

We stayed on Orcas Island for a few days a couple of summers ago. At the place where we stayed there was a circle painted on the lawn, about a foot wide. The notice by the circle read: Cell phone reception area. They were not kidding!! We used to joke at our conference center in Green Lake, Wisconsin, that you could tell who the persons' cell phone provider was by where they were standing outside to use their phones. It has been a few years since I have been there, not sure if this has changed or not. We remember the ad: "Can you hear me know?"

I recall a parable about a pastor who preached the same sermon four weeks in a row. After the fourth Sunday the leadership became concerned and questioned the pastor. His response was that he was going to keep preaching it until someone listened. I think most preachers wonder from time to time if anyone is listening. Is God listening?

When we pray we have a God who listens. A God who hears our words. A God who wants to hear from us. Should this not be our joy - our God hears us when we pray. We want to be heard, we want someone to listen. We may not want a response; we just want to know that someone is listening to us. We may already know the answer but there is something about saying our thoughts out loud to someone. Even in the hearing of our words we may change our minds, alter our course. Knowing that someone is listening when we speak helps us to discern thoughts and ideas.

I saw a post this week about the technology driven society we are living in that went something like: "Our modern day technology has the ability to bring us closer to those who are far away, while separating us from those who are close by." The image accompanying the post has a group of people sitting around a table with faces buried in cell phones, texting.

Isaiah assures us that our God sees and hears. He notes that God will not judge just by what God sees or hears. The assurance is that God hears. Gods of wood or stone cannot hear, only a living God can hear. Not only does our God hear, but God judges by the condition of heart, our actions and our deeds. There is never a busy signal. There is never a "Your call is important to us, please stay on the line until the next available..." When we pray our God listens and hears.

Today we lit the candle of Joy. Joy is in many ways the result of hope, peace and love. Joy, though, is not always excitement, celebration and dancing in the streets. Joy is a sense of hope that in the midst of the storm there are calm days coming. The sun will shine again. Joy is a sense of peace that the captain/pilot knows the way. A sense of peace when we can't see our way through the dark. Joy is the promise that in the end love will win. Joy is knowing that when we pray, God listens.

We can be assured that our God hears us. God hears our shouts and our whispers. God hears our silence. One example comes from my high school days and a mid-week prayer service. She was angry. We had just entered into a time of prayer. No one knew she was angry before she started to pray. She was the first to pray. Her best friend had been healed of her arthritis pain, God had not healed hers. She was upset with God. As she prayed her voice got louder and louder. Finally she was literally shouting at God. Eyes opened and everyone looked at the pastor to see what he would do. He let her pray. He let her vent her anger. Suddenly there was a big sigh and a hearty AMEN! God heard along with the rest of the town!

On the other side Paul writes to the congregation in Rome (8:26-27) that there are times when we do not know how or what to pray. At those times when the words do not come the Spirit is present to intercede for us before God. When we struggle for the right words we need

not worry - we have One who speaks on our behalf. God hears even the whispers of our heart. What JOY.

**26** In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. **27** And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God.

Jesus said, "When you pray..." Here in the Lord's prayer is an example, a prayer when we can't find the right words, our own words. Rick Hamlin in 10 Prayers You Can't Live Without includes a chapter on the Lord's Prayer. He gives examples when people prayed this simple prayer when it seemed out of place for the situation they were in. This did not seem like the right prayer, the right words, but as they prayed the prayer it became appropriate for the very moment they were praying. It brought peace, rescue, healing, forgiveness and release. It moved the focus from self to the world. From hate to love and forgiveness. It brought a sense of hope, peace, love and joy. It became more than an example but a life-changing prayer. It became Joy

Listen again to Isaiah 11:6-9 - a word of hope, a word of peace, a word of love and one of joy. Precede it by these words, "And when you pray, pray

**6**

The wolf will live with the lamb,  
the leopard will lie down with the goat,  
the calf and the lion and the yearling[a] together;  
and a little child will lead them.

**7**

The cow will feed with the bear,  
their young will lie down together,  
and the lion will eat straw like the ox.

**8**

The infant will play near the cobra's den,  
and the young child will put its hand into the viper's nest.

**9**

They will neither harm nor destroy  
on all my holy mountain,  
for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord  
as the waters cover the sea.

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NIV, New International Bible Society, Zondervan, 1973, 1978, 1985  
NRSV, Division of Christian Education, NCC, 1988