

Jesus had ascended into heaven. He had commissioned the Apostles to be his witnesses to the ends of the earth.

They had returned to Jerusalem with a sense of joy, worshiping together, and they, along with other followers, gathered in a room to pray.

This first gathering of the followers of Jesus – note this – their first action following their commission to be witnesses of the resurrected Jesus was not to elect officers, not to set a budget, not to organize committees...

They devoted themselves to prayer!

Before there was Twitter and Facebook, before there was Texting and E-Mail and Skype - before any of the ways to communicate that we think we can't live without – THERE WAS PRAYER!

I ended the sermon last week with the basic convictions that form the foundation of these sermons: God is listening to you and me - and we enter into that relationship of faith as we listen to God.

As this relationship grows, we begin to grow into God's will for our lives, not because we learn some magic formula about prayer, but simply because, through prayer, we are able to live more and more in Christ and Christ lives in us.

As I've developed this series, I have drawn from the writings of Henri Nouwen and Richard Rohr, Martha Moore-Keish's recent book "Christian Prayer for Today", and the wonderful book by Anne Lamott, "Help, Thanks, Wow".

Even more, for my own prayer life and the writing of prayers, I get inspiration from the prayers of the Old Testament scholar, Walter Brueggemann; and in recent years by the writings of Alden Solovy: "Jewish Prayers of Hope and Healing" and his most recent work, "This Grateful Heart."

But I have to tell you, the framework for this trilogy of prayer was set some thirty years ago when I participated in a prayer study written by the Methodist minister, Maxie Dunnam; maybe some of you studied it, too.

I'm talking about his most notable work, "The Workbook of Living Prayer".

Maxie Dunnam says it is "Living Prayer" because it describes how we live our faith, and how it also describes prayer that is alive, fresh, a power that moves us.

I think the novelist Frederick Buechner captures this when he says of one of his characters: "Yet Godric prays the way he breathes, for else his heart would wither in his breast. Prayer is the wind that fills his sail."

It is obvious that the Apostles thought of prayer as faith in action – the chief exercise of faith, says John Calvin.

As one preacher said, "Three realities launched the church: the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the coming of the Holy Spirit, and the people praying."

They were inviting God to rule in their lives – and the rest of the story, the Acts of the Apostles, the history of the church, I see it as the adventure of living prayer.

Prayer is a matter of relationship and living prayer, first of all describes our relationship with the living God.

Sometimes I think we miss the dynamics of living prayer because it contradicts our own sense of self-sufficiency.

I think of the man, according to the story I heard – one Saturday night after a football game, sitting in his truck in the parking lot.

Another driver came up to him, asked if he had a heavy tool, a wrench or hammer he could borrow.

The man said “yes” and watched this other man go back to his car and break the window out, reach in and get the keys, which he had left locked in the car.

The man in the truck said, “I wish he had told me his problem. I’m a locksmith and I had my tools with me!”

We are the same when we ignore the available power that God has for us, if we don’t have a prayerful relationship with God.

I just read an article that reports a recent study published in the *Journal of Aging and Health* focuses on three measures of well-being — optimism, self-esteem and contentment with life — and shows that for all of them, there is a relationship between attachment to God and prayer.

As people grow older, according to the study, those who are securely attached to God are more likely to have a sense of well-being — and the more frequently they pray, the greater that feeling.

However, those who feel more distant from God do not receive the same benefit.

As I’ve said before, “Our faith is not in the power of prayer, our faith is in the power of the one to whom we pray.”

Roberta Bondi, a wonderful teacher and author said it this way, “*If I want a real relationship with God, I have to tell God what’s going on. As with any relationship, you don’t know in advance how it’s going to turn out. You just do it, you make yourself accessible so you’re prepared to receive grace when it comes.*”

The adventure of living prayer begins with our relationship to the living God.

Living Prayer also describes our relationship with others, how we live with others.

Prayer can and will connect us to God and will strengthen our connectedness with each other.

I heard a wonderful story of a young husband and wife – he was looking for a new job – she tells him as he heads out for an interview, “I’ll be praying for you.”

He gets the job, and when he gets home, a beautiful table has been set, the aroma of a delicious meal fills the house, someone must have called and she’s celebrating.

When she serves dessert, there’s a note on the plate, “Congratulations! I knew you’d get the job. You know how much I love you!”

After supper, as he’s taking the dishes back, he sees a note that had fallen from his wife’s pocket. It read, “Don’t worry about not getting the job. We can make it. You know how much I love you.”

Friends, we cannot go through this life alone. We need support – emotional and spiritual.

Living prayer gives us that support as we pray for each other and with each other.

As we pray for others, we become involved in their lives, and as we become involved in their lives, our prayers come alive.

You’ve heard it said that ‘Prayer changes things’.

Well, the truth of the matter is that prayer changes people who change things – that God’s love works through you and me to turn our prayers into effective action for the creation of a better life NOW.

That’s why I suggest you pray in the language of how you relate to the world – the adventure of living prayer is to pray your life.

For example, in my prayer life – not just to pray for war-torn Syria, but I would pray for a 67 year old grandfather holding his 2 ½ year old grandson as the bombs and bullets terrorize their lives...that's the prayer picture I offer to God, and in that picture I can see a real person in a real world with a real hurt.

And just look around you, praying the life of those around you.

Instead of praying for the hungry, you would pray for the 6-year-old little girl who will have only one meal today; or for the mother who has to decide how to divide 3 helpings for 4 children.

Or instead of asking God to heal the sick, you offer a prayer for the person who takes medicines like you, only they have to choose which prescription to give up because they can't afford all of them.

Living Prayer describes our relationship with God, with others, and prayer becomes living prayer when we pray our lives rather than simply say our prayers.

I have always liked the prayer by John Baillie *Teach me, O God, so to use all the circumstances of my life today that they may bring forth in me fruits of holiness rather than fruits of sin:*

- *Let me use disappointments as material for patience.*
- *Let me use success as material for thankfulness.*
- *Let me use suspense as material for perseverance.*
- *Let me use danger as material for courage.*
- *Let me use reproach as material for longsuffering.*
- *Let me use praise as material for humility.*
- *Let me use pleasure as material for temperance.*
- *Let me use pain as material for endurance.*

Living prayer means to pray what we live, what we know, what comes into our life, being honest with ourselves and honest with God.

C.S. Lewis wrote: *"I pray because I can't help myself. I pray because I'm helpless. I pray because the need flows out of me all the time, waking and sleeping. It doesn't change God. It changes me."*

The adventure of living prayer is to transform us, not just a paint job on the outside, but evidence that God has spared no expense in the divine restoration work among people like you and me.

I close this trilogy of sermons on prayer with the same convictions I've shared in the first two sermons:

One: When I pray, and it doesn't seem as if God is listening - I will not surrender to the silence. God is listening.

And, second, when I pray, it is not with a perfect knowledge of God, but it is with a firm desire to seek God's will and have the faith to walk in it.

Which is why I believe this is the prayer for the adventure of living:

Day by day, dear Lord, three things I pray.
To see thee more clearly,
To love thee more dearly,
Follow thee more nearly,
Day by day, by day, by day

TO GOD BE THE GLORY.