

"AND HOW SHALL WE PRAY?"

A Sermon By

Rev. Philip A. C. Clarke

Park Avenue United Methodist Church
106 East 86th Street
New York, New York 10028
June 18, 1989

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INTRODUCTION

This past Spring Mother Teresa appeared on Robert Schuller's television program. Schuller reminded her that the show was being carried live all over America and in 22 foreign countries including her own native Yugoslavia. And he asked her if there was one message that she would like to convey to all those viewers. Her response was,

"Yes...tell them to pray. And tell them to teacher their children to pray."

Prayer precedes "good works" in Mother Teresa's estimation. We must connect with Christ before we can truly connect with our neighbor and his many needs.

The disciples of Jesus came to Him after He had finished a time apart for prayer and they made a request of Him, "Lord, teach us to pray". Somehow I believe that this is a need many of us have. We could get our lives and our communities and even our world in order if only we knew how to pray and took time to do it. Fortunately, Jesus has given us a pattern. It begins simply, "Father...hallowed be Thy name."

WE BEGIN BY ACKNOWLEDGING WHO GOD IS

We begin by acknowledging who God is. For you see, prayer is not for God's benefit, but ours! We need to know to whom we are making our petitions. What is His nature? "Father" That pretty well sums it up, doesn't it? He is our loving parent. And yet He is more. "Hallowed (Holy revered, awe-inspiring) be Thy name". He is the Source of our life. He is our everlasting Hope. Without Him we would not even exist.

When Dwight Eisenhower was being inaugurated President of our country in January of 1953, he surprised the nation by personally offering up a prayer to Almighty God. Here was a man who had commanded three million troops in the invasion of Normandy, had brought an end to World War II, and now was being inaugurated into the most powerful office in the world. And what did he do in front of all the nations of the world and all the people in America? He acknowledged that he needed help. He needed a Power greater than he was to fulfill the task before him. Ike explained,

"To the best of my knowledge, the men of courage I have known have been men of faith. I've never seen any of them who weren't."

Dwight D. Eisenhower understood that God was to be hallowed. We begin by acknowledging who God is. God is all-important in our lives.

One of the most striking moments in last Summer's Democratic Convention came during a black clergyman's benediction. NBC TV's Connie Chung sought on camera to interview Jesse Jackson on the convention floor. "Excuse me, we're praying now" said Jackson to Miss Chung. The press would have to wait. Something far more important than an interview on national television was going on. The Democratic Party was acknowledging the power and the presence of God. Prayer is important to our lives because God is important.

"Father...hallowed be Thy name."

WE PRAY THAT OUR HEARTS, OUR WORLD WILL BECOME LIKE THE KINGDOM

"Thy
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come...Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven". In the second place, we pray that our hearts, our community, our country and our world will become like the Kingdom of God.

Luke says simply, "Thy Kingdom come..." Matthew adds, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven". Now unless you have read the Gospels recently, you may have forgotten about the passion that Jesus had for the Kingdom of God. He came preaching "the Kingdom". It was the Kingdom that He said was the pearl of great price, the treasure hidden in the field, the tiny mustard seed that produces a great tree. Wherever God's will is done, whether in Heaven or on earth, there is the Kingdom.

You and I need to develop more of a passion than we have for the Kingdom of God in our time. It is unbelievable that 2,000 years after Christ our world would still have as much hatred, as much violence, as much evil as it does. I believe that if we had maintained Christ's passion for the Kingdom it would not.

By teaching us to pray for the Kingdom, Jesus surely expected us to be working for the Kingdom as well!

A little girl is kneeling beside her bed, offering up her prayers. She says,

"Dear God, if You're there and You hear
my prayer, could you please touch me?"

And just then she feels a touch. She jumps and gets excited. She says, "Thank you God, for touching me." Then she looks up and sees her older sister and gets a little suspicious and says to her,

"Did you touch me?" ..The sister answers, "Yes, I did."
"What did you do that for?" she asked. "God told me
to" was the reply...

Even as we are asking God to bring His Kingdom to our community, God is showing us things that need to be done if this community is to resemble the Kingdom of God. We are His hands, His feet, His mouth in our world. Remember that. He is counting on us just as we are counting on Him until that day comes when truly the Kingdoms of the world become the very Kingdom of our Christ!

WE PRAY THAT GOD WILL MEET OUR DAILY NEEDS

"Give us this day our daily
bread". In the third place,

we pray that God will meet our daily needs. With this sentence we know that Christ means for prayer to be a daily exercise.

