

Why Pray?

Hespeler, 8 May 2022 © Scott McAndless

[Acts 9:36-43](#), Psalm 23, Revelation 7:9-17, John 10:22-30

Our Bible story from the Book of Acts this morning is really a very uplifting story, isn't it? We have this woman, Dorcas, and she is a simply wonderful woman. Everybody loves her. She makes all of her friends these beautiful clothes that they treasure. And yes, she gets sick and dies and that is so very sad. But then Simon Peter shows up, he prays and he raises her from the dead and basically everyone lives happily ever after. It is just so beautiful. It reminds us of the power of the resurrection of Jesus to renew our own lives and to give us the hope for a life beyond this one.

A Few Questions

So, it is absolutely a feel-good story. And yet, at the same time, it is also the kind of story that, when you look at it closely, is going to make you ask a few questions. We've talked about prayer, and it certainly makes you ask a few questions about prayer.

Questions like, what if Simon Peter hadn't been in a nearby town so they could ask him to come and pray for her? Would God have just left her dead simply because there wasn't a good enough prayer around? And what about all of the other really nice women who made beautiful clothes that didn't have Peter to pray for them? Why wouldn't God care enough to raise those women?

And then there is an even more delicate question about prayer in general. Why is it necessary? I mean, apparently God had already decided that he was going to raise Dorcas. The story ends by telling us, **"This became known throughout Joppa, and many believed in the Lord."**

Why Would Prayer Change Anything?

That seems to be the point of it. God wants the message to spread and raising somebody from the dead is definitely a public relations coup! So,



if God had already decided to do it, why did he need Peter to ask? And if God didn't want to do it, why should the almighty Creator of the universe be persuaded to change plans just because this one guy asked God to do it?

In short, the question is, why pray for these things? If God already knows what we want, then why do we need to ask? If God is really in charge, why should we think that God might change course on something just because we ask? These are all really good questions, and they deserve answers.

Transactional Prayer

The root problem, I think, is this. We just don't understand prayer the way that God does. We tend to think of it, like we do most things, as a transaction. You go into the candy store, you slam down your toonie down on the counter and the cashier gives you a box of Reece's Pieces®. That's a transaction. And we think of prayer that way – we do an act of devotion for God, or we ask in just the right way in just the right words, and God gives us the thing that we want in return.

Based on a Certain View of God

The biggest problem with that way of thinking about prayer is the picture of God it is based on. It presumes that God is somewhere "out there," and that prayer is the post office or the email server that we can use to contact God in that distant place. But here is the thing, God is not "out there." God is certainly not just up there in the sky looking down. If God is truly God, then God is right here. God is right beside you, perhaps closer than anyone has ever been. Come to think of it, if God is God, then God must be in some sense already within you.

So, of course, when you think to pray and ask for something, God already knows that you need it. God is a part of that need. When you worry and pray for someone who is sick or in danger, God already feels your sorrow, anxiety and fear for that person. Prayer is not a transaction, it is participation. It is God participating in what you need or in what you are feeling. It is you participating with God in the ongoing work of creation.

A Master Dancer Seeking a Partner

On one level, yes, I would affirm that God does not need us to pray in order for God to do whatever needs to be done. But, on another level, I would say that God acting without us entering into that

conversation of prayer would be kind of like a master dancer who was able to do all of the steps absolutely perfectly and flawlessly. But the problem with that is that the best Tango dancer in the world cannot dance the Tango without a partner.

God wants you to be that partner. It's not because you have to say the right thing or do it in the right way. It's not even because you know all of the steps of the dance. God wants a partner. God wants to give you the privilege of being part of the dance.

Or think of prayer as a song. When you pray, you get to put your concerns into words, however imperfectly, so that God can take up your melody and sing the perfect harmony. That's what prayer is, not a transaction. It's a dance, it's a song, it is an exercise in making that eternal connection between the human and divine perceptible, even if only for a moment. So, yes, let us pray!