

## OPENING PRAYER

No matter how many roads we have traveled or what paths we have taken, we are here in this Church today to worship you and to learn about you and your designs for us. Open our hearts and our minds and allow us to hear your Word. Amen.

## SCRIPTURE READING – Matthew 6:1-13 (NIV)

Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.

So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

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. And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

This, then, is how you should pray:

Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come,  
your will be done,  
on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
And forgive us our debts,  
as we also have forgiven our debtors.  
And lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from the evil one.

## WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

So, what would you do?

This is a question I have asked myself a hundred times.

I pray every day that I would have the wisdom to recognize the truth, and the strength to stand up for it. One of the lessons in the Prayer 101 Retreat is to find the true voice within, the one voice that comes from the Spirit because, as we all know, there can be many voices in there.

But allow me to indulge.

A man walks in here next week and says, "Well, you know there is a better way to reach the Kingdom of God."

Now, we have been doing it the same way for two thousand years and we think we know what we are doing.

But this person says, "No, there is a better way. Follow me and I will show you the way."

Now, we have never heard of this person before. We have no idea of where he comes from. We have no idea where he was trained or what he has learned. Yet there is something about him that is very intriguing, and some small voice inside us says maybe we should listen a little. And there are other wise men who tell us that no matter what, he has been sent with a message we should hear.

But he shows up day after day preaching a different message than the one we have been taught. Preaching of a different way to a relationship with the Holy Spirit.

We have been taught that the rules are the way to get into Heaven. There are ten simple rules we must follow, and that is all there is to it. But this man tells us that there is much more to it than just following some rules, rules we cannot even honor as it is. He tells us that we can develop a personal relationship with God. Yeah, that's right: if we pray hard enough and long enough, we can have a relationship directly with God. And through this relationship we can choose to live in Heaven today or we can choose to live in Hell today. Through this relationship is the way we enter the Kingdom of God.

## WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

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Now, the religious leaders that we know and respect tell us, “No, don’t listen to *that*. Listen to what you have been taught by us, your leaders. Who is this man? What are his credentials? I have a Ph.D. from Princeton Seminary and I have taught you well.”

But he keeps showing up, insisting there is a better way, and again somewhere deep down inside you know, you sense, that something about his teaching has some merit, has some truth, no matter how different it is from what “you know.”

So, what would you do?

Now, to add some intrigue, this person starts to perform miracles like we have never seen before, miracles that are beyond human power; they come from a power beyond our comprehension. He turns water into wine; he would be very popular here in Newport Beach. He heals the sick; he saves the dying; he heals the crippled; just the mere touch of his cloak and a person can be healed from an affliction. He drives out the demons and the demons know who he is; they recognize him as a man of God. But instead of YouTubing it to gain fame and fortune or popularity, he tells everyone he has affected “Now don’t tell anyone about this,” because that is not the message he is trying to teach.

Now the religious leaders are really worried that this person is going to undermine their authority. They have to figure out a way to stop this madness or they will lose their lifestyle. How can one man change the mindset of our religious belief system that we have been using for two thousand years?

But this person does not waiver in his teaching, and people are starting to listen. People are starting to follow this man, and he chooses some select individuals that he believes can and will learn his ways and spread his word beyond his immediate reach.

Now the authorities really know they must stop this man and stop this movement. Things are getting out of control – their control. And it is not because they don’t also hear that same small voice telling them to listen, telling them there is another way; it is because they will lose their human authority. And that is UNacceptable!

WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

The crowds following this man are growing large. The movement rises to a level that the leaders **MUST** do something to stop it. So they make up a charge and have him arrested.

## WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

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Because of the power and threat of the authorities, all of his disciples, all of his apostles and all of US followers abandon him. We are afraid to express our true belief and displeasure with the authorities for fear of being arrested also, or for fear of the consequences of having to live in CdM if he is wrong. You probably could not attend this Church any longer; you would not be welcomed at the bars and restaurants; you would not be able to work in CdM; you would be ostracized. So we abandon him. He is totally alone in that moment, but he does not waiver; he does not give in to their demands. He is denied by all.

SO WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

And then it gets much worse. He is convicted and sentenced to death, a horrible public execution to demonstrate their power.

So I ask myself: WHAT WOULD YOU DO? WHAT *COULD* YOU DO, AND WOULD IT HAVE MADE ANY DIFFERENCE? Probably not!

I PRAY EVERY DAY THAT I AM NOT PUT TO THIS TEST. BUT IF I AM, I PRAY THAT I HAVE THE COURAGE TO STAND UP FOR THE STILL, SMALL VOICE THAT GUIDES ME.

But THEN the miracle of miracles: he is resurrected, he is alive! The ultimate demonstration of the eternity of the SPIRIT. The lesson that he has been teaching – that we live this life for the life of the SPIRIT in relationship with GOD and not for the life of the HUMAN – is the true lesson.

And he forgives and he blesses all of the people who abandoned him. He blesses them with the Holy Spirit to guide their human lives in this realm. And then he ascends to his rightful place in God's Kingdom.

Now, of course this is the story of Jesus Christ as we know it, and it happened two thousand years ago.

But as I reflect on this story, I think that one of the greatest miracles of all is that this story survived two thousand years. In the face of the strongest opposition the world could mount, the story survived and is alive today. And it is way more than the story of a man. It is the story of how we can develop a relationship with the Holy Spirit of God that leads us to his Kingdom. Twelve disciples told twelve people each, who told twelve people each, and the story is alive today, two thousand years later.

## WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

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So I ask myself again: WHAT WOULD YOU DO HAD YOU LIVED IN THAT TIME? And I don't know.

But now I ask myself: WHAT CAN YOU DO TODAY?

And I do think there are things we can do. We can stand up tall for our Faith. We can be the light in the darkness. If we tell twelve people our story and they tell twelve people this story, then maybe the story will survive another two thousand years.

Let us pray.

Lord, we seek the wisdom to discern your voice in our life, and we seek the strength to follow that voice no matter where it leads us. After hearing this story, we have faith that your voice will lead us to where we are supposed to be. Help us to remain strong in the face of opposition trying to interfere with your word.