

Pastor Jon's Sermon from July 24, 2022

Text: Luke 11:1-13

“Lord Teach Us to Pray”

The Lord's Prayer is the last thing I shared with my dad before he died. It has an even deeper meaning to me now than before. It reminds me that when we are in doubt or don't have the words to say, we can pray the Lord's Prayer... covers it all.

Today I want to preach about prayer.

I love it in the Bible when people don't seem to have it altogether... and yet God still calls them and uses them to carry God's message of love and justice to the world. Today, I like how the disciples ask Jesus to teach them how to pray. I can wrap my head around that as I have struggled with prayer at different times in my life.

If you pray, when do you pray? In the morning? Evening? All day long without ceasing? In the middle of the night when you can't sleep? At meals? How many of you struggle with prayer? There are days when you don't have the energy to pray and need someone else to do it for you.

Well I have good news for you. Prayer is a journey... something that can be learned and that we can grow into. Jesus reminds us in our Gospel to keep asking, keep seeking, and keep knocking and the door shall be opened. Don't give up on prayer.

In our Genesis text for today, we learn that God's ear can be bent. God listened to Abraham's appeal for justice on behalf of the righteous people of Sodom and Gomorrah. Abraham talked God down like a child negotiating with a parent from destroying Sodom and Gomorrah because of their sins if 50 righteous people could be found there. Abraham negotiated with God all the way down to 10 righteous people. In conversation with God, Abraham moved the needle.

Second, we pray because Jesus, God in human flesh, prayed all the time. Jesus was frequently found praying in the Gospels... especially during times of transition or big decisions in his life.

He prayed before choosing the 12 disciples.

He prayed before sharing his first passion prediction.

He was praying when he was transfigured on the mountain in Luke's Gospel.

He prayed in the Garden of Gethsemene, Father, if it is possible, take this cup from me... but not my will but your will be done, before heading to the cross. Thy will be done is one of the most faithful prayers we can pray.

Seeing Jesus' prayer life in Luke 11 prompted the disciples to ask Jesus, "Teach us to pray, like John taught his disciples." I find this request gracious. Teach us to pray. Thanks be to God our Gospel treats prayer as a learned experience.

And don't get me wrong, prayer can take many forms. Sometimes our sighs or silence are our prayers. Sometimes our cries out to God in the middle of the night are our prayers. Sometimes we pray intercessions on behalf of others like in church. Prayer can be singing or playing music, or looking around God's creation. Prayer can simply be an honest conversation with God, like with a friend or a loving parent.

The next thing I want to share about prayer is about the one whom we are praying to. Our Triune God is a gracious and loving God... a God who longs to provide for our every need and is already. We know God today through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, who loved everyone... not a God of destruction and vengeance like we saw in our Genesis text. Jesus' work on the cross shows how far God was willing to go for us, even when we don't deserve it. And God will not abandon us now.

John's Gospel also reminds us that God desires that all may have life and have it abundantly. But people are still hungry, at war, getting cancer. We know that distribution systems are broken and sinful. Injustice happens. And when we see it, we are called to pray and act. When people are suffering because of our broken world, God laments with us.

Another thing about prayer is that God will always hear our prayers... no matter how far we wander. Sometimes the answer is no or not yet, or the answer is something we weren't expecting. But God loves us through it all.

Our bishop Anne asked this week in a pastor's conference meeting, if one of your children gives you the silent treatment after a fight, do you quit loving them or trying to communicate with them? You still love them just as much. You long for reconciliation.

The times when we give God the silent treatment, God is always waiting for us to return. And our prayers don't have to be perfect. Romans 8:26-27 says, "We don't know how to pray as we ought, but Holy Spirit intercedes for us with sighs too deep and words." So the Holy Spirit takes our imperfect words, searches our hearts, and intercedes for us according to the will of God.

So in response to the disciple's request, "Teach us to pray" Jesus taught the Lord's Prayer.

It starts off Our Father in Heaven, Hallowed be your name. Calling to God like a loving parent, who is fully other and holy.

Here's a little test for our prayers. If you think God loves all that you love, and hates all that you hate, you can be sure that you've created God in your own image. God is fully other. God is holy. God's ways are not always our ways.

Next Jesus teaches us to pray for three things. God's Kingdom come, daily bread, and forgiveness.

In Luther's Small Catechism:

Your Kingdom Come, "It is true God's kingdom comes on its own without our prayer, but we ask in this prayer that it may also come to us."

Give us this day our daily bread. "In fact, God gives daily bread without our prayer, even to all evil people, but we ask in this prayer that God cause us to recognize what our daily bread is and to receive it with thanksgiving." And this is what blew my mind in confirmation. Daily bread is everything needed for life such as food,

drink, clothing, shoes, house, farm fields, money, property, an upright spouse, upright children, upright members of the household, upright and faithful rulers, good government, good weather, peace, health, decency, honor, good friends, faithful neighbors, and the like.

Praying for daily bread is for the good of all... and in this day and age, praying for faithful rulers, good government, and good weather come to the forefront.

Like a loving parent, who though we are imperfect can still give our kids good gifts. How much more does God, who is holy, want to listen and provide for us with every good gift.

Amen.