Dear Heavenly Father we thank you for this day and this time of worship. We ask that you help this time together to nourish our souls and bring us closer to you. I thank you for these words that you have given me. Thank you that we live in a country where we can freely worship and pray to you. It is a privilege that not everyone enjoys. Please be with our Christian brothers and sisters who are fighting for the right to worship you. We also thank you for the 175 years that our church has existed. You have seen it through ups and downs and we pray that you will continue to watch over us. In Jesus name we pray. AMEN

When you hear the word prayer, what do you think? Do you think of saying grace before a meal? Or maybe it brings to mind a small child saying bedtime prayers. Some of you may even think of your own bedtime prayers. Still others may think of prayer as a privilege, while some think of it as a duty. Others still, may think of it as a chore, something that is hard to do and so it gets put off for as long as possible.

According to the Dictionary of Christianity in America prayer is communication with God, usually in verbal form. For many Christians prayer is a daily practice and may take place at the beginning of the day, at mealtime, in the evening and sporadically throughout the day or at set times. Christians through the centuries have found private prayer to be an essential aspect of their spiritual life, both as a means of expressing themselves to God and of experiencing his presence. Private and public prayer may be spontaneous, recited or read from a prayer book.

I recently read of a women who took a trip to an Abby and lived with the monks for a period of time. She has said that one of the most transforming aspects of this trip to the Abbey has been living according to the monks' schedule of prayer. They pray the Liturgy of the Hours. That is they pray at 6am- Psalm 5, 9am-The Lords Prayer, noon- 23rd Psalm, 3pm-Psalms 117, 6pm-Psalm 150, 9pm-Psalm 4 and Midnight Prayer- Psalm 119:62 and Psalm 134 . The six things she learned from living on a monastery prayer schedule are 1) It makes it less tempting to procrastinate. 2) You use your time more purposefully. 3) It gives you a new appreciation for meals . 4) It makes you surrender your life to God at the micro level. 5) It helps you put your plans in perspective. And 6) It helps put God at the center of your life. If one of your excuses for not praying is you don't know when to pray maybe this schedule will help.

Prayer may take one of several different attitudes or may combine any number of these into a single occasion of prayer: Adoration- is offered to God alone. It frequently consists of praising him for who he is. Confession- is coming before God, men and women respond by confessing their own sinfulness and inadequacy to approach him apart from the merit of
Jesus Christ. Intercession- is Christians praying on behalf of others, whether for individuals, a group or the world. Intercession may be prayer for those in danger, in sickness or facing a crisis. Petition- is the prayer of asking, not as a self-interested begging but as a recognition of the believer's dependence on God for every gift of physical life and spiritual grace. Thanksgiving- is one of the most prominent types of prayer, Christians give thanks to God for daily food and sustenance and the multitude of blessing they enjoy and receive as coming from the hand of God. While it is difficult to make a rigid distinction, believers frequently view thanksgiving as a response to what God has done and praise or adoration as a response to who God is.

Now that we know what prayer is, the next thing to look at is why should we pray. Psalms 50:15 tells us “And call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will honor me.” We honor God by asking Him to help us. We are admitting that we need God. Prayer invites God into any situation, such as the long life of a church. As we pray, our faith grows. Our growing faith moves God to act on our behalf and work all things together for our good. Prayers also unties our hearts with God. It is hard to carry on daily conversations and not grow closer to the person you are talking with. To pray is to change. It transforms us. The more we pray the more we see our need and the more we desire to be like Christ.

Mark 1:35 says, Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. This is only one of many places in the Bible that tells of Jesus praying. If Jesus thought it important to pray shouldn't we follow His example? Jesus knew that talking to His Heavenly Father was important.

What kind of things should we pray about? We should carry EVERYTHING to God in prayer. Most of us are familiar with the Hymn What A Friend We Have In Jesus, but do you know the story behind the hymn? It was written by Joseph Scriven, who live from 1819 to 1886. Joseph had wealth, education, a devoted family and a pleasant life in his native Ireland. Then tragedy struck. The night before Joseph's wedding, his fiancee drowned. Reeling from tragedy, he made up his mind to immigrate to North America. At the age of 25 he left Ireland for Port Hope, Canada.

Ten years later Joseph received word that his mother was facing a crisis. Joseph wrote her a comforting letter, enclosing the words of his newly written poem with the prayer that those brief lines would remind her of a never-failing heavenly friend. Mrs. Scriven gave a copy to a friend who had it published anonymously and it quickly became a popular hymn, though no one knew who wrote it.

