



Teach us to Pray

Luke 11:1-13

TRINITY PULPIT

Children are now half as likely to know the text of the Lord's Prayer than they were 40 years ago."

That's the lead of an article in the British newspaper *The Telegraph*, published in March 2012. It was reporting the findings of a survey of 1,000 children ages 6-12 and 1,000 adults who were in that age group 40 years ago. It found that 92 percent of the adults said they knew the Lord's Prayer as a child, while only 55 percent of today's children knew it.

While the survey about the Lord's Prayer was conducted in Britain, we suspect that a similar poll in this country would yield similar results, for secularization is a feature of our society as well. But perhaps that makes it all the more important that children be taught the Lord's Prayer. While many of us who grew up attending church may find it easy to frame our own sentences in our mind and send them God-ward, not all church attendees find it so easy, and some people with little or no religious training find the whole idea of praying downright intimidating.

If you know the Lord's Prayer, as we refer to the prayer Jesus taught his disciples to pray, where did you learn to pray it? If you grew up in some congregations, you might have prayed the Lord's Prayer together every week in worship. Just like singing the doxology or reading the Bible or taking the offering, the Lord's Prayer was a part of a weekly recitation. You could say it by memory and the only issue was whether you were going to say "trespasses" or "debts" when you got to the part about forgiveness.

Others of us learned to say the Lord's Prayer at other times and places. If you were like me and grew up in a church that did not practice any formal liturgy, then the Lord's Prayer was something other Christians cited every week, but not us.

I can remember learning to recite the Lord's Prayer not in church but on basketball, football and baseball teams. Prior to the game the team would huddle up and the coach would lead the

team in prayer. However, not to offend anyone with a personal prayer, we would all say the Lord's Prayer together. I am not sure what the Lord's Prayer had to do with getting ready for the ball game, but we would recite it and then yell, "Team!" and then we were ready to go. I guess we thought saying the Lord's Prayer was going to give us some mystical strength and ability to win the game.

Maybe we needed to utter the words that the disciples uttered to Jesus that day, as recorded in Luke 11: "Jesus teach us to pray."

We are continuing our series on "Living on a Prayer." We are going to be looking at some of the great prayers of the Bible and, of course, the one we must start with is the prayer that Jesus taught his disciples to pray. We refer to it as the Lord's Prayer. Last week we began our series by letting the Apostle Paul remind us that we are to pray continually. We pray because of our attitude toward God and toward self. We pray as we are, where we are and as we can. Today we turn our attention to the Lord's Prayer.

We are told that Jesus was praying one day in a certain place and, as the disciples observed Jesus' prayer life, they longed to pray as Jesus prayed. What do we know about Jesus' prayer life? We know that Jesus desired to pray and spend time with God the Father. This has always puzzled me and caused me to ask questions about the nature of Jesus' incarnation and the relation of Jesus with God the Father.

Jesus is God. Jesus is and has always been. Through Jesus all things were created and they were created by him and for him. Everything, according to the Bible, is to bring Jesus glory. Jesus is fully God and yet also fully human. This is the great mystery of what we call the incarnation. So, we believe that while Jesus was here on earth he was fully God and fully human. Yet Jesus, in his humanity, thought it was essential to pray and spend time alone with God the Father. So, what we find of Jesus' prayer life is consistency. He was always going off alone to pray. We find a sense of de-

sire. We discover that Jesus was always praying before major decisions and challenges. Whether it was to begin his ministry or choose his disciples, Jesus was praying. When the crowds wanted to force him into being a different type of Messiah, Jesus went to pray. When Jesus was preparing for the cross, he prayed. When Jesus was on the cross, he prayed. We find Jesus' prayer life to be one of consistency and routine and yet, he also prayed in those crucial moments of life. In addition, we find that Jesus' prayer life was authentic and honest. The prayers we have of Jesus are from the heart. They are prayers moved with concern for others and concern for the will of God. His prayers are sometimes lengthy as he prays for his disciples and for all who will believe. Sometimes they are succinct as he prays, "Not my will but thine," or even a prayer of forsakenness, "Why have you forsaken me?" such as he prayed on the cross.

