

Luke 11:1-13

He was praying in a certain place, and after he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, “Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.” 2 He said to them, “When you pray, say:

Father, hallowed be your name.  
 Your kingdom come.  
3 Give us each day our daily bread.  
4 And forgive us our sins,  
                   for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us.  
 And do not bring us to the time of trial.”

5 And he said to them, “Suppose one of you has a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say to him, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; 6 for a friend of mine has arrived, and I have nothing to set before him.’ 7 And he answers from within, ‘Do not bother me; the door has already been locked, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.’ 8 I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, at least because of his persistence he will get up and give him whatever he needs.

9 “So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. 10 For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. 11 Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for a fish, will give a snake instead of a fish? 12 Or if the child asks for an egg, will give a scorpion? 13 If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”

## TEACH US TO PRAY

How do we learn to pray?  
 Some of us learned prayers as children.  
 “Now I lay me down to sleep.”  
 “God is great. God is good.”

Those prayers are fine when we are children. But, there comes a time when we want prayer to be something more.

Like Martha in last week’s lesson we are distracted and anxious about many things. But, the one thing we need most is absent from our lives. God is absent from our lives.

Today’s lesson begins with a disciple who recognizes this absence of the holy in his life. Jesus was praying and when he was finished a disciple said, “Teach us to pray like John taught his disciples to pray.”

For many of us the desire to learn about prayer begins when we meet someone who is truly a person of prayer. John the Baptist and his disciples were prayerful, holy people, and of course this was especially true of Jesus. This disciple saw something that he wanted for his own life in these people of prayer.

### A MODEL PRAYER

In response to this request Jesus gave us a model prayer.

In that regard let me say that it's okay to study and copy the prayers of others. Just as we learn to pray as children by memorizing prayers so we develop in our prayer life by studying and using the prayers of others.

And we begin with the prayer that Jesus taught us. In our lesson for today Jesus tells the disciples to pray like this. Use my prayer.

And then we have Luke's version of the Lord's Prayer. It's a bit shorter than Matthew's version, and your Bibles will vary a bit depending on translation and how they evaluate the texts.

But, suffice it to say that this prayer is essentially the same prayer that we pray each week.

### A CONVERSATION STARTER

This morning I want to use this familiar prayer as an example of how we can use Scripture to learn how to pray. We use Scripture to meditate more deeply on the nature of God and our relationship to God.

You might think of it as a "conversation starter" with the Almighty. Remember you can do this not only with the Lord's Prayer but also with many other Scripture passages.

Whenever people have trouble with prayer a common complaint is that they don't know what to say. And I say, "Pray God's Word back to Him."

This is why I'm a big fan of the old fashioned idea of memorizing Scripture. It gives us a way to make prayer a two-way conversation. We believe the Bible is God's Word. So, if we want to listen to God, this is how we do it.

Other religions might tell us to empty our minds when we pray. Christians believe just the opposite. We fill our minds with God's Word as we find it in the Bible.

Now there's an important reason we do this. Often when we listen for voice of God in prayer without the benefit of Scripture, we will hear "God" tell us what we already want to believe. We think that we're listening to God, but what we're really hearing is a faint echo of our own voice.

The way to avoid that is to center our prayers in Scripture. And when we do that the Scripture will come alive for us in a new way. We'll understand the Word of God in a way that will have personal meaning for us.

## RELEVANT PREACHING

I've been working with a Pastoral Nominating Committee from another church recently.

And one of the skills that they want in their new pastor is someone who can preach sermons that are relevant and meaningful.

But, how do we do that? How do we apply the Word of God in such a way that it has meaning for us today?

Relevant preaching is not just using illustrations from the modern world. In fact I've found that if the illustration doesn't fit, it can do more harm than good.

Relevance comes from prayer. Relevance comes from applying the Word of God to our personal situation. And when we do that, the Spirit of God fills us.

This is not only a task for the preacher. It is also a task for the congregation as well.

In other words we all have responsibility when it comes to making the Word of God relevant. We have the responsibility to pray God's Word back to Him. No sermon or teaching or reading from the Bible will ever be relevant unless we take that message personally.

