

Teach Us to Pray

Matthew 6:9-13

Good Morning Friends and again a Good Morning to those of you joining us via the livestream this morning. Do any of you remember that old kids Christian song? This is the day? This is the day, and then there's the echo, "this is the day!" My mom would sometimes sing that loudly in the morning when I was a surly teenager who didn't want to wake up. It drove me crazy. But the message behind that somewhat annoying song is a good reminder for us as people of Faith. The Lord has made this day. We are here together. And it is good.

Before advent, we had gone through a short worship and sermon series on prayer, and it really felt like we had just barely scratched the surface. So, I thought we would pick up the topic of prayer again for the next while before we move into Lent and Easter Season. We're going to using one of the most well known prayers in scripture and one of the most enduring liturgical prayers throughout Christian History- The Lord's Prayer.

Most people, regardless of what stream of Christianity they are a part of- Catholic, Evangelical, Pentecostal, Anglican, or Anabaptist, know the words to the Lord's prayer. Some faith traditions say the prayer as a part of every worship service, some add it in from time to time. The small, very conservative, very evangelical Christian school I attended said the prayer as part of the morning prayers and pledges time. I can't

honestly even remember learning the prayer; it's just always been in my memory.

And there's a good reason for all this. This prayer appears twice in the gospels. Once in Matthew and once in Luke. We're going to be focusing on the Matthew retelling because of all the helpful context that it gives us, but first, I'd like to read the Luke version, which comes from Luke 11:1-4, "Now Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples." And he said to them, "When you pray, say: "Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread, and forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation." When Jesus is asked by one of his closest followers "How should I pray? How do you Pray? Can you teach me to pray in the same way? And the response Jesus gives is, essentially, what will become The Lord's Prayer. Early records and manuscripts of the Christian Church indicate that some form of this prayer was used often, in both gatherings of the faithful and in personal prayer amongst the believers. In my own life, anything I have memorized can become rote-meaning I can do or say something with little mental energy required. I've noticed this as Ezra has started to do basic math. $6+6=12$. I don't have to think about it. There's no actual computation happening, but when Ezra is asked that same question, he squints his little eyes, looks up and you can see him working out the problem in his head. The same sort of risk can exist with The Lord's Prayer, we hear it so often, say it so often, that it requires little thought on our part; little engagement of our hearts and minds. Yet, because of the centrality of this

prayer in the Bible and in tradition, this seemed like a great way to us to talk about some of the postures, pitfalls and practices of prayer.

In the passage that Roger read for us this morning, Jesus teaches the prayer to his disciples saying this THEN is how you should pray; another way to say it would be this INSTEAD is how you should pray. If we zoom out on the broader context of scripture around the prayer, we see that Matthew 6 begins with warnings from Jesus about who exactly good works (giving material goods, feeding others, etc.) and prayer should be for -the love of God, not for the puffing up of personal piety. Jesus tells his disciples to not be like the hypocrites, who love to give to the poor when they have an audience watching. He says to be so secretive that even your right doesn't know what your left is doing. Jesus goes on to say the same about prayer; don't be like those who stand on the street corner, praying for the attention of the crowds, praying so that they will be noticed. Go somewhere quiet, somewhere secret to pray because prayer is about communing with God. Prayer is about communing with God. Giving is about honouring God with what you have been given by God. The key is what we do and how we pray is that it's supposed to be God and for God, not for others.

And while it is probably not very often in our time and culture that we see people praying on street corners, which truthfully unnerve me more than make me feel like praising them for their righteousness, there is still a temptation to broadcast our lives via social media. Taylor and I have been talking about this a lot recently. People in my own age demographic and younger often share so much of their lives on social media, including

their spiritual lives or educating others on issues they feel are important. Churches often have large social media platforms that allow comments, likes, and feedback constantly. I'll be the first to admit that I've been guilty of doing this too. But in all the praise and clatter from a largely impersonal audience, I wonder if we're sometimes falling in the trap that Jesus warned against. Is it not enough to pray or do a good thing? Is that not a reward in itself? More and more, I've been convicted of a quiet faithful life. Grounded in the real people in my circles, not an online audience. Living a real life, of loving God and Loving People - not a curated life that puts my life on display.

