Sermon for Sunday, October 26, 1975, by Andrew A. Jumper, D. D., Pastor
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"THE TROUBLE WITH GETTING ON YOUR KNEES"
St. Mark 14:32-42

Text: "Rise, let us be going..." St. Mark 14:42a

Recently major publications have been giving prominent attention to something called "Transcendental Meditation", commonly called TM. I am not yet ready to give you my full opinion on this matter except to say that I am now convinced that this can be a very dangerous practice. According to the practice of TM, a person is given a "mantra". A mantra is a "secret" word given to him after some preliminary instruction and, using this secret word, the person is to meditate 20 minutes in the morning and 20 minutes in the afternoon. According to some studies done on persons meditating, certain physiological changes occur. Changes occur in the brain waves, in the blood, in the respiration rate. Also, certain psychological changes are reported to occur. A person has a sense of detachment, a sense of peace, and the meditator reports that he has better emotional balance as a result. Also, some athletes report that following meditation, they are able to function more effectively.

At the same times these reports are coming out, another group of scientists are reporting that by using the same techniques and meditating on the word "one", they are achieving the identical results. So, the effect on the body and mind of the person meditating does not seem to be related directly to the secret mantra. Indeed, what we are seeing demonstrated is the fact that God has made us in a certain way. When we meditate, certain features of our physio-psychological construction go into operation and these operations are helpful and beneficial to us.

However, while the press and other public media are indicating that this is some new discovery, that is not the case at all. Indeed, great saints of the church have been telling us for centuries of the benefits of prayer and meditation. So, the question that faces us today is not "Does meditating on some secret mantra, or even on the word 'one' have beneficial results?" No, the real question is this: "Is such meditating the best and most beneficial means of utilizing the strange and wonderful way God made us?"

Now, according to those involved in Transcendental Meditation, it is "a-" religious. By a-religious, they mean that it is not a part of any religion and that not only can a Christian practice TM, but that it actually makes him a better Christian. However, as nearly as I can tell, and in spite of disclaims to the contrary, TM is a thinly disguised form of Eastern religion that involves a pagan initiation rite along with a very non-Christian hymn of induction. But beyond the issue of whether it is or is not an Eastern religious practice, there is a far more important and critical question we must ask about TM or any other form of meditation. That question is this: does it make you a better and more responsible person morally. You see, the key issue is not does it make you feel better physically or mentally, not does it make you function better emotionally or physiologically. No, the real question is does it make you a better human being morally. Does it relate you to God in a deeper and more meaningful way, so much so that it has a dynamic impact, a significant change, on your life style.

Isn't that what religion is all about? Isn't it about relating ourselves to God and as a consequence to one another in a better and more significant way? When Jesus was asked what the first and great commandment was, that was exactly what He said. He said the first and great commandment was to love God with all of your heart, mind, body, and soul. And He said the second was like unto it, for we should go on to love our neighbors as ourselves.

I would like to suggest to you this morning that true prayer--Christian prayer--is exactly that. It is relating ourselves to God and to one another in such a way that there is a dynamic and significant change in those relationships. And if some new technique of meditation is being popularized and promoted by people as being helpful to them, it is because we are not praying, or we have forgotten how to pray, or we do not understand the nature of true prayer. For that reason, I would like to share with you this morning for your consideration and practice some thoughts on true prayer.

The first thing I want to say to you is that prayer is not necessarily saying anything. Many of us think of prayer as a monologue, a one-sided conversation with God in which we do all of the talking. As a matter of fact, we sometimes describe this as "saying our prayers". Actually, prayer is making ourselves aware of a relationship, of bringing to our conscious minds an inner awareness of God. It is letting one's self have a growing inner togetherness with God. You try that the next time you pray. Simply sit quietly and think of God. Let yourself become aware of His presence. For example, two people who love each other very much may sit quietly for long periods of time and there may not be any words--no verbal communication. Yet, at the same time, there is a deep communion between them and they are both deeply aware of one another. There is an inner awareness, an inner togetherness that does not depend upon words. Michale Wilson, in a recent book, gives us another illustration. He writes, "Eight years ago, when my wife had been in and out of hospitals a number of times, she received a letter from which she knew that she would have to go back. She told no one at the time. But our youngest son, who was then four, was like a bear with a sore head all morning, he would not leave her. Towards lunch-time in the kitchen, hanging on to her apron, he suddenly burst into tears and said: 'Don't go back into hospital, Mummy, don't go back into hospital!'" There it is! A wordless kinship, an inner togetherness which does not need to be informed with words, but which simply knows. Begin your prayers by becoming aware of your inner togetherness with God.