Sometime later when Joseph himself was ill, a friend who came to call on him happened to see a copy of these words scribbled on scratch paper near his bed. The friend read the lines
with interest and asked, “Who wrote those beautiful words?” “The Lord and I did it between us” was Joseph's reply.

Let's read the words to the first verse together. Think about what they are saying as we read them.....What a friend we have in Jesus All our sins and griefs to bear! What a privilege to carry Everything to God in prayer! O what peace we often forfeit. O what needless pain we bear, All because we do not carry everything to God in prayer. Jesus wants to be our friend; a friend in whom we confide everything. He wants to hear all about our sins and our griefs, as well as the things we are thankful for. How do we do do accomplish this? By praying! Praying is a conversation with God.

The words to the second verse are just as comforting. Let's read them and again think about what they mean.....Have we trials and temptations? Is there trouble any where? We should never be discouraged. Take it to the Lord in prayer. Oh what peace we often forfeit, O what needless pain we bear, Jesus knows our every weakness- Take it to the Lord in prayer. Do you have someone who knows all your weaknesses and will share ALL your sorrows? We all do...Jesus. We just have to take the time to pray and let Him know what is going on in our life. Again by praying.

The third verse tells us what Jesus will do for us when we pray. Let's read read and think about these words also..... Are we weak and heavy laden Cumbered with a load of care? Precious Savior still our refuge Take it to the Lord in prayer! Do thy friends despise forsake thee? Take it to the Lord in prayer! In His arms He'll take and shield thee-Thou will find solace there. This verse tells us Jesus is our refuge and He will shield us from our griefs and sorrows. It also reminds us that Jesus will always be there for us. All we have to do is talk to Him. Like Joseph Scriven, we too can find relief from our burdens when we take our troubles to the Lord in prayer.

Now at this point you may be thinking to yourself, “Since God knows everything, do my prayers really make a difference?”. The answer is YES! God may know everything, but He still wants to hear from you. God wants that connection with you that comes from prayers. Max Lucado says , “Our prayers may be awkward. Our attempts may be feeble. But since the power of prayer is in the one who hears it and not the the one who says it, our prayers do make a difference.”

The Bible mentions several postures for praying. Kneeling is mentioned in several places including Luke 22:41. Mark 14:35 is one of the places that bowing and falling prostrate is used to show an attitude of prayer. The spreading out of hands as mentioned in 1Tim. 2:8, among other places, is also acceptable. Standing is a way to pray that is talked about in Luke 18:11 as well as other places. Many people sit and pray. I have developed the habit
of being the first or second person to church on Sunday mornings. I use this time to pray before the cross as I sit in the front pew. I know I can pray anywhere, and do pray throughout the week at home; however I feel closer to God in the Church. I thank Him for the week that has passed and ask guidance for the week to come and also to bless the worship service that is about to take place. If for some reason I do not get to do this, my whole week seems to be just a little off. This is just a personal habit and may not work for others. You should develop your own habits as to when and how you pray. Your best time may be first thing in the morning before anyone else is up, it could be on the drive to work, maybe it's at lunch time or it could be just before bed. Only you can decide what works best for you.

Jesus tells us in John14:13-14 And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. 14 You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it. Jesus is telling us to ask for what we need or want in His name. We are to pray to God, but do it in Jesus' name. This is reinforced in John 16:23b-24 which says my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. 24 Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete.

We should not only pray for our selves and others but also our churches. A church needs prayers for the guidance of it's leaders, for it's financial health, and its maintenance. Without faithful prayer a church could not exist. Since Collins United Methodist Church has been around for 175 years, can you imagine all the prayers that have been said for our church. Can you imagine all the prayers that have been said in this church! One hundred, seventy-five years worth of prayers is something to be proud of. Let us pray for another 175 years of prayers.

When and where you pray is not as important as the fact that you DO pray. It doesn’t even matter if you kneel, stand, fold your hands or raise them, just pray. It doesn't even matter where you pray, it could be in the shower, in your car, standing in line at the store or any other place you may find yourself. Max Lucado sums it up beautifully in his devotional, Just Pray.

“Do you want to know how to deepen your prayer life? Pray. Don't prepare to pray. Just pray. Don't attend a lecture on prayer or engage in discussion about prayer. Just pray. Posture, tone, and place are personal matters. Select the form that works for you. But don't think about it too much. Don't be so concerned about wrapping the gift that you never give it. Better to pray awkwardly than not at all. And if you feel you should only pray when inspired, that's okay. Just see to it that you are inspired every day.”

If you are still having trouble with what to say you can start by reciting the Lords Prayer. I
will even help you get started. Please pray with me.