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SERMON TITLE: **What is Prayer About Anyway?**  
SCRIPTURE: **Mark 11:11-18**  
DATE: **March 27, 2022**  
Online service at [www.fpcd.org/live-stream](http://www.fpcd.org/live-stream)

Read also 2 Chronicles 6:12-21.

**W**hat do you do for solace? Is there someone you talk to? A favorite grandparent, friend, or confidant to whom you talk? They always make you feel better. Perhaps they know your history. They know your stressors. They know your faults. They know your triumphs and joys. You can say anything to them, even the awful stuff because . . .

They know you and love you anyway!

Today I want to talk about a place of solace God has set up for us. Do you think of God caring about our comfort or relief, giving succor and support? Someone said in a meeting I attended this week that God is much easier on us than we are on ourselves. Let's imagine God is just that. Let's think this morning that God WANTS that for us. God wants us to see Him as a place of solace.

You may not think that when I read this passage but hold on! Don't give up! It's an interesting passage, especially in light of the words in 2 Chronicles. READ Mark 11:11-18

All four Gospels tell this story, and in John, it tells us that the disciples credited it to a prophesy in the Psalms:

"It is zeal for your house that has consumed me; the insults of those who insult you have fallen on me." (69:9)

In other words—*I'm taking up your cause, God.*

I don't know that we can quite understand what it was to experience that event—if Jesus was here in 2021 visiting our city and our sanctuary and he found it wanting and so he proceeded to set it straight, what would we do or think?

For those of you who might have a Jesus who is meek and mild, or a gentle "love-only" Jesus, get the full impact here. He was Jesus-out-of-control; Jesus who had had it. What's going on here! He's throwing tables over, making a whip and driving people out, slinging their money far and wide, calling people thieves. He is very upset.

What is he so upset about?

It was festival time—Passover. He had already come into the temple the night before and looked at everything carefully, and then he left the building for the evening because it was late. He came back the next day in this rage.

The way to understand what happened in the temple is to understand the purpose of the temple as described in 2 Chronicles. King Solomon built the original temple and he wrote down extensive details about not only how it is built, but how each section was to be used.

**God does not keep secrets from us.** There are plenty of things about God which are a mystery and which we will not know in our lifetime. But the things God is doing on earth involving worship is a different story. **God shares God's purpose with people.**

We should feel very good about that. Worship is a GIFT! It is a place for solace.

When First Presbyterian Church participated in The Flavor of Duncanville last week, we took a survey. We asked people who stopped by our booth to answer two questions:

1. What do you need from your local church?
2. How can our church serve you best?
  - One of the answers was *a safe place.*
  - A second answer following closely was *prayer.*

When we think about the temple, Solomon said to the people that the temple he built was inadequate. He explained to his people that the highest heavens could not contain God, much less a structure on earth. Solomon believed God had very specific plans and God's own intention was that the temple would be a place where prayer and forgiveness happened. It would be a place where foreigners, and all nations – would be welcome, even **invited to come** to seek the One True God and pray to God. The reason for designating the temple to prayer was so that all the peoples of the earth may know God's name and fear Him. (1 Kgs 8:43)

The outside temple court which Jesus walked through was the court of the Gentiles. **The temple was built for all the peoples of the earth to come and pray.** Yes, sacrifices took place at certain times. But remember how Jesus interpreted God's purpose for people who worship God:

"For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings" (Hosea 6:6).

Jesus said, "Those who are well do not need a physician; but those who are sick do." In other words, the main function of the temple was love and forgiveness, the main purpose is for us to connect to the mercy of God which leads to the knowledge of God.

When we know God personally, we begin to be healed. This happens through personal relationship with God. It happens through intimate conversation. PRAYER

Remember Hannah, when she went to the temple with her problem? She could not get pregnant and she was being taunted by “the other (fertile) wife.” She prayed her heart out at the temple. (See 1 Samuel 1:9ff)

But, instead of the temple in Jesus’ time being set up so people could pray, it was filled with stalls of animals and currency exchange booths and money changers’ tables. Thousands of people visited the temple during these festivals. Josephus, the historian who lived at that time, tells us that during Passover week, one year 255,000 lambs were sold and sacrificed at the temple.

It was noisy and there was no room for quiet prayer.

Now Jerusalem was one of the largest, most famous cities. It would have been like New York City or Chicago. Imagine the Stock Exchange, filled with buying and selling, or the Commodities Board of Trade in Chicago, now called the CME group, two huge exchanges. So imagine Jesus walking through all of that. And the outer court through which he walked first was the Court of the Gentiles. What does God want? For all the nations of the earth to be able to come and pray.

How hospitable was it? How was the access to the temple? Would any other people feel welcome? Would they feel that it was a place to bare your soul to God? Could anyone have knelt down to pray quietly? *And how was the smell?* ☺

“For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings” (Hosea 6:6).

All those people whom Jesus knew needed healing, needed forgiveness, needed someone to pray with them were absent because the temple was not accessible to the nations.

**The nations were robbed of their place in the house of prayer.**

**God was robbed of the worship of the nations.**

So you can see why Jesus walked into the entryway and put a complete stop to the situation. He would not allow anyone to carry in merchandise to sell, change money, or sacrifice any animals for the entire day. He turned the temple leaders’ world upside down.

There was another way that people were being robbed. When they were told that going to the temple was for the purpose of sacrifice, or BUYING their forgiveness, or appeasing God with their sacrifice, it was false security. But God only wants you and me to come to him, pray and say “I’m sorry” when we sin so he can forgive us.

Jesus was opening up a relationship with God through prayer. It is a heart thing.

“And I will give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit in you. I will take out your stony, stubborn heart and give you a tender, responsive heart. And I will put my Spirit in you” (Ezekiel 36:26-27a).

**Prayer is a heart thing.**

Let’s look at what prayer does for us: (from 2 Chronicles 6)

- ~ When you hear, *forgive*.
- ~ When there is drought, *send rain* and *forgive* when we confess our sins.
- ~ *Teach us to follow the right path* when we stray and restore us because *we are your special possession*.
- ~ When we pray about our troubles or sorrow, *hear* and *forgive*.
- ~ When foreigners come, then *grant what they ask of you*. In this way, all the people of the earth will come to know and fear you.
- ~ If we sin against you -- and who has never sinned? -- you might become angry with us and let our enemies conquer us. But we might turn to you in repentance and pray, ‘We have sinned, done evil, and acted wickedly.’ If we turn to you with our whole heart and turn toward this temple and pray, then *uphold our cause*.
- ~ *Forgive* your people who have sinned against you.

It is a wonderful gift to have a sanctuary; to come here to worship and especially to pray. Do you appreciate this gift? I encourage you to do so. **It is a place of forgiveness, healing, worship and prayer.**

Allow God to change your heart in this place. For we are each responsible for what we do. But when we turn to God no matter the sin, there is no condemnation through Christ Jesus our Lord.

This is an amazing solace. Are you engaging with it?

AMEN