The second suggestion I would give you for praying has to do with how you think about God. You see, how you pray depends on how you think about God. For example, if God is a stern figure from whom you must beg favors, you will pray one way. If you think of God as a sort of cosmic Santa Claus, then you will pray another way. If you think of God as someone too busy to be bothered with your problems, then you won't trust Him to do anything and that will affect how you pray. In that case, you will be like the young paratrooper before his first jump. His sergeant said, "Count ten and pull the first ripcord. If that doesn't work, pull the second ripcord for the auxiliary 'chute. After you land, a truck will pick you up." The paratrooper jumped, counted ten and pulled the ripcord. Nothing happened. He pulled the second cord, and again nothing happened. As he fell, he said with some disgust, "Yea, and I'll bet that truck won't be there either." Yes, how we think about God determines how we pray. Let me suggest four basic ways we can think about God as we begin to quietly bring God to our conscious minds and begin to make ourselves aware of our inner togetherness with Him.

First, we can believe God is good. Jesus said, "He who has seen Me has seen the Father." And when we look at Jesus we see someone who is good. He comforts the brokenhearted, He heals the sick, He is a friend who cares for the outcasts, He is full of mercy and compassion. Every day we see things which apparently deny the goodness of God. We see a young mother struck with a fatal disease and we are helpless to help. We see accidents, or a child with a birth defect, or a tragic accident that kills or maims. Can we see those things and trust in the goodness of

God? Yes, because we can look at the cross of Jesus where He is dying for the sins and tragedies of the world and we know that God is good. In spite of the tragedies in human life, I know that a good God is working out His purposes of love in the midst of the worst that life can do.

Second, we can believe God is present. Jesus said, "I am with you always, to the end of time." (Matt. 28:20) When I know that, it helps determine how I pray. I am not praying to a distant God, remote from me and my needs. No, I am praying to one who is closer than life itself. As I pray, I can believe that not only is He close to me, but that He is close to those for whom I pray, about whom I am concerned.

Third, we can believe that God cares. Jesus cared about people. He was concerned about their needs and in their sorrows He wept with them, as He did with Mary and Martha over Lazarus; He can weep for them, as He did over the city of Jerusalem. Sometimes in the midst of great suffering or sorrow or loneliness, we often feel so desperate or that no one cares. At a time like that, all we can do is point to the cross and say, "God cares here and now--God cares that much." Yes, we can believe that God cares.

Fourth, we can believe that God is at work in His world and in our needs and our problems. Jesus once said, "My Father has never yet quit His work, and I am working, too." (John 5:17) Yes, Jesus was indeed at work, healing, loving, touching, reaching out to the desperate, feeding the hungry. And as I think about God, I know that He is indeed at work in the world, doing something about the hurts and the pains, doing something about the sorrow and loneliness, doing something about my needs.

In transcendental meditation, or other forms of meditation, one can think of some secret word called a "mantra" or he can simply concentrate on the word "one". Because it triggers some mechanism within us, it has certain benefits. But it is not prayer. No, prayer is becoming aware of an inner communion, an inner togetherness with God--a God who is good, a God who is present, a God who cares, a God who is at work. And which would you rather have, some secret oriental religious word from India, or a deep, inner relationship to God? Now, I have said two things to you this morning. I have said that prayer is establishing an inner relationship and awareness with God and, second, I have said that how you think about God determines how you pray. The third thing I want to say is this: the trouble with getting on your knees is that you have to get up. And that's where the catch comes. You see, the test of my prayers is what I do when I get up off my knees. Isn't that what happened to Jesus in our scripture this morning? In the Garden of Gethsemane we discover Him at prayer as He faces His trial, His humiliation, and His crucifixion. But it is not enough to see Jesus down on His knees in spiritual agony. No, we have to see what He did when He got off His knees. Our text for this morning says, "Rise, let us be going..." And Jesus rose from His knees to go to the cross for the sins of people like you and me.

To pray is dangerous business. It is dangerous business because in the very act of praying I involve myself in those things which God cares about and that includes those for whom I pray. That defective child, that broken home, that starved refugee, that prisoner in the county jail, that lonely person in the old folks home, that widow, grieving in sorrow--all become my concern and my responsibility. Why? Because in praying I involve myself with God and with those for whom He is concerned. Therefore, a man who prays or a group which prays or a church which prays becomes a focal point of God's activity because prayer issues in care. That's the trouble with getting on your knees, you have to get up--you have to rise and get going. Do you remember how St. James put it? He wrote, "Suppose a brother or a sister is in

rags with not enough food for the day, and one of you says, 'good luck to you, and keep yourself warm, and have plenty to eat,' but does nothing to supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that?" Yes, the test of my prayers is what I do when I get off my knees, when I rise and get going.

So, God has made us in a certain way. We can have an inner awareness, an inner togetherness with Him. And as we commune with Him, how we feel about Him will be determined by what we think about Him--that He is good, He is present, He cares, He is at work. But as we commune with this God of ours, the reality of that communion is determined by what we do when we get off our knees.

People promoting Transcendental Meditation have been giving a lot of publicity to certain public figures who practice TM. According to them, Joe Namath of the New York Jets football team practices TM. And, according to them, he reports that as a result he plays better football. Well, looking at their record this year I hope he does even better. But the real question is this: Does it make Joe Namath a better moral person, a better human being? And that is a question we have to ask ourselves, too. What is happening in your life when you get off your knees?