

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost, July 24, 2022

Introduction to the Day: You might be as surprised as I was to learn that forms of the Lord's Prayer were around long before Jesus' time. The uniqueness of Jesus' prayer is that it begins, "Our Father". Some translations of Father resemble our words "Papa" or "Daddy" even. So as we listen to Jesus teach about prayer and even as we pray the Lord's Prayer, Jesus invites us to pray to a loving, trustworthy God.

Luke 11:1-13

He(Jesus) 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." 2He said to them, "When you pray, say: Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. 3Give us each day our daily bread. 4And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us. And do not bring us to the time of trial." 5And 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; 6for a friend of mine has arrived, and I have nothing to set before him.' 7And 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.' 8I 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. 10For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. 11Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for a fish, will give a snake instead of a fish? 12Or if the child asks for an egg, will give a scorpion? 13If 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!"

Sermon:

Some would overhear the conversation between God and Abraham and conclude that if you pray correctly, you get your way. Prayer is not about getting the right words, posture, fervour or even your steadfast belief. Prayer is about a relationship with God...and if anything— if we pray enough, eventually it's God's way that's gotten. Check out Luther's Small catechism about sometime (it's in the back of the hymnal btw). A few stories can help us appreciate what Jesus is saying about prayer.

Jesus' teachings about prayer reveal God as loving like parents love us-

Sometimes the things we ask for are reasonable. Sometimes not. But when you're little, you ask away. A company of three worked across the street from our house clearing trees. Chuck, Bob and DJ let me hang around — as a pre-schooler, I got to throw twigs into the wood chipper and sit in the big truck for coffee breaks. Mom sent me with sandwiches and cool drinks to acknowledge their kindness so we had lunch together too. To be sure, I'd be ready for work the following Monday, I asked Dad for a hard hat; safety first you know —and I'd be just like the fellas. No plastic Tonka hat would do. Dad likely knew full well we wouldn't find an OSHA (if they had OSHA in 1965) approved helmet to fit my five- year-old noggin. Yet Dad set aside an afternoon to drive me around to hardware stores, lumberyards, and construction supply centres. That my dad accompanied me on my naive little fools errand makes me appreciate the parenting my dad was sometimes capable of.

So how much more does God go about answering prayers than even my dad did that Saturday afternoon. Jesus says God will grant us God's own Spirit if we ask.

Jesus is interested in the spirit and intention of our prayer.

Prayers are not tests of our ability to trust. We pray because God is trustworthy. There is an ancient story told among the Hasidic people about a woodcutter. “He was in the forest, it was evening and it was time to pray. He had forgotten his prayerbook. He didn’t know any prayers by heart either. The story goes that he prayed, ‘Lord, I am a simple, stupid man. I am so stupid that I have forgotten my prayerbook. Worse yet, I don’t know any prayers by heart. But you, O Lord, know all the prayers, even before we say them. So I will do this. I will recite the letters of the alphabet and you put the prayer together.’ And the prayer began with the woodcutter reciting the Hebrew alphabet...*aleph, bet, gimmel, dahlet*...the story concludes on that day of all the prayers that God heard on that day, the prayer of the woodcutter in the forest was most precious”(retold by Rev. James Limburg in Daily Readings from Spiritual Classics, Paul Ofstedal, ed., Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing 1990, p. 167).

Jesus yearns for us to become the very things we pray for.

To pray for God’s name to be hallowed really means we pray that God helps us live in a way that God’s name and reputation is honoured. A friend and colleague tells the story about growing up in the Penner family...the insurance Penners, not the lumber yard Penners. When Carole leave for school or go on dates as a teenager, her folks would say to her, “Remember, Carole, you’re a Penner and your actions reflect our good name.” Just so you know, Carole is a credit to the Penners, and also to those we call Pastor and those we call Christian.

When I was in the third of fourth grade and would go to confession, penance often included saying the Lord’s Prayer, the “Our Father” a few times. I discovered I could crank out ten Our Father’s and manage to get to Phil Gaglia’s house in time to play baseball. Looking back, chances are the kindly priest was hoping I’d say the prayer slowly so things could soak in... that stuff about forgiveness...stuff about trust in God at times when I felt like I was at the end of my little eleven year old rope.

Gwen was in her eighties when I met her she said for her whole life she prayed the Lord's Prayer three times a day...the final before sleeping so she fell asleep peacefully trusting in God's love. "It shapes my day, she said. It shapes my life too."

The words aren't magic. The relationship God initiates with us and the community God yearns for us to become are what it's really all about.

As we pray the Lord's Prayer later maybe we can slow down just a bit and ponder how much God loves us and how God yearns for wholeness on earth as in heaven. Amen.