So, when Jesus tells the disciple to pray "like this" he isn't suggesting that we say a hundred "Our Fathers" like some kind of punishment. He is saying that we use this prayer as a way to begin a conversation with God.

So, let's do that. Let's use our lesson for today as an example of how Scripture can help us learn how to pray.

## FATHER

Jesus teaches the disciples to pray by letting them listen in on his prayer. And the first word out of Jesus's mouth is the word "Father."

This has two meanings.

First, God is the Father of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

This got Jesus into hot water with the religious authorities because when Jesus talked about God as his Father this made Jesus equal to God.

This is the essence of Christianity. God was in Christ. And it is also the essence of prayer. We pray in Jesus' name. We see God through Jesus.

But, this also means that if Jesus encourages to pray in this way, if we are to pray to the Father, then we have been adopted into the holy family.

This one word, "Father" is filled with meaning.

Addressing God in this way suggests that God loves us, that God wants the best for us, that God like a good Father knows what we need and is willing to give us good gifts.

In Jesus' explanation of this prayer in our lesson he alludes to this aspect of prayer. He says that human fathers are far from perfect. But, even in our imperfect sinful state we still try to do the best we can for our children. We try to give good gifts to our children.

How much more is God our Father willing to attend to our needs?

So, when we say, "Father" it is more than just a memorized form of address. It's an important statement about the nature of God. God is the Father. God is a God of love and compassion. Like a good father God sacrifices for us and gives us good gifts.

When I think about God the Father, I think about the parable of the prodigal son. God is like the father who waits patiently and longingly for his recalcitrant son to return home. God waits for us to return home.

So, when we say, "Father" we say it with passion. We linger on that word. We let that word speak to us.

#### GOING FROM THE HUMAN TO THE DIVINE

Now that word can also seem to be a distraction to some people. Suppose we had an earthly father that was not so nice or even cruel? Or maybe we have recently lost our father and that's all we can think about when we use that word?

I don't think we should run from those thoughts and feelings. Instead I would let those thoughts and feelings interact with God's Word.

For example, whenever I preach on the Lord's Prayer I remember that my father used to sing the Lord's Prayer in church. He died at a relatively young age, and I have lots of feelings about that.

But, I also think about the fact that my father is with our heavenly Father. And as I let my personal feelings interact with the words of Scripture I come to greater appreciation of the promises of God. I learn to trust in a personal way.

If your experience with a father was not so good, you might think about the fact that God the Father is the father you wished you had.

In all cases what we are doing is reasoning from the lesser to the greater. We are using human experiences to get a very tentative grasp on the divine.

That's what Jesus is doing in our lesson for today when he used some very mundane, earthly examples to encourage persistence in prayer.

He said,

“If we pester our neighbor to help us out at a bad time he might do it, not because he wants to but just to get us off his back. How much more will our heavenly Father give us what we need?”

That's an argument from the lesser to the greater.

It is using an earthly example to help us gain a little heavenly perspective.

HALLOWED

On the other hand, the next phrase in this prayer reminds us of another aspect of God's nature. God is holy. God's name is “hallowed.”

God is above and beyond us. Our ways are not God's ways.

God is Father, but God is also the Creator of everything. In a sense we dare not even speak God's name.

In the Old Testament the name for God that we transliterate “Yahweh” was never actually spoken by God's people. Instead, they would say “Lord.” They would not speak the name of God because God's name was too holy.

Jesus is telling the disciple that wants to learn about prayer that we must always remember that though God loves us and wants the best for us, God is not like us. God is Other with a capital “O”.

Though we trust in the grace and mercy of God the Father, we also are overwhelmed by God's power and might.

I sometimes wonder if those people who say that they are “spiritual but not religious” are turned off by the easy, even thoughtless way they we in the church sometimes talk about God.

In some cases they have a point. We often substitute religious ritual for spiritual awareness

Jesus reminds us that prayer is not a conversation between equals.

In prayer the ground is holy, and we are commanded to take off our shoes. Prayer is that place where we learn that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.

This does not mean a craven fear of what God might do to us. This is a fear born of the fact that the God we worship created a universe that is beyond our imagination. When we look into the skies we see the enormity of God's creation.

This is the God we worship.

