

Sermon – 7th Easter

John 16:23-33

May 26, 2019

“All the King’s Friends”

My subject today is prayer – and I want to enter it by way of John 15:15, where Jesus said something quite remarkable. In saying “farewell” to his disciples, Jesus said *“I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.”*

The “farewell” part of this is important, because Jesus says something else regarding our relationship with God just a bit later - in John 16:26-27, where he says *“In that day you will ask in my name. I am not saying that I will ask the Father on your behalf. No, the Father himself loves you because you have love me and have believed that I came from God.”* In the ancient Near East, there was a pecking order of access to heads of state – kings. They, like modern leaders, had their bureaucracies, and servants who carried out the king’s commands. But if you were in the inner circle – you were regarded as a *“friend of the king.”* You not only got to be in his presence now and then – you got to be involved in discussions about what the king decided. You *“knew the master’s business”* – and while his decision was final, your input was heard.

When Jesus says therefore, in John 16:24, a verse that clearly pertains to conversation with God – prayer that is, *“ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete”* – we need to read it from the perspective of John 15:15 – meaning as friends of Jesus, and therefore, friends of God. Friends of ancient kings no doubt asked kings for things – favors and such – as they do today, but friends of ancient kings talked with kings in order to know what they were thinking and wanted, to discover what their “will” was, so they could be in the know, and even shape what the king did. Being so valued, being given such a privilege as this – would be complete joy to someone in those days – a prized position to hold.

There are many verses in Scripture that teach about prayer – Jesus says in Luke 11:9, in words that mirror what he says in John 16:24, *“ask and you will receive”*, and he clearly says it regard to a providing Father, saying that if we who have or are “human fathers” know how to give good gifts to our children, how much more our Father in heaven will give to those who ask. But he ends the teaching on prayer in Luke by saying *“how much more will the Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him.”*

My point is this – prayer is first and foremost an act of seeking the will of God. We could go on endlessly in discussions along the lines of *“I’m seeking God’s will for my life”* - direction on everything from how to handle a problem that has arisen to where to enroll in school, whom to marry, whether or not to take a job, right on down to where to go buy a new couch or go to dinner. Ok, Jesus says for us to “ask”, so ask - converse with God – the more the better. But Jesus also says *“seek first the kingdom of God, and all these things will be added to you.”*

The kind of friends Jesus says we've been gifted to be are not favor-seeking ones but influence sharing friends of the King. Think about that before you pray. And while we are told clearly that such access to God is to be made through the name of Jesus – John 16:26-27 says it is clearly direct access to God the Father we have in prayer. The setting of this lesson from John 16 is likely the upper room where the other gospels tell us Jesus and his disciples ate “his last supper.” It could however have taken place on the road to the Garden of Gethsemane, after supper, where Jesus would for the final time in his life – kneel in prayer to his Father. Lord, teach us how to pray indeed – prayers at the end of one's life are the most sincere, are they not?

The other gospels all tell us Jesus wanted to be relieved of his suffering – or at least he wondered if there was another way to save people from their sins. But they also tell us he ended his “last prayer” saying “*not my will Father, but thine be done.*” Prayer is speech with God, and speech with God had ever since the Garden called Eden been disturbed by the sin Jesus came to save us from. Once free and honest, in the aftermath of Adam's sin - his decision not to listen to the will of God and act out of his own will – speech with God had been tainted – even guilt ridden.

Over the years the priests of Israel led prayers for the people but always by first offering up sacrifices for the guilt of the people. Prayer in the aftermath of Eden is often portrayed for us in as it was in Genesis 3 - as demanding and defensive. In the preface to his “last prayer” with God in our lesson from John today, Jesus says that is about to end. “In his name” speech with God would once again be joyful, free of defensiveness and, amazingly, a reflection of who we by grace have become - “friends of the king.” Little wonder that when he taught us to pray, our Lord said “*say this...Father...thy kingdom come, thy will be done.*”

So how should you pray? What should the content of your prayers be? Oh my gosh a dozen sermons would be needed to answer that. You know what – just say something – start somewhere! But as friends of the king – your first order in prayer John tells us ought not to be to seek “*God's will for your life*” – rather his will for his kingdom. And his will is that the inhabitants of that kingdom do what he commands. In John 16, clarity is a big issue. The disciples of Jesus are frustrated he is always using “figures of speech.” “Tell us plainly” they say.

Jesus answer is remarkable and ought to embolden our prayers. He says; “ask the Father yourself. You're his friends, and friends are not only privy to what God is doing – they're participants in it. As we believe – so we pray. AMEN