

Matthew 6:9-13

Essential Church The Jesus Prayer

Introduction: Good Morning Church! We miss you dearly. Though we are separated by distance this morning we are so thankful that our bond is stronger and deeper than any distance or situation. Our's is a bond of the Holy Spirit, through the shed blood and broken body of Christ. We are the family of God, whether gathered or scattered.
(Elder announcement)

We're in a series we're calling Essential Church. At such a strange time with so many changes and an inability to predict the end of this pandemic, it seemed wise for us to look back at the early church and consider the essentials of their life together. Currently the church and the rest of the world are experiencing a reset or a reboot and I believe if we, the church, lean into this moment God will bring about renewal and we will come out the other side of this more vibrant and more fruitful than before. We're calling this series essential church because we believe the way forward is actually to go backward, to the beginning of the church. We need to look at the early church and see what was essential to their life. And what we find in Acts 2:42-47 is that the church made a liturgy - a habit and practice of devoting themselves to the Apostles doctrine, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to the prayers. And throughout the ages this has been a constant liturgy of the church, whether gathered or scattered, though the manifestation of it may have taken different shapes or forms over the centuries.

By practicing this liturgy, and centering their lives on these essentials the early church was able to continually adapt, being both flexible and fruitful amidst the constant changes that they faced whether through growth dynamics, politics and persecution or the leading of the Spirit into new ventures. So we are spending these weeks looking at their liturgy - The things that they habitually observed and practiced together. By practicing

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1. A Praying Community

- a. **What is prayer?** Prayer is simply talking with God. It can be praise, awe, adoration, or thanksgiving. It can be confession, and petition. There are many ways in which we can pray - but in its most basic form prayer is simply talking with God. One author defines it - "Prayer is continuing a conversation that God has started through his Word and his grace, which eventually becomes a full encounter with him."
- b. God has spoken, and we respond in conversation through prayer. The purpose of prayer is to know God and to be conformed more to his will and his image. In prayer we are not seeking our will to be done, trying to get God to do what we want, but we are asking for God's kingdom to come, his will to be done and for us to be brought in line with that will.
 - i. In Acts 2 Luke tells us that the early church was devoted to the prayers. They did this daily. They had a daily commitment and rhythm of prayer, it became a mark of their lives personally and of this community.
 - ii. Obviously they believed in the effectual power of prayer. Prayer was not a last resort for them, but a necessity and a priority. They prayed proactively...God was on the move and they wanted to join him in his mission to the world.
 - iii. I think it's important to remember these first Christians were Jews, they prayed and were familiar with prayer, it

was part of their culture and their rhythms from their youth. So it's interesting that Luke would note that this was something that the early church centered its life together on. Why would he do that? Possibly because this community was praying in a whole new light - they had been given through Jesus' work and the descent of the Holy Spirit a whole new way of relating to God - as Father. They had an instinctual desire to talk to their Father, to call on him, to praise him, to thank him, to know him, to draw near to him.

1. But I also believe they had a renewed faith and hope in prayer because they had been witnesses of the power of God. The God who had promised so long ago to break into the world and heal it, to restore it, to make it his dwelling place once again, had begun to do so through the work of his son Jesus Christ - evidenced by the resurrection, the ascension and the pouring out of the Holy Spirit. God and his kingdom were on the move with resurrection life and power...And the church was praying to be fellow workers and co-laborers with God in his kingdom work. The Church was praying for that Kingdom to come, for God's will to be done on earth as it is in heaven in a whole new way..

c. What did the Church pray about?

