

Luke 11:1-13  
July 28, 2019

## Prayer

“Lord, teach us to pray,” one of the disciples asked Jesus, and ever since, Christ followers have been asking the same question. Given all the prayers in the Bible; the Psalms, the prayer of Jesus in the garden and others, one wonders why faithful people are confused about it, in need of some help, why we still ask, “Lord, teach us to pray.”

For the last year, we have been thinking about prayer more intentionally than in other times. It has been called, “A Year for Prayer,” and we are nearly at the end of it. So it comes as no surprise that the lectionary reading for this last Sunday in July is the Gospel of Luke’s version of the Lord’s Prayer.

### The Lukan Prayer

It is a little different from the version in Matthew’s gospel. The prayer in Luke is shorter. There is no:

“In heaven,” just, “Father.”

“Let your will be done on earth as it is in heaven,” just, “let your kingdom come,” giving Luke’s version a more down to earth feel.

“Deliver us from evil,” just, “lead us not into temptation.” and

“For yours in the kingdom, the power, and the glory, forever, amen.”

Another difference is in the line about forgiveness. In Matthew’s version, we find, “forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.” Our practice here is to use the word “trespasses” instead of the word, “debts,” largely because of our discomfort when it comes to the forgiveness of financial obligations, either our own, or those of others, owed to us.

Luke actually uses another word, traditionally translated as, “sins.” “Forgive us our sins as we forgive our debtors.”

Luke’s prayer comes in a different place in the story. For Matthew, the context is about authentic faith versus hypocrisy, and Jesus contrasts his teaching about prayer with the example of the religious leaders who “pray for show.” “Be careful not to do your acts of righteousness before people, to be seen by them.”

In Luke, the context comes on the heels of the Parable of the Good Samaritan, inspired by the question about eternal life, and the encounter with Mary and Martha in their home at which Jesus commended Mary for her attention to life’s most pressing question.

In that vein, the prayer is simple:

Father, hallowed be your name

Let your kingdom come

Give us our daily bread daily

Forgive us our sins as we forgive our debtors

Lead us not into temptation.

## The Hypothetical Situation

Then comes a kind of story, and what it really answers is the question about whether or not God hears prayer and answers it. Suppose you have a friend who has late night guests and needs some help. When they call after you have already gone to bed, will you help them? It is a rhetorical question. As annoying and inconvenient as it is, the answer is, of course, yes, you would get up and help.

Later, Jesus makes an even sillier case. He says, “which of you would give your child a snake if they asked for a fish, or a scorpion instead of an egg?” Once again, it is rhetorical. Of course you would not do such a thing. What makes you think God would? So,

“Ask, and you shall receive; seek, you will find; knock, the door will be opened.” In other words, yes God hears and answers prayer. The upshot of all this is that in giving great care and attention to life’s most important questions, prayer is essential and effective.

For what do we pray?

For the transformation of the world through the arrival of God’s reign

For the taking care of life’s daily needs

For forgiveness and protection against the evil that surrounds us and that we find within us.

What simple beauty in a simple prayer?

There is no suggestion of hypocrisy here, as in Matthew. Here there is only a sincere concern to seek a line of communication with God. The concern is not that we do not become hypocrites by our praying, but that we become healthy and sincere Christ followers.

## Humanity

The question, however, runs deeper than the level of our religiosity. All these questions are universal, that is, they are relevant to everyone, and address us at the level of our humanity, not our religion.

When I was in high school, I had a friend who thought that he did not have to worry about sin, because he had never been baptized, as if the moral demand didn’t apply to unbelievers. But these questions *do* apply:

What must I do to inherit eternal life?

Who is my neighbor?

What is the most needful thing?

How do we deal with daily concerns?

How does one pray?

These questions and any other way one might choose to ask, are really just one big question about God.

They are asked of, and by:

Men and women

Jew and Gentile

Rich and poor,

Theist and atheist

Straight and gay  
White and black  
Democrat and Republican  
Muslim, Buddhist, Christian, Jew (and any other)  
And the like.

These questions rise up out of the depths of our humanness. It is not only believers who ask them, and should ask them, but everyone. There are no exceptions. Religion is meant to be a help. And as we learned in the winter bible study, “asking” is what prayer is all about. When we pray, it does not matter what we are asking about, we are asking these questions.

We must help each other ask them. We must let our neighbors, friend and foe, ask them in their way and as they are ready, or not ready. With regard to people, they are voluntary questions; with regards to God, they are mandatory.

They cut right to the heart of our living. The asking is essential to our health. As much as I love science and respect it; science, and math and technology, power, pleasure, and the like, are helpless before them. Prayer is the medium for asking them.

## God Listens

The point of it all is that God is present in our asking, and we should keep on asking, daily, indefinitely. God is present to hear and to understand; to mend and to restore; to comfort and to cleanse.

Prayer is a way of life. It is rich and multi-faceted, and it breathes in and out with life’s ebbs and flows. Sometimes it is meaningful and powerful in one way, sometimes in another.

And lest one think that God is too quiet too much of the time, do not forget that God has spoken boldly and at high volume in the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Be simple about it. Have a simple trust. Pray for the coming of God’s reign, for the meeting of your daily needs, and for forgiveness and protection. Beyond that, pray what is on your mind and in your heart. God listens.

The news is good news. Life is not diminished by our asking, but enhanced. We are not threatened by our asking, but celebrated and accepted. We are being encouraged to pray, Lord, teach us how”

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