And when we hallow the name of God, we acknowledge his power and might.

This too brings us comfort and joy. God is Father and God is holy. In Jesus we see how this is true. The Almighty comes to us in the human touch.

### YOUR KINGDOM COME

So, if God comes to us as Father and the Almighty, what does that mean from a practical standpoint? The next phrase in the model prayer tells us.

We pray, "Your kingdom come."

Notice, we don't pray, "My kingdom come." We pray, "Your kingdom come." It's not about us and what we want. It's about God and what God wants.

If God is a Father who knows how to give good gifts to his children, and if God is Almighty, the Creator of all that is, then in the final analysis the point of prayer is not to get God to do what we want.

The point of prayer is to align our will with God's will.

This is where many of us struggle.

I think of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. He struggled mightily with the way of the cross. He asked for another way. But, then he ended his anguished prayer, "Not my will but thine be done."

This is why prayer is hard. We find it difficult to say "Your kingdom come." We always have our own agenda. And quite often our agenda does not align with God's agenda.

When we look back on the history of the church we can see that quite often the church was unable to say "Your kingdom come." Instead, the church sought to align herself with the kingdoms of the world or to even establish her own kingdom.

And I see that same struggle playing out in the church today.

Now don't misunderstand. We need to figure out practical ways to do what faith requires. And sometimes that might mean taking controversial stands for the sake of the gospel.

But, we need to be careful that we do not let our personal preferences guide our prayers instead of the gospel.

Again, it's not about us and what we want. It's about God and what God wants. We pray, "Your kingdom come."

And that means at the very least that we have a open spot in our heart for change wrought by God's Spirit.

Maybe we haven't understood God's will for our life. Maybe we thought we were on God's side but we were in fact doing the absolute opposite of what God would have us do.

Praying "your kingdom come" is not an easy thing to do. It does not come naturally. But, if we can learn to pray that prayer, it will make a huge difference in our life.

## DAILY BREAD

We often begin our prayers with a list of our needs.

But, Jesus' model prayer does not begin with our needs. Jesus' model prayer begins with words that remind us of the character of God. God is Father. God is Almighty. His Kingdom comes (whether we like it or not).

But, this does not mean that God is somehow uninterested in our needs. In fact, the next petition in the model prayer encourages us to ask for something. Jesus taught us to pray, "Give us each day our daily bread."

Each day all of us have needs. And it is right and proper for us to ask God to fill those needs. Asking for daily bread also makes us aware of what God has already given us. It is a way of being grateful.

Daily bread emphasizes the fact that we focus more on what we need today than on what we need tomorrow.

Jesus had a lot to say about how anxiety robs us of the joy of living. He said that we don't have any control of what happens tomorrow so why worry about it?

On the other hand we do have what God has given us today. Let's be grateful for that. When we pray we say,

“God give me what I need today to do your will. Give me my daily bread. Feed me not only with food but with your Word.”

In verse 9 of today’s lesson Jesus put it this way, “Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you.”

In other words, Jesus encourages us to be persistent in prayer.

One way we learn to trust God is to ask God for what we need on a daily basis. We learn to rightly associate the daily blessings of life with the providential care of our heavenly Father.

## FORGIVENESS

Finally, we pray for forgiveness. I think the last two petitions in this model prayer are connected. The trial or the temptation of life is to disconnect the forgiveness of God from the forgiveness of others.

But, in this prayer we see that the forgiveness of others is necessary. Jesus said that we should pray, “And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us.”

We do that don’t we? We do forgive everyone indebted to us. Right?

Or do we treasure and hold onto those grudges like prized possessions?

Asking for forgiveness needs to be a part of any prayer. We confess our sins before God.

But, at the same time we bring to mind those who have sinned against us and by the grace of God we forgive them.

In this way prayer helps us escape the terrible burden of carrying grudges. We lay down that burden at the throne of grace. And we receive the joy of God’s forgiveness. In Jesus Christ we are forgiven.

Jesus taught us how to pray long ago. Let’s give it a try this week. Let’s be persistent in our prayers

And let’s use this model prayer as a conversation starter with God.

I suspect that we will learn once more about the true meaning of God’s grace and glory.

Amen.