

July 28, 2019 • Seventh Sunday after Pentecost

## “When you pray, say...”

Sermon by Rev. Patricia Farris



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.” 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 indebted to us. And do not bring us to the time of trial.” 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; for a friend of mine has arrived, and I have nothing to set before him.’ 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.’ 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. “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. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for a fish, will give a snake instead of a fish? Or if the child asks for an egg, will give a scorpion? 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!”*

Most of us who have grown up in the church learn what we call the Lord's Prayer at a very early age. How we delight in this congregation on those Sundays when we hear the voices of the children and others worshipping around us praying together: “Our Father who art in heaven...” Perhaps like some of you, some Sundays I have taken to mouthing the words silently myself, letting the sound of voices all around fill my spirit and lift me up.

Of course, we know that sometimes kids don't get the words quite right, translating unfamiliar words into words they know. My favorite from across the years is a small boy's interpretation that goes like this: “And forgive us our trash baskets as we forgive those who put trash in our baskets.” Not a bad prayer, really, especially in this age of recycling and environmental awareness. I'm sure Jesus would have approved.

There is power in memorizing the words of this prayer. When we know them by heart and carry them in our hearts, they're there when we need them, when other words escape us. How often in times of grief, have I invited a family or the congregation to pray these words together, and the words come, through tears. How often, at the bed of someone very ill or near death, have I said: let us pray together, and these words come, sometimes with no sound, just the lips framing the prayer.

How often, in sharing communion with a shut-in, have I said: let us pray together, and this one who has not been able to worship in church for years is instantly joined with all the saints and the great cloud of witnesses as we pray together: “Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name...” How often do we find ourselves confounded by something so big, so devastating, so overwhelming that we do not know how to pray. In those times, we have this prayer in our repertoire and we pray it, having perhaps forgotten that it gives us always just the words we need.

From Scripture, we learn many ways to pray and we are a congregation that prays in a great variety of ways. We pray in our homes before meals and before bedtime. We pray at the opening of meetings, to invite the Holy Spirit to guide and direct our work. Our Intercessory Prayer group gathers to lift all the prayers we have forwarded to them from congregation and pastors. I know that many of you pray regularly for me and for the leaders of our congregation, and I am so very grateful. We pray as we walk the Labyrinth. We pray as we gather for weddings, for baptisms, for memorial services, and we pray as we send people forth into mission. In worship each week, we pray in silence, we pray with the children, we pray all together and we lift our own prayers to God. And we pray as we tie knots in beautiful prayer quilts, giving our prayer tangible shape and form to comfort those in need.

We pray and we pray and we pray and we pray. And even so, do we not find ourselves, from time to time, not knowing how to pray? Feeling that our prayers are inadequate, or unworthy, or maybe too selfish. Do we not find ourselves sometimes, right along with Jesus' first disciples, asking: “Lord, teach us to pray”? We see you praying, Lord, we see your church praying, and we want to know more, we want to be able to pray as YOU have prayed.

Friends, there are times when we need help and guidance in praying. Never hesitate to ask any one of your pastors or a trusted church member for assistance in prayer. Asking is an expression of growth in faith, of a desire for greater spiritual maturity. And when we are open to learning, God, in Christ Jesus, is always ready to guide and direct. “Ask, and it will be given you; search and you will find; knock and the door will be opened for you.”

As Jesus taught his disciples that day, he gave them an example, a model. He was showing them what a disciple's prayer should always include.

The model prayer of Jesus draws disciples into closer relationship with God. It draws us back into right relationship with one another. And it draws us into God's kingdom, God's promised reign of love, justice for all, and peace.

First—our relationship with God. For Jesus, God was Abba, intimate, familiar, loving and compassionate. Not a power-broker, not a mighty general, not a magic shield. For Jesus, God was as close as one's one loving parent, present with us, ever ready to guide, to nurture, to direct. This is a relationship of closeness and of trust. The Holy One, as close as our very breath, yet always sacred beyond our naming.

Next—our relationships with one another. Jesus teaches us to pray to OUR Father not to “my father.” By starting with that word “our” and continuing in that fashion, when we pray in the manner of Jesus, we pray in the plural. When we pray our Lord's Prayer, we are

always praying with all Christians everywhere. When we pray for our daily bread, for forgiveness for our sins as we are forgiving those who have sinned against us, we are joined to all who have carried the cross of Christ, with all who have shared in his baptism and his death, with all who will enjoy the promise of life everlasting in him. Jesus' prayer does not separate us out for special blessing. It reminds us that we are brothers and sisters, and re-connects us to them all, to whom we are responsible, and from whom we draw strength and in whom we find love.

And third—our relationships in God's kingdom. Jesus' prayer takes us out of the ways of this world and draws us into Kingdom values. Jesus' way of praying pulls us out of any selfish concerns for ourselves. His way of praying reminds us that in the Kingdom of God, there is bread for everyone, especially for those who are hungry now. In the kingdom of God, there are no broken relationships, for justice and peace prevail, on earth as in heaven. In the kingdom of God, evil does not triumph. In the Kingdom of God, everyone has a seat at the table. That kingdom and that power and that glory are God's, forever and ever. This is God's will for the earth, now already present in heaven.

Listen now to a British colleague's interpretive revision of the Lord's Prayer which helps us enter into the richness and beauty of its meanings:

**Our Father in heaven,**

remind us constantly that you are parent  
to all your children, whoever and  
wherever they are or come from  
**hallowed by your name.**

**Your kingdom come,**

establishing peace and justice,  
hope and life for all peoples,  
**your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.**

**Give us today our daily bread,**

disturb us into an awareness of the needs of others.

**Forgive our sins,**

our pride and also our prejudice,  
**as we forgive those who sin against us.**

**Lead us not into temptation,**

especially keep our hearts and minds  
open to see the good in others;  
**deliver us from evil.**

**For the kingdom—just and true,**

**the power—gentle and fair,**  
**and the glory—shot through with the colours of love,**

**are yours, for ever and ever. Amen.**

Amen. In the Hebrew way of praying, *amen* means "so be it." So be it. In uttering that word before God, we are in fact committing ourselves to live into the spirit and message of Jesus' prayer. So be it.

*Amen* commits us to going forward with God. *Amen*. I commit myself to living as a disciple of Jesus Christ. *Amen*. So be it. I commit myself to discerning your will for my life and so to live in the power of your Holy Spirit. *Amen*.

So together, let us pray when we do not know how to pray. Let us pray when we have lost the words to say. Let us pray when we are tempted to put our own desires first and need to be reminded of God's will for us and for this world. Let us pray when we have grown distant from God. Let us pray when we are having troubles with one another. Let us pray when things aren't right in this world or in the church. And let us pray when our hearts are bursting with joy and gratitude. Let us pray. Let us pray. Let us pray. So be it. AMEN!

Notes:

Crossan, John Dominic. *The Greatest Prayer: Rediscovering the Revolutionary Message of the Lord's Prayer*. New York: HarperOne, 2010.

Mulholland, James. *Praying Like Jesus: The Lord's Prayer in a Culture of Prosperity*. San Francisco, Harper Collins: 2001.

From Leslie Griffith's *A View from the Edge* (Autobiography)

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