

I'm a bad pray-er. Would probably never be called a prayer warrior. I don't really take time to sit down and pray. My mind wanders, or get bored. My prayer life is more short snippets – talking to God. Not continuously, maybe not even regularly, not always deep or eloquent or poetic, but as thoughts run through my head, I talk to God.

As I drive by your houses.

As I run – and can't clear my mind.

As I fall asleep.

Around the dinner table, or putting Anya to bed.

Even in church – in small groups, meetings, during hospital visits, kid sermons – the prayers aren't rehearsed, just what pops in my head.

My prayers would never be put into a song.

But that doesn't mean we shouldn't pray – even if it never sounds like Hannah. Even if prayer isn't answered the way we hoped for – like it is for Hannah.

Hannah is barren, and wants a baby, promises to give it to God, to the temple. It is a bit of a selfish prayer – a baby gives her status and worth forever, but she also selfless as she makes this deal with God. The baby born to her, Samuel, becomes a prophet. Her prayer is answered! And she sings about it. How great if that would happen all the time?

But that isn't reality. Prayer can be complicated - to understand, and to do.

This past week – during a small group gathering, I invited someone, heck anyone, to offer a prayer. I got no takers. This isn't uncommon, a lot of time I expect to be the pray-er at church events.

And I mumbled to myself – probably louder than I intended...maybe this is why our church is failing. I regretted that comment. And I am sorry.

But also, it struck a chord. Our inability to pray, individually, collectively, as Bristol Lutheran, or the Church Universal – may be why we fall short of God's will.

We can't continue to rely on the professional pray-er.

My job is to pray for the congregation,
but not as the designated pray-er.

My job is to encourage and guide and teach you to pray.

Some us are gifted pray-ers. Others maybe have to work more. But as Eguene Peterson says - prayer is how we get in on what God is doing.

So even when it feels uncomfortable, we practice prayer, conversation with God.

We teach our kids to pray – our confirmation students and youth group – why as adults are we embarrassed to talk to God.

How do you pray?

- Rote prayers – On the screen, Lord's prayer,
- Silent prayers –by self? In a group?
- Aloud

About what do you pray?

So why don't/do we pray? Do you believe in the power of the prayer?

I'll admit, the practice of prayer has always confused me. Because of stories like Hannah.

Just pray harder. Pray more. Get more people praying. Prayer warriors. It seems like we teach the more prayer, the more action from God.

But prayer doesn't change God. We can't change God, otherwise God would cease to be all powerful.

How ungodlike would it be to require a certain amount of prayer, before God would act?

So if God is already in control, (not God controlling us) but if God already knows us and what will happen, why do we pray?

Because we are changed.

Just like Moses last week – his prayer, his plea, his conversation with God – changed Moses. Prayer changes you and me and our community. It is a holy sacred moment where we talk to God, and we listen for God.

Prayer often summarizes our conversation, acknowledges God's presence in the conversation, and shows thanksgiving and gratitude to God. That can be poetic, but doesn't need to be. You can lower your expectations.

Maybe we have trouble praying because, we aren't sure how it is answered. To pray and expect it to drop from the sky – is fanciful faith. Yet we do that, we want that. It's easier.

But the answer so often shows up in God's response – in silence, in the calming, in that little voice in our head, and through others. God answers prayer yes, but Hannah's prayer shows us that God listens.

We realize that the answer to prayer comes in the midst of us being changed. We are changed to carry out God's good work. We pray that our will matches God's will.

God can – and often does - act without us. But a lot of prayer is answered, when the Spirit stirs us to action. God's work, our hands is not a cliché - but theological, biblical truth.

“Don't pray unless you are willing to be an answer to the prayer.” (Quote unknown)

A lot of time my prayers aren't for things to happen, but for things that have already happened.

Little snippet talks to God. Responding to what God has already done.

Hannah responds to everything in a prayer – affirming God's presence and strength in her, gifts that only come from God.

She praises God incomparable; no other like this God, who knows us, surprises us, strengthens us, forgives us, and loves us.

Maybe our prayer practice starts with thankful response.

Let's start there. Turn to your neighbor. Make it simple. Give God thanks for that person. And ask God to take care of them. Whatever pops into your head. Let them hear it. Listen to what is said. Both of you may be changed by prayer.

And keep talking to God.

God loves to listen.