually honoring, praising, serving, blessing, loving one another. “Perichoresis”, the ancient church called it, the cosmic dance of love.

Now being a bit reserved, and having embarrassed myself by stepping on my dance partners feet or tripping on my own, I often find myself sitting or standing against the wall at dances, visiting with people, watching with a bit of envy as others swing, twirl, and move graciously to the rhythm of the music. But ever since watching Robin Williams in “Mrs. Doubtfire” bouncing on the couch at his child’s birthday party while House of Fire’s “Jump Around” plays, I cannot hear the opening squeals of that song without racing from the wall to the center of the dance floor.

Last year, at my nephew’s wedding I was over at the photo booth having donned a Dr. Zeus hat, oversized sunglasses, and a blue Styrofoam tie that was about 5 inches wide when I heard those squeals and I leapt over some chairs to begin jumping around on the dance floor amidst a crowd of beaming millennials delighted to see someone over 50 looking and acting so crazy.

And so it is with the Holy Spirit’s work in our prayer lives. We may think and feel like we need to know and master the right words, the right formula, the right posture in order to pray rightly

when the Spirit plays our irresistible tune and pulls us into the cosmic, divine dance enabling our prayer, articulating our groans, drawing us into the conversation, the prayer, and the communion within the triune Godhead.

The Apostle Paul tells us in Romans that it is the work of the Spirit of God that enables us to even address the Creator of heaven and earth, and Lord of the universe as our parent. And the language he uses is not the formal language of “Father,” but rather the intimate, familiar, loving title of “Abba,” which is the equivalent of calling God, “daddy,” or “mommy.”

In other words the Spirit transforms our prayers from bargaining and pleading with God as some sort of distant, disinterested, dozing cosmic bellhop who needs us to ring the prayer bell loudly and repeatedly to respond to us. The Spirit transforms our prayer to communion with God, to a means of transformation as we are lifted on to our heavenly parent’s knee in prayer in the Spirit and discover ourselves to be God’s beloved children, and not merely children but heirs with Christ.

And the Spirit, Paul says, also prays in us, for we don’t know how to ask in a way that is truly good for us and in accordance with God’s will for our lives and the world. We can only share our honest feelings, hopes, and needs without hesitation and fear, knowing that it is not by correct form and appropriate words that our prayers are heard by God but by the Spirit’s intercession, the Spirit’s making our heart into the prayer room where the conversation among the Father, Son and Spirit takes place regarding the realization of God’s will for our lives and the world amidst our present circumstances and fears.

And even more than that, Paul says, we really don’t even know what to ask for and how to pray. Sometimes situations are so complicated. Sometimes they are so overwhelming. Sometimes our life experiences and world affairs come together in such a way that we in essence fall on our knees and lift our faces and hands up to God and groan. “Momma said there’d be days like this,” when the news headlines, and a lack of sleep, and a bad report from a doctor, and a snarky attitude by our teenage child, and a virus in our computer, and a banging of our elbow in that funny bone spot sends us to that place of hurt, anger, despair, confusion, and groaning. Preacher Jim Forbes calls it “choreographed prayer;” Just a certain posture and a cry, “arrgghhhh!” No words, just groaning, just syllables, just cries, just anger... but the Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words.

When he was 10 Jimmy was playing with his younger brother when his brother’s lips turned blue, his face became rigid, and he collapsed in a seizure. He screamed and his mom and dad came racing up the steps. “Run call Dr. Wyatt’s office and tell him to meet us at the emergency room” they told him. Jimmy raced to the phone, dialed the office, and a nurse picked up. “Carter needs help he yelled, he’s going to the hospital!” And to whatever question that dear nurse asked he could only repeat, “Carter needs help, he’s going to the hospital. Carter needs help, he’s going to the hospital.” But the nurse was able to translate his cries, his groaning, and Dr. Wyatt was at the hospital when his parent arrived with Carter.

When it comes to prayer, to understanding the mind and the will of God, to articulating anything that accurately reflects all of the elements of our circumstances and how they are being woven

into a glorious future of God's making, we are like an infant who communicates something like this: Waaaaaaah! But just as loving parents who knows our situation and our needs tend to us when we cry out and groan; even so the Spirit intercedes for us.