When I studied theatre in college, the director of our plays, who was just an incredible woman of faith, would always tell us to "Serve the Story". Meaning, all your acting, your character, your movements, the way you deliver your lines should be serving the bigger message of the story. The goal as an actor is to make this story so real, so believable the audience feels it in their bones. You're not there to try to milk your lines for a better laugh. Not there to be the star of the show. Not even there for the sake of your fellow actors, you're there to serve the Story. This is the same in the Christian Life, Jesus says, we're not here to be the star, Jesus even said that about himself- he came to love and serve the wishes of the Father and our aim is to do the same. We're here to serve the story of God reconciling all of the world, and most especially humanity, back to himself.

Okay, getting back to our text, The Lord's Prayer. So knowing that Jesus warned against false piety, and told his disciples to serve the story, then then teaches them this prayer:

“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. “

The Lord's Prayer also reveals to us the things that Jesus, and therefore God values. This prayer, between a Holy Father and Beloved Son, helps us see the value system of God. The more we seek to know and live by these values the more deeper a communion with God we'll experience. For myself, and I think for most people, there's a sort of tiered system of Friendships. People have their work friends, the friends that

they do stuff with -like curling, or a book club. Friends from childhood, and so on. Typically, between friends there is some element of commonality. You enjoy the same sports. You work in the same office. But those friendships only go so far. To have a really deep friendship, one that is marked by intimacy, and the sharing and bearing of the deeper things in your life, that almost always requires some degree of a shared value system. There needs to be a commonality on a deeper, ideological level. And so if we think about this our relationship with God, the hope would be to always be moving deeper into the value system of God, allowing for that deeper communion.

Each week we'll be exploring a phrase or a section of the Lord's prayer to help us dig deeper in this idea of what God values. Let's begin with the opening phrase, Our Father. Biblical commentaries suggest that what Jesus was getting at here is that we are all sons and daughters of God, and we're praying to OUR Father. Jesus has made God Our Father. Jesus says, "I will ascend to my Father and your Father, to your God and my God."

"The use of Father as a name for God is rooted in earlier biblical language but goes beyond it in two respects: First, the image of Father is only one of many ways of referring to God in the OT, and relatively infrequent one at that. In Matthew and most of the NT, however, Father has clearly become a primary name for God. Second, there is a shift in the meaning of knowing God as Father. The Hebrew Scriptures generally use the image to express God's covenantal relationship with Israel as a people. For the Christian community, however, Father suggests not only One to whom

we belong as a people. For the Christian community, however, Father suggests not only One to whom we belong as people, but One whom we know in an intimate, familial way through Jesus Christ. Paul states it succinctly in Romans, “When we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’ it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are Children of God!”

So, we see in the Lords’ prayer a shifting from the God we see in the pages of the Old Testament to a more familial, intimate God. The image here is of a parent-child relationship in the best sense.-one of love, tenderness, and provision.

A friend of mine from college is someone who had a very difficult, traumatic relationship with her own Father. She struggled a lot with the Father language found within worship. At some point in her journey, she began to pray, “Our Mother, who art in heaven.” When I first heard her pray this, I recall how jarring it felt. But the more I thought about it- the more, I thought, why not? God is neither male nor female, and if praying this way helped my friend to see God in a more positive, intimate way, why shouldn’t she pray in that way? In our own prayer lives, trying out more expansive language for God, or changing up adjectives “Living God” “Gracious God” is a simple, beautiful way to expand our holy imaginations about our familial God.

Our Father, Who Art in Heaven -This draws our prayers upward, reminding us that the home where God resides and whom we will join with someday is in heaven. Further, it serves as a reminder that we’re praying to one who has a God’s Eye View, so to speak. God who sees all of time, all our lives, and all the interconnections between our world and our relationship. It’s a comfort to know the one we are praying to see

the bigger picture. As my friend Ashley used to say, “Looking back, I can see how much God was looking ahead.”

Our Father, Who Art in Heaven, Hallowed Be Thy Name. The name of God is Holy. We are communing with the one whose throne is the heavens and whose footstool is the earth. This is a source of comfort and should humble us too. There’s so much in this preamble that makes all that comes after it more meaningful.

So Friends, as we spend the next weeks learning more about what it means to pray as Jesus taught us, it’s my hope that we’ll be able to ask questions together, share our responses and strengthen our communion with one another, and most especially, with our Lord.

Each week, I’ll be ending my sermons with a different version or translation or paraphrase of the Lord’s Prayer, as another way to hear these words anew.

Our Father in heaven, let your name be kept holy. Let your kingdom come. Let your will be done on earth as it is done in heaven. Give us our daily bread today. Forgive us as we forgive others. Don’t allow us to be tempted. Instead, rescue us from the evil one, Amen.