Sermon 07-28-19

Luke 11:1-13

Teach Us to Pray

**Sermon Starter**

How do you pray? Who taught you to pray? Do you pray in public or only in private? What do you pray for? How Often?

When I look back on my childhood, I remember it was my Grandma Wall that taught my sister Linda and I to pray. We would get down on our knees in the living room, resting our arms on one of the overstuffed chairs or we would be tucked into bed, lights out, with our hand folded. She taught us two prayers from her youth and how we can pray for our family.

My prayer life has changed over the years, depending on what goes on in my world. Sometimes I feel my prayers are similar to those of Anne Lamott, **GRAPHIC: who wrote that she has two basic prayers: “Help me, help me, help me.” And “Thank you, thank you, thank you.”[[1]](#endnote-1)**

**Jesus and Prayer**

We all have our own prayer history, how we pray and what we pray for. We may pray daily. We may pray multiple times a day. We may try to use those “churchy” words and phrases we think God needs to hear, yet we may also just “talk” to God, spilling out what is on our hearts, at times covered with tears. Our prayers may also be very similar to Anne Lamott’s “Thank you, thank you,” and “Help me, help me, help me.”

There are many books that have been written about prayer. You may know what I am talking about, those self-help texts that try to teach us something. There are even classes designed to help us become “prayer warriors,” people who can pray like Melinda, and others that teach us how to frame our prayers for praying in a public setting, including worship.

However, today’s Gospel takes us back to the beginning of praying *with* and *in* Jesus Christ. Our Gospel today is more than a recounting of a pious moment in the life of Jesus, more than a story of how we got the Lord’s Prayer, or what some refer to as the Our Father. It is more than a lesson from Jesus the teacher.

Jesus taught his disciples not only how to pray but also what to pray for. We know that prayer was an integral part of Jesus’ life. Many times, the scriptures tell us about Jesus going to a secluded place, mountaintops mostly, to pray. Jesus prayed before choosing his disciples, he prayed when he fed the multitudes, he prayed before he healed people, he prayed the night before he died, and he prayed from the cross itself. Prayer was a part of his life, even up until his death.[[2]](#endnote-2)

**Teach Us to Pray**

In our opening verses we hear that one of the disciples asked Jesus to **GRAPHIC: “teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples” (Luke 11:1).**  This statement is in reference to John the Baptist, who did have a band of disciples that followed him in his lifetime. In the Gospel of John, we read that Andrew was a disciple of the John Baptist. His disciples were known for the prayers taught by their master.

Seeing this practice, the disciples of Jesus asked the Lord to teach them to pray. Jesus responded with what we now call the Lord’s Prayer.[[3]](#endnote-3) He gave them – and us – words to address God, words to praise God, and only then, words to petition God. What Jesus taught them became important – and has remained important – for the life of the church.[[4]](#endnote-4)

There are two versions of the Lord’s Prayer in the Bible. The one we heard in our reading this morning from Luke 11:1-4 is the shorter and less familiar version. The other, from the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 6, is the more liturgical version and the one we commonly say in worship. Luke’s version consists of five petitions while Matthew’s version has seven.

Luke’s version Luke is considered by some scholars to be closer to the original prayed by Jesus and is a model prayer intended for habitual use by the disciples. If you recall, our scripture started this morning with: When you pray, say…[[5]](#endnote-5) There are four parts to the prayer: the address, “thou” petitions, “we” petitions, and the doxology.

So, let’s focus on the Luke version. **GRAPHIC: The address is one word, “Father,” or in Aramaic, “Abba.”** We are to approach God as Father or Abba; one we can relate to intimately. Much has been written about this word, inviting us to think of God as one who looks upon us as family, to whom we are as dear as if we were God’s very own children. Yet, I am aware some people cannot look to God as a Father figure because of the way they have been treated by their worldly fathers**. GRAPHIC: There are alternatives for naming God including referring to God as Creator, the Trinity, the Almighty, Lord, Alpha and Omega, Holy One,[[6]](#endnote-6) or even Mother, in addition to “I am”, as we read in Exodus.**

There are two “thou” petitions in Luke’s version of the Lord’s Prayer, “Hallowed be your name” and “Your kingdom come.” Before anything is asked for us, God, his glory, and the reverence due to him come first. **GRAPHIC: Hallowed is an Anglo-Saxon term that means holy**. We are praying “holy be your name,” meaning to consecrate or set apart.[[7]](#endnote-7) **GRAPHIC: When we pray for God’s kingdom to come,** we acknowledge God as ruler of the world and obey His will. His will shall be done perfectly when our Lord returns.

In Luke’s version of the Lord’s Prayer we find three “we” petitions that focus on the physical and spiritual needs of the disciples. **GRAPHIC: The first, “Give us each day our daily bread,”** goes back to the old story of the manna in the wilderness, again from Exodus. Remember, in that story God provided manna each morning, enough to feed the Israelites on that day, and a double portion before the Sabbath so they would not have to collect manna on the holy day. Yet, this is the most debated part of the Lord’s Prayer. Is this a prayer for ordinary bread, or a reference to the end times, the eschatological bread in the messianic or heavenly banquet? In Luke’s Gospel, concern for the poor, giving bread, sharing common meals are marks of Jesus ministry.[[8]](#endnote-8)

The second “we” petition, **GRAPHIC: “And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us,”** is more commonly prayed today, “And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.” Presbyterians will normally pray debts while Methodists and some Lutherans pray trespasses. Trinity Lutheran prays sins. This petition is an appeal that God, as Father of the disciples, will graciously forgive them (and us) of their (our) sins so to enable us to forgive one another, for even the best of us is a sinner coming before the purity of God.