Someone once asked E. Standly Jones for the secret of his tremendous physical energy. He wrote more than two dozen books and preached three times a day across India, China and America. This he did for more than 40 years. He replied, "I have kept up my prayer life daily. So I do not face life alone."

An occasional nod in God's direction will not make it. We pray daily. And among the things that are legitimate for us to pray about are our physical needs.

I think that for most of us that part of prayer will be primarily a prayer of thanksgiving. We have so much! We have so much for which to be thankful!

I enjoyed reading about a Couples' Club at the First United Church in Hamilton, Canada who sponsored an annual auction sale. Everybody gathered up their accumulated junk and sent it down to the Church. Then they brought in a professional auctioneer for the occasion. He sold all this stuff and the event raised some big money for missionaries and the Club's budget.

Well, one couple - Joe and Mildred - had some old lawn furniture that had been lying about on the veranda. Mildred thought the auction sale to be a marvelous opportunity to get rid of it. So she went through it all and had it sent down to the church to be sold. But when the time came for the auction, Mildred was home sick and couldn't be there. Joe went instead. You guessed it. Joe saw this lawn furniture and bought it. He thought he had found a terrific bargain. Poor Mildred! She had to wait another year to get rid of it.

We don't worry about our daily bread. We worry about gaining weight. We don't worry about life's essentials. We worry about what to do with all of our "left-over" junk. Right? Rather than praying for our daily bread, which is a legitimate prayer for most of the world's people, our prayers will be chiefly prayers of thanksgiving. I don't know about you, but I want the Father to know that I don't take any of it for granted. I want to thank Him every day for the blessings He has given me.

WE PRAY FOR FORGIVENESS AND FOR THE POWER TO FORGIVE OTHERS

"Forgive us our
trespasses as

we forgive those who trespass against us." Our next prayer is for forgiveness and for the power to forgive others. Many are tempted to make this into a legalistic demand. "If you expect God to forgive you, you must forgive others!" That's true, of course. But forgiveness is not easy for any of us. And yet, we must continue to move in that direction.

I love the story I heard recently about the elderly lady who was driving a big, new expensive car and was preparing to back into a parallel parking space when suddenly a young man in a small car zoomed into the space...beating her out of it. The lady charged out of her big car and angrily demanded to know why he had done that when he could easily tell she was trying to park there and had been there first. His response was simply, "Because I'm young and I'm quick". When he came back out a few minutes later, he found the elderly lady using her big, new car as a battering ram, backing up and then ramming it into his parked car. Now he was angry...very angry...and asked her why she was wrecking his car. Her response was simply, "Because I'm old and I'm rich."

Anger is so easy. Forgiveness on the other hand requires the grace of God. We are able to forgive because we have experienced forgiveness ourselves.

Edith Bunker of "All in the Family" once described the confessional boxes in the Catholic Church as "telephone booths to God". Well...maybe they're not quite that, but every prayer must contain an element of confession. We are not all that God means for us to be. We are finite creatures in every respect. We need His mercy. We need His compassion. We need His amazing grace. So we pray for forgiveness and sometimes we need to get down on our knees and pray hard for the ability to forgive!

WE PRAY FOR GUIDANCE

"And lead us...not into temptation". Our final prayer is for guidance. Mind you, it's a tricky world out there. There are so many snares. Be careful, dear friend.

The year was 1864. A "Bowery Bum" with a slashed throat was brought into Bellevue Hospital here in the city. The man was unable to recover from his injury because of a body weakened by excessive alcoholism. He had a fever. He suffered intense pain from the laceration on his throat. He lost a great deal of blood. He was suffering from malnutrition. He survived for several days until finally he died at the age of 38.

And he died with only 38¢ in his pocket. As this story unfolded, however, they discovered that this was not just another "Bowery Bum". He had been well known all over America, famous for his songs. He had charmed America into singing, "De Camptown Races", and "Oh! Susanna". Then it was "Jeanie With the Light Brown Hair" and "My Old Kentucky Home" and hundreds more. Any guesses as to what his name was. Stephen C. Foster. But on that cold wintry night here in this city in 1864, Stephen Foster died, leaving behind the legacy of a wasted life.

Stephen Foster never intended to have his life end like that. Nobody ever does. One of the most important prayer many of us could pray is "Lead Us Not Into Temptation". Not that God ever does tempt us to do evil. Matthew helps us here again by adding, "And deliver us from evil". In other words, "Don't even let us near where the sin is lurking!"