- i. The early Church literally prayed about everything:
 1. The appointing of leaders (Acts 1:24-26; 14:23)
 2. Healing and deliverance from unclean spirits (Acts 3:2-9, Acts 5:16)
 3. Boldness to speak the word of God (Acts 4:29)
 4. Healing, signs, and wonders - for God's presence to be known in the church and in the surrounding community (Acts 4:30)
 5. Forgiveness of their persecutors (Acts 7:59-60)
 6. The dead to be raised (Acts 9:36-42)

7. James told the church to pray for one another that they might be healed from physical illness. (James 5:16)
8. Paul told Timothy to teach the church to pray for all people, for government and leaders, **“I urge you, first of all, to pray for all people. Ask God to help them; intercede on their behalf, and give thanks for them. Pray this way for kings and all who are in authority so that we can live peaceful and quiet lives marked by godliness and dignity. This is good and pleases God our Savior, who wants everyone to be saved and to understand the truth.” - 1 Timothy 2:1-4**
9. The church Prayed for Jesus’ soon return. (1 Corinthians 16:22 - Maranatha! - Lord, come quickly!)
10. The early church prayed for anything and everything that concerned the establishment and furtherance of the kingdom of God. - Matthew 6:9-13

2. What does a liturgy of prayer look like for our lives and our community?

- a. For a few weeks I have been defining liturgy as bridge building - a work or task done by an individual for the benefit of the broader community. A work done by me, I am responsible to play my part, but it isn’t about me - it’s about us. It’s about our collective benefit and good.
- b. You can probably already see how prayer is by necessity liturgical work - We as individuals must engage in prayer, in faith, in consistency and fervency - A praying church requires individuals who pray. That begins with us setting the rhythms of our own lives according to the priorities of the kingdom of God and not social media and 24/7 news cycles. And the need to do this now, might be greater than ever.

- i. Sadly we are seeing the church at this moment caught up in so much distraction, being sucked into all the conspiracies surrounding this pandemic, talking of the mark of the beast, the end times, W.H.O. being part of A One World Order, etc
- ii. *“The real conspiracy is satanic and it’s goal is to get you to focus on “global meta whatever’s” that you can do almost nothing about and neglect the place of prayer, the word, and sacrificial love of neighbor.” - Jon Tyson*
- iii. Even if it were the end of the world - Jesus’ exhortation to his people when he spoke of these things was - “Stay awake, and alert. Be faithful stewarding over the responsibility that God has given to his people... Our calling is to watch and pray, not get sucked into the fear, political positioning and conspiracies. Church, watch and pray!
 1. God has called his church, his kingdom citizens here on earth to intercede for the world. In intercessory prayer, we are called, even chosen, as a people not for our own sake but for the sake of the world. Just as Israel was chosen in order to be a light unto the nations and a kingdom of priests, so the church is called to be the people of God to and for the world. It is because we are God’s ambassadors and image bearers, charged with caring for and stewarding the creation, that we bring to him the concerns of creation, praying for each other, for the church, and for the world at large.
 2. Just like the early church we should be praying for anything and everything that concerns the establishment and furtherance of the kingdom of God.
 3. We pray for one another, we also pray for those outside our community of faith: for our

neighborhoods; for municipal and government leaders; for the poor and those in prison; for those suffering persecution, exploitation, or the effects of natural disasters; we even pray for our enemies and oppressors. In intercessory prayer we pray for the needs of the world. We pray for healing from illness and disease, for protection from abuse, for the end of environmental exploitation, for the eradication of slavery, for the end of racism, for an end to war, genocide and violence. Any area where we see evidence of the curse of sin we pray "Father, your Kingdom come, Your will be done in our lives, in our church, in this city as it is in heaven."

- c. What if we were determined to do this? What if we determined that we are going to be a church that prays together, for one another, not seldomly but often, that our Sunday gatherings, that our midweek lunches and coffees, that our meet up groups would be marked by prayer. What might we see God do in us - his presence in our lives, what might we see God do in our city around us?
- d. If prayer is essentially about getting ourselves into the will and purposes of God - if it really is about seeing the kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven - As we pray - we will be able to be flexible and fruitful in whatever life with all it's ups and downs throws at us.
- e. Closing: I truly believe that we are in the middle of a shaking of all nations - God is at work in the world and our posture needs to be one of prayer - God, what are you doing and how can we join you in that work? Help us hold lightly to the past, and have open arms to what you are bringing us into - Lord, we don't want to be guilty of seeking our comfort over your kingdom and your glory, help us be flexible in the midst of uncertainty, cause us to be fruitful even in seasons of drought and trouble! Let your kingdom come and your will be done in our lives, and in this city, as it is in heaven! Amen!