The third “we” petition is a bit controversial. **GRAPHIC: It is interesting to note that in the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) of the Bible from Luke it reads,** “And do not bring us to the time of trial” and from Matthew “And do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one.” The New International Version (NIV) and the Common English Bible (CEB) use the word temptation, while the Catholic Study Bible reads, “and do not subject us to the final test.”

We pray from the rituals of the Methodist and Evangelical United Brethren Churches (who formed the United Methodist Church in 1968), **GRAPHIC: “And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.”** What gives? Why the differences?

Translation has a lot to do with it. We can pick up any number of commentaries and find varying interpretations of this third petition. No matter if we use temptation or trials, we need to remember that God does not tempt or lead us to temptation or trials. The devil, or Satan, tempts us to sin, not God. The prayer appeals to God as the One who controls all of life for deliverance from any trials that will threaten us.[[9]](#endnote-9)

**GRAPHIC: Pope Francis has approved changes to the wording of the Lord's Prayer for the Catholic Church**. Instead of saying, "Lead us not into temptation," Catholics will say, "Do not let us fall into temptation."  The pope said he thought the English translation of the prayer was not correct.

"It is not a good translation because it speaks of a God who induces temptation." The Pope said, "I am the one who falls. It’s not him pushing me into temptation to then see how I have fallen. A father doesn’t do that; a father helps you to get up immediately. It’s Satan who leads us into temptation, that’s his department."[[10]](#endnote-10)

Finally, you may have noticed that the doxology, words that praise God, and in this case, I am talking about those words we say at the end, “For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen,”[[11]](#endnote-11) are not contained either version of the Lord’s Prayer in Luke or Matthew. The concluding doxology is first found in the Scottish Book of Common Prayer of 1637. It was carried over in many placed in the 1662 revision of the Book of Common Prayer.[[12]](#endnote-12)

Laurence Stookey, the author of *Let the Whole Church Say Amen*, tells us that a good story, when told well, marches along with strong verbs. So does a good prayer. When the disciples of Jesus asked him to teach them how to pray, Jesus provided a prayer that used vigorous verbs as a model for them to follow when making petitions to God:

**GRAPHIC: Give (us today or daily bread)**

**Forgive (us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us)**

**Save (us from the time of trial).**

**Deliver (us from evil.)**

Notice what Jesus did not say:

*Let us today find or daily bread.*

*We hope that we may be forgiven, as we forgive those who sin against us.*

*Be with us in the time of trial.*

*May we escape evil.*

Some Christians are troubled by prayers that are as direct as the first set of petitions. “Do we dare to pray that way?” they ask. “It seems as if we are ordering God around.” Yet, remember it is no less than the authority of Jesus who gives us permission to be so bold.[[13]](#endnote-13) Be bold in your prayers!

This prayer was repeated three times each day as a devotional practice among most early Christians. John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, so revered this prayer that he proclaimed: “This prayer, uttered from the heart, and in its true and full meaning, is indeed the badge of a real Christian.”[[14]](#endnote-14)

William Barclay commented that the Lord’s Prayer has two great uses in our private prayers. If we use it at the beginning of our devotions it awakens all kinds of holy desires which lead us on into the right pathways of prayer. If we use it at the end of our devotions, it sums up all we ought to pray for in the presence of God.[[15]](#endnote-15)

The Lord’s Prayer has been part of the Communion ritual since 380. Some of the early church fathers wanted to repeat it at the breaking of the bread, others wanted it at the end. Since 1552, it has followed the Communion.[[16]](#endnote-16)

**GRAPHIC: Lord; teach us to pray.** Jesus did just that. No matter how often or what we may pray for, the Lord’s Prayer is one we can repeat daily to offer honor, glory, and praise to God as well as to ask God for all that we need. At the least, **GRAPHIC: this prayer should be part of your daily communion with God.**

In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Amen.

1. James A Wallace, C.SS.R., “Homiletical Perspective on Luke 11:1-13”, from David L Bartlett & Barbara Brown Taylor, Editors., *Feasting on the Word, Year C, Vol 3,* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 289 [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Philip Comfort and Walter a Elwell, *The Complete Book of Who’s Who in the Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc, 2004), 324-325 [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Wallace, ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Jack Dean Kingsbury, “The Lord’s Prayer”, contained in Paul J. Achtemeier, Gen Ed., *HarperCollins Bible Dictionary, Revised Edition*, (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancsico, 1996), 621-22 [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. M. Eugene Boring, “Names of God in the New Testament,” contained in *HarperCollins Bible Dictionary*, 735-36 [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Donald K. McKim, *The Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms, Second Edition,* “Hallow” (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014), 142 [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. R. Alan Culpepper and Gail R. O’Day, *New Interpreter’s Bible, Vol IX, Luke/John* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1995), 235 [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2019/06/06/our-father-pope-francis-approves-changes-words-lords-prayer/1366459001/> accessed 07-12-2019 [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. United Methodist Hymnal, 895 [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. F.L. Cross & E. A. Livingstone, *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, 3rd Edition Revised* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press Inc., 2005), 1002 [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. Laurence Hull Stookey, Let the Whole Church Say Amen (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2001), 27 [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. *The Wesley Study Bible*, Study Notes Luke 11:4 (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2010), 1258 [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. William Barclay, *The New Daily Study Bible, The Gospel of Luke*, © copyright The William Barclay Estate, 1975, 2001 (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 171 [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. Cross and Livingstone, *Oxford Dictionary*, 1001 [↑](#endnote-ref-16)