We need God's guidance in this world. And we pray for it daily. Life is difficult enough even for the most devout and dedicated people we know.

CLOSING STORY

I like the story about the young man who went ice fishing for the first time. He arrived there with all of his equipment and began to cut a circle in the ice. Suddenly he heard a deep voice say somberly, "Don't cut that ice". The young man stopped, looked around, didn't see anyone, and so he moved to a different part of the ice and started to drill another circle. Again the deep voice from nowhere announced, "Don't cut the ice". Finally the young man yelled,

"All right...what's going on here? What are you bothering me for? Just who the heck do you think you are anyway?"

To which the mystery voice replied, "I'm the manager of the skating rink"

Now I only wish that God's voice were that easy to distinguish. I would like to hear it "boom" out every time I'm about to goof or take the wrong step. But you know...that's not the way life works. We walk by faith - praying each step of the way for God's guidance along the path we walk.

Mother Teresa says, "Tell them to pray and to teach their children to pray". Our Lord gave us the model long ago. Pray that God's Kingdom will come to this world. Give Him thanks for your daily bread. Ask His forgiveness even as you try to forgive others. And pray daily for His guidance.

PRAYER

Teach us, O God, how to pray...how to withdraw from the pressures of life, not in self-interest or self-indulgence, but to find the

quietness and the strength that we need in order that we may handle life and handle it well. Help us always to remember the example of Your Son, Jesus, and how in his withdrawing and returning, He fulfilled one of Your laws and made His life great and rich for all others. In His name and spirit, we offer this prayer. Amen

PASTORAL PRAYER: June 18, 1989

O THOU, who art the light of the kinds that know Thee,
the joy of the hearts that love Thee,
the strength of the wills that serve Thee...

HEAR OUR THOUGHTS as we enter once again into the quiet time
of prayer. Far from us Thou never art, but by the
busyness of our lives and the insensitiveness of our
hearts we shut Thee out. We keep Thee distant.

GREAT IS THY power. Infinite Thy love. Thy concern is for all
mankind.

FOR THE warmth and the beauty of a Summer Day...for the opportunity to
assemble in worship, and to share in fellowship with others with-
in these hallowed walls, we give Thee our thanks.

FOR THE guidance and for the care that have brought us safely through
the work of another week to this place where we may find
faith and draw strength, we would give YOU our thanks.

NOW HELP US never to trifle with the sacred purposes of this hour,
never to fritter away its meaning with wanderings of
mind, and bring to each worshipper present a sense of
undergirding, a sense of forgiveness, a sense of
renewed purpose and deeper meaning.

AS WE UNITE together in the pastoral concerns of life, we ask that Thy
blessing might rest upon -

All who are engaged in healing the sick.
All who are helping to rescue the fallen.
All who are entrusted with responsibility for leader-
ship in high places.
All who are working diligently and faithfully for
peace among the people of our troubled world.

REMIND US, Lord, that we cannot fellowship with Thee, if in
our hearts we neglect or reject our brother or
sister who is in need.

MAY THE INFLUENCE of this Lord's Day be strong in our land.
And may those who call upon Thee in prayer be
given the strength to bear their burdens and the
willingness to help bear the burdens of others.

ALL THIS we ask in the name and the spirit of Him who long ago came
among us and of whom people said, "He is the Way, the Truth,
and the Life."

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ANNOUNCEMENTS: Sunday, June 18, 1989

I. GREETING / VISITORS

- A. We greet the visitors in the congregation this morning...so pleased to have you spending this hour with us. Be free in the sharing of your name...make yourself known to us.
- B. Fill out a visitor card or sign one of the Guest Books. Join us downstairs for punch and cookies. Come...worship with us again. Work with us, too, in the programs of service and of outreach in which we are involved...
- C. The roots of this church are deep in the soil of this part of the world's greatest city. We've been doing the Lord's work here since 1837...fourth building out of which we have ministered. We like to say to new friends that we "minister" here in the name of Christ and it is in His loving spirit that we embrace all of you this morning with words of joy, peace and love.

II. PARDON OUR APPEARANCE

- A. And do "pardon our appearance"...we're in the process of re-decorating and restoring our sanctuary...our beloved place of worship after 15 years.
- B. And work is progressing nicely above us and around us. And so, too, is our Restoration Fund Drive...our appeal for \$40,000 to help share the cost of this restoration. We're more than half way there with something like 104 gifts and pledges gratefully received. They total \$ 23,250. How wonderful it would be if we could "wrap up" this appeal by the end of the month.
- C. Our thanks to all who have responded so generously, and so promptly. About 20% of those we have approached have responded thus far. Hopefully, many more will be pitching in and helping out.

