

PRAYING SILENTLY AS I WALK WITH JESUS

Scripture: Matthew 6:5-6

March 11, 2020

“And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.”

Those who know me are well aware of my aversion to praying non-communal prayers publicly. (For the record, I enthusiastically share in reciting the Lord’s Prayer each week in church.) I have a deep appreciation for good pray-ers in the same manner as I do for good cooks; I am a grateful eater of home cooking, but I am not so much of a cook myself!

My avoidance of public prayer is a bit incongruous as I enjoy public speaking and I am not a shy person. Though I have done it on occasion, spontaneous public praying is simply not part of my DNA. A few years ago, when I took on a leadership role in the UMC, I spoke to the Bishop about my prayer phobia, and he reminded me that God accepts all of us and not to despair. He then shared the story of a person much like me, who, when asked to pray in a public forum, became so flustered she could not remember how to end her prayer and concluded with “good-bye” instead of the more traditional “Amen.” Undoubtedly, she and I are kindred souls!

I believe that the message of Matthew 6:5-6 is that we should pray with sincerity to the primary recipient, our Lord. If you are praying for the right reasons, then you can speak privately to God rather than catering to the masses in order to establish your devoutness! If you only want the accolades achieved from praying to an assembly, then that is all you will receive. It is the genuineness of the prayer and not the number of listeners that pleases God. An audience of the One is just fine.

While I confess that I do take some solace that Matthew provides support for my private prayers, this is not a criticism of those who are gifted at praying before a larger group. God exalts those who honestly: pray out loud on any occasion, write beautiful poetic prayers, can only utter a sigh, and, like me, offer private, conversational, often inarticulate, ramblings! This Lenten season, pray in the manner that is authentic for you.

Prayer: God, prayer is personal, and you know that not all of us can pray spontaneously in public. You listen to us through any means we are able to connect with you. Please help us to always be sincere in our communication. Amen

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