

The Jesus Way: Our Daily Bread

Matthew 6:7-13

Rev. Nancy S. Lynn

January 28, 2024

There are a few moments in a worship service that always touch my heart no matter how often I experience them. Of course, one is singing “Silent Night” when the sanctuary is full of beautiful faces glowing in the light of the candles. And there is the sacred joy that comes with baptizing a baby. Another is looking into someone’s eyes as I say their name and serve them Communion. And one that still catches me off guard sometimes is the power of so many voices praying the Lord’s Prayer together.

Many of us learned the Lord’s Prayer when we were children - either because our parents or Sunday School teachers taught it to us or because we simply picked it up from hearing it in worship over and over again. Like much of the important liturgy of our faith, it eventually became etched into our memories or, some would say, written on our hearts. And for many a faithful Christ-follower, it never leaves us.

Still, there are times in worship when it feels as though I am just simply reciting the words as my mind wanders to the next part of the service. I think we all do that from time to time. Yet, when I really listen, when I hear all the voices united in praying for God’s will to be done, for God’s kingdom to come, it will move me to tears. The words of the Lord’s Prayer are powerful and transformative if you let them speak to us, shaping us and the way we live.

We know from Matthew 6:8 that God already knows our needs before we ever bring them to God in prayer. So, maybe praying, and particularly praying the Lord’s Prayer, is more about changing us than it is taking our requests to God. If so, that can only happen when we take the time to really consider and meditate on the meaning of its words.

This is the third week in our sermon series entitled “The Jesus Way”. We’re using Jesus’ teachings in The Sermon on the Mount to consider what it means to follow Jesus - not just in theory but in practice. We have talked about the Beatitudes and the challenges Jesus lays out in expecting us to look beyond the law to embody its spirit and meaning. Now, we dive into the Lord’s Prayer. How does God speak to us through its words? What does it mean and how can we pray this prayer in such a way that we are formed as Christ-followers by its words?

Henry Ward Beecher once said, “I used to think the Lord’s Prayer was a short prayer; but as I live longer, and see more of life, I begin to believe there is no such thing as getting through it. If a man, in praying that prayer, were to be stopped by every word until he had thoroughly prayed it, it would take him a lifetime.”

Every word in the Lord’s Prayer has a depth of meaning that is transformational. The six petitions encapsulate the heart of Jesus and his ministry, and they show us what it means to be his followers.

Of course, the prayer starts with “Our Father, who art in heaven”. Even in those first words, Jesus begins to set forth what is important to him. He teaches us to say “our Father” not

“my father”. The whole prayer is written in the plural which reminds us that we are meant to live and worship in community. The Christian journey is too challenging to walk alone if you are really trying to live into Jesus’s teachings. In addition, Adam Hamilton writes, the plural “reinforces for us that God is not simply my father but is the God and Father of us all. God is the creator of all people. Conservatives, liberals, Jews, Muslims, African Americans and Caucasians, God is father to us all”. How does thinking of God the Father shape your faith? If you are a father, what does it teach you about fathering?

The next line, of course, is “hallowed be thy name”. Hallowed means consecrated or holy. These are words of praise but also acknowledgment that there is some power we call “God” that is greater than we are. Jesus is reminding us that God is so much bigger than, so much more than, we can begin to comprehend. And God is our creator and worthy of our praise and respect. What makes God holy to you? What examples can you think of God’s greatness? The ancient Israelites so revered God’s name that they did not say it. God’s name was Yahweh, but they didn’t speak it aloud or write it out fully. What would it sound like to say God’s name aloud with such reverence? What would it feel like?