III. PARISH CONCERNS

- A. Be sure to purchase your ticket today for the All Church Picnic of this coming Saturday. It's always a fun and festive day...see Doreen Morales, our Picnic Coordinator, today and get on board. Remember, the bus leaves and cars as well at 8:30 on Saturday.
- B. Jesus said: "It is more blessed to give than to receive" In this spirit...

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"And lead us...not into temptation". Our final prayer is for guidance. Mind you, it's a tricky world out there. There are so many snares. Be careful, dear friend.

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ANTHEM: "Keep Not Thou Silence"

"Keep not Thou silence, O God. Hold not Thy peace and be not still, O God."

ANTHEM: "Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring"

"Jesu, joy of man's desiring, Holy wisdom, love most bright. Drawn by Thee, our souls aspiring soar to uncreated light. Word of God, our flesh that fashion'd with the fire of life impassion'd. Striving still to Truth unknown, soaring, dying round Thy throne".

ORGAN POSTLUDE

The organ postlude - a final offering of our praise to God - is played after the Benediction. Time permitting, we invite you to share in the beauty of it.

FOR THOSE WHO SING

During June, choir rehearsals will be held on Sunday mornings at ten o'clock.

SATURDAY, JULY 1

Our wedding is to be on Saturday, July 1st, at 4 pm at Christ Church United Methodist Chapel, 60th Street and Park Avenue. If you are "in town" that weekend, of course we want you to come, to share in our joy and to wish us luck.

Love, Lynn and Phil

"HOUNDS OF HEAVEN"

The "Hounds of Heaven" meet on Tuesday evening at 6:30 in Fellowship Hall. Come and share in the study of Dieterich Bonhoeffer's book, The Cost of Discipleship. George Leopold is class leader.

ALDRSGATE CLASS

The Aldersgate Class meets on Wednesday evening for Bible study in Fellowship Hall 7:30 pm. Carl Condra is class leader.

TICKETS ARE NOW ON SALE

Tickets - costing \$5.00 - are now on sale for the June 24th All Church Picnic. See Doreen Morales, Picnic Coordinator, for yours. This is a major fellowship event of our Church for the year and all are encouraged to get in shape and plan to come.

MEETINGS THIS WEEK

The Nomination and Personnel Committee will meet on Tuesday evening, June 20th, at 7:30 pm in the Russell Room.

The Membership Committee will meet on Thursday evening, June 22nd, at 7:30 pm in the Russell Room.

On Saturday, June 24th, at 8:00 am in front of the Church all church members and friends will join for the ALL CHURCH PICNIC. The bus will leave PROMPTLY at 8:30 am, we shall return to the city by 6:00 pm.

PEOPLE:

1. Last Sunday for Robert Pittman...Atlanta bounded....Choir, Audit.
2. With us today, Pam Hubby...of Atlanta.... here only for the week and especially today.

SHARE WORD WITH US

The Committee on Nominations and Personnel will be meeting Tuesday, June 20th, to begin work on our 1990 committee personnel.

You're invited to "pass word on" to the minister if you have a special interest in a particular committee assignment. It's helpful to have people serving the Church in their area of interest and expertise.

Committee assignments can include the following areas: Day School, Education (Sunday School), Fellowship, Finance, Membership, Outreach, and Worship.

We also need people working in such areas as the Church Fair, the Coffee Hours (Hosts and Hostesses) and Church Ushering.

Let us hear from you as the Committee on Nominations and Personnel begins its summer work of enlisting people and putting together our 1990 working committees.

And many thanks to all who are hard at work this year in so many different areas. Many hands make light work.

"HIGH ABOVE US"

The restoration and redecoration of our sanctuary is going forward nicely "high above us". Within a week or two, you'll soon be able to see the miracle of transformation that is taking place. We're right on schedule.

And gifts to the "If Our Walls Could Speak" restoration fund drive are coming in nicely. Members, friends, former members and non-resident members are all responding with generous contributions. Indeed, a wonderful miracle is in the making.

The goal for our Restoration Fund appeal is \$40,000. To date, 105 gifts have been gratefully received. They total \$23,343.00. In other words, we're half way there!

Use the pledge card in the pews if you wish to make a pledge of support. Or, if you wish to make a gift today, make sure your check carries a designation of "Restoration Fund". When people yoke their lives and their faith in determination together, great things happen!