



Saint Andrews Weekend
October 30, 2016
Pastor Mark Toone
Chapel Hill Presbyterian Church

Lord, Teach Us to Pray: Prayers of the Saints
Romans 8:26-29

I love rib eye steak. I eat it rarely, but when I do, I enjoy each juicy, flavor-filled bite. I don't wolf it down; I tarry over it. That's how we've been approaching the Lord's Prayer. Taking our time, bit by bit, to savor a prayer that we so often just wolf down. One of the members of my LifeGroup said, "Now I find that when we are praying the Lord's Prayer, I want to say, 'Slow down... slow down, you are praying it too fast!' I want to savor every word." Hopefully, all of us are praying this prayer differently because we've taken the time to really listen to Jesus as he says, "Pray then like this."

But today, on our Saint Andrews Weekend, I want to take a hiatus from the Lord's Prayer. I want to talk about prayer partners. How many of you have a prayer partner? Someone who you know prays faithfully and fervently for you? One of my faithful prayer partners is my mom. When we were sorting through our mementos after the sale of our home, I plowed through boxes of letters my mom wrote me when I was at university in St. Andrews. Several letters a week. It is an incredible trove of faithfulness. And again and again, she would speak of how she was praying for me. To this day, I know my mom is my faithful prayer partner. In fact, it is hard to imagine anyone more faithful, more diligent or, frankly, more connected with God in prayer than my mother.

But there is someone. My most faithful prayer partner. And by the way, he's yours, too... and I'll bet you didn't even know it. Let's turn to Romans 8:26 to read about Him.

Likewise, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

So who is our most faithful prayer partner? The Holy Spirit—the third person of the Trinity, the Spirit of Jesus who lives inside of us! Paul tells us that "...the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words." This is astounding!

When our son, Cooper, was a little guy, he didn't talk. He had a condition that caused him to be so sensitive to sensory input that he was overwhelmed. Touch, texture, taste, sound... all of it overwhelmed him. The only thing he could control was his own speech. And he did. For years, he barely said a thing. And frankly, he didn't need to at home, because he had a big sister named Rachel. Rachel knew what Cooper wanted, knew what he was trying to say, and sometimes before he even had a chance to try, she would speak for him. She was his interpreter; his spokesperson.

That is what this beautiful text describes. When we are at a point of weakness—when we are speechless before the Lord and don't even know where to begin in prayer—we discover that we have a divine prayer partner. The very Spirit of God. The one who lives within us and understands our heart and our longings and our pain and our inadequacy, also understands the heart of the Father and His longings for us. And that Spirit becomes our divine spokesperson, praying on our behalf — speaking the words to God that we would pray if we could find them. Did you know that?

Isn't that an incredible picture? We usually assume that prayer is something we have to do; that's why Jesus taught us to pray. And of course, that is true. But here we discover that even in those moments when we are stuck—speechless, mute before God—the Holy Spirit intercedes for us. He says, "Uh, Father, Abba what Mark is trying to say... what Mark meant to say, what Mark can't say is this!"

Imagine that! God the Spirit prays for us—intercedes on our behalf with God the Father. Isn't that wild? And he does so with groanings too deep for words. He taps into the deepest things of our soul—things we don't even know how to touch upon—and expresses them perfectly.

When I shared this with my LifeGroup, for one of the men it was like a lightbulb went off. He said, "I never saw this passage before. But it gives me such great comfort. There are times when a prayer request is so important, so meaningful, so profound, I don't even know where to begin." So the Holy Spirit begins for us. Isn't that great?

By the way, the Holy Spirit is not our only prayer partner. Take a look at verse 34: "...Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us." So, within a few short verses, we discover that not only is the Holy Spirit within us praying for us... Jesus is standing next the Father's throne and He's interceding on our behalf, too. Leaning over and saying, "See, that's Mark. He belongs to me. He is precious to me. He is my little brother. Love him like you love me." The Son and the Spirit are praying for me and for you!

In a moment I will read ten names of Chapel Hill saints who died last year. I buried every one of them. I walked with some of them in their last hours, and I walked

with their families in the grief and weakness of their loss. What comfort it is to realize that even in those moments of pain and suffering—when we are absolutely mute before the Lord, unable to give word to our grief—the Holy Spirit, the gracious Holy Spirit says, “That’s all right. Be still. I’ve got this. I’ll carry you. Let me pray for you.”

So let us remember and celebrate the legacy of faith past as we watch a scroll of the names of every Chapel Hill member who has gone to be with the Lord. Please stand when your loved one’s name appears. And will you join me in amazement as we remember that God the Son and God the Spirit prayed these saints right into the eternal presence of God the Father, to his name be glory forever and ever.

Amen