Central to everything Jesus teaches is the declaration that God’s kingdom is coming to earth. In fact, Jesus ushers in the kingdom by showing us how to live as God created us to - with kindness, justice, compassion, and love of God and neighbor. This is what God’s will is for us. So, we pray “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done”. For these words to have meaning, to shape us as Christ-followers, we have to imagine and name what the kingdom of God is and what God’s will is. Years ago, I began to pray the Lord’s Prayer, always emphasizing the word “thy” to remind me that being a follower of Christ isn’t about what I want, about my will, but about God’s will for me and for all of creation. How would you live differently if you were constantly choosing to live out the ways of God’s kingdom? What would it look like today in our world for God’s kin-dom to come and God’s will to be done? This is an invitation to pray for those circumstances in our lives and in the world where God’s kingdom has not come. Today, that would mean Gaza, Ukraine, any person or group which is in danger or oppressed. It is an invitation for us to pray for peace on the earth. For respect and dignity in how our leaders in the world view their power and their people.

The third petition in the prayer is “Give us this day our daily bread”. In scripture, “bread” almost always refers to literal, physical bread as well as to what sustains us spiritually, what gives us strength and courage to be Christ-followers. So, “Give us this day our daily bread” becomes, in part, an invitation from Jesus to consider what we really need in the way of food and how we might be part of getting food to those who don’t have enough. Yet, it also leads us to ask what we need at the spiritual level and, again, not just as individuals, but in community with each other and with the world.

One of the most challenging lines in the prayer is “And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us”. Of course, other traditions use sins or debts here. I am partial to trespass, though, because it not only speaks to the mistakes we make, but also to the fact that in making them, in some sense, we cross outside the boundaries of what God expects of us. That often means we cross another person’s boundaries, as well. We all do things that hurt God or hurt others - and that ultimately means we hurt ourselves. It’s no wonder Jesus speaks about forgiveness over and over again in his teaching. He also demonstrates forgiveness - he forgives

the woman caught in adultery, the tax collectors, even those who execute him. He expects us to do the work of forgiving as he did.

So, he sets asking for forgiveness is in parallel with offering forgiveness to those who cross our boundaries. What does it mean to forgive others? A common definition of forgiveness is to let go or release our resentment and desire for vengeance so that we can be reconciled. Are we able to accept God's forgiveness for ourselves when we haven't forgiven others or ourselves? When we pray this line, we might stop and ask ourselves, "What do I need to ask God's forgiveness for today? What do I need to forgive someone else for?" How is forgiveness necessary to building the kin-dom of God?

And how does that relate to temptation? "Lead us, not into temptation, but deliver us from evil". There are so many different kinds of temptation - food, alcohol, drugs, sex, power, money, status. Yet, we know that all of the things that tempt us can ultimately damage us - and others - because they lead us away from what is of God - what is holy and life-giving - and toward what is destructive.

When Jesus speaks of evil he means those behaviors, values, and words that destroy life and relationships. I've been asked many times if I believe in the devil, in Satan. What I've come to believe is that we anthropomorphize evil and hatred as the devil much like we anthropomorphize goodness and love in God. And much like God is incarnate in Jesus Christ and in all of us who strive to live in love, the devil becomes incarnate in those who do evil things. This is another reminder, then, that this is not just a prayer about my life but about our communal life. We are praying, saying "lead *us*" and "deliver *us*" because we know that evil plays out not just in individuals but in the systems and values of society at large.

The last line of the Lord's Prayer isn't actually in the words that Jesus teaches the disciples. His words are all petitions. The last line is a doxology added by the early church. "For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen." As we say these words, we are confirming aloud that we, and everything in creation, is God's and promising our allegiance to God's kingdom, God's vision for humanity, and God's work in the world. Not only do we offer our allegiance, but we offer ourselves to do that kingdom work.

In fact, the whole of the Lord's Prayer, while written as petitions to God, is also a call to action for us. The prayer teaches us how to live in God's world, and the more you dig into the deeper meanings of the Lord's Prayer, the more transformative it will become in your life. The more we pray it together in worship, the more transformative it will be for us as a community. And transformation is at the heart of all of Jesus's teachings.

In a few minutes we are going to pray the Lord's Prayer. I invite you to listen to the beauty of voices united in these simple but powerful words. Soak them in and open yourself to how they may lead you into a deeper understanding of Jesus and a deeper commitment to the Jesus way. May it be so. Amen.