The disciples observe this prayer life and they want to pray like this. How many of us have observed the prayer life of another and been envious? We know people who pray with such ease, consistency and authenticity. There are certain people we can all think about that we know are people who pray. They are the people we want praying for us in our time of need.

I am reminded daily of the many of you who pray for me on a daily basis. There are many of our homebound members who tell me every time I visit, "Pastor, I pray for you daily." I will never know on this side of heaven what their prayers have meant in my life or the life our church. Many times we might think what we achieve is the result of our own ability, plans and execution, but I am certain one day I will discover that any success we have had together might be the direct result of one of our saint's fervent and persistent prayers for us.

The disciples saw Jesus praying and they asked him to teach them to pray. In Jesus' response, that we call the Lord's Prayer, Jesus reveals to us that our prayers should have certain qualities. I want to suggest that Jesus mentions five qualities about prayer. Before we begin, let us say that not every prayer must have these qualities. Not every prayer we offer is going to be as thorough as this prayer. Jesus is not telling us how to pray every time we pray; rather, he is saying when we pray, here are some qualities to consider in our prayer. Let me also say that we are just going to be giving a thumbnail sketch of these qualities, but I think they set the tone for our thinking on prayer.

First, Jesus reminds us that prayer is about a person and that person is God. As we stated last week, prayer is not just a shot in the dark hoping someone might hear. Many years ago, before there were cell phones, email and all the incredible ways we can communicate, there were CB radios. Many people had CB radios in their cars or

home. It was a way to talk to someone, especially on the road. If you were going down the road you could ask for assistance, directions or even help if you broke down, if you had a CB radio. Many of you remember how you would call for help. You would say, "Breaker, breaker," and then state the channel and ask if anyone was listening. Of course, you did not say, "Is anyone listening?" You had to know the lingo. You said, "Does anyone have their ears on?" The CB radio was truly a call into the dark. It was always exciting when someone responded. What you wanted more than anything else was someone else to respond. It was a thrill to know there was someone out there listening.

Jesus reminds us that prayer begins in relationship with a person and that person is the Heavenly Father. The term that Jesus uses to refer to God places our relationship with God in a new light. We don't simply pray to the God who is creator God, or the God who is the all-powerful God, or the unapproachable God we sometimes find in the Old Testament. Jesus comes and gives us a whole new way of knowing God. Jesus says that when you pray you say, "Father." The term is more like Daddy; it is Abba Father. It is like the cry of a young child crying out to her daddy.

On this Father's Day, those of us who are fathers long to hear just the sound of our sons and daughters say to us "Dad" or "Daddy." There is really nothing more that needs to be said. Just the sound of that word makes all the difference. Just the sound of that name creates a feeling of intimacy and love. We know the many hard man who melts at the sound of the word "daddy."

Theologian Karl Barth reminds us that we must not measure God by our fathers but the other way around. There was not earthly fathers and then the divine father but the other way around. We must let God define fatherhood and not let earthly fatherhood define the Heavenly Father.

As Chris Tomlin sings:

You're a Good, Good Father

It's who you are, it's who you are, it's who you are

And I'm loved by you

It's who I am, it's who I am, it's who I am.

Jesus says we begin prayer with a person in mind. That person is our loving Heavenly Father.

Jesus says that when we pray we know that this loving Father has for us a purpose. Prayer is about seeking God's purpose for us. Jesus says our prayer should be that the will of God be done on earth as it is perfectly done in heaven. In the Garden of Gethsemane, in the midst of Jesus' agony before the cross, Jesus prayed the same prayer: "Father not my will, but your will be done." The one who would follow Jesus is to pray for God's pur-

pose above all things. Our lives are determined by our dreams and desires. It is normal for us to pursue a dream. There might be something we want to do or something we want to become. We might want to be a doctor or a lawyer or an engineer. Maybe we want to accomplish a great challenge. It might simply be something that is on our “bucket list” that we want to experience. It is good to have dreams and work toward dreams.

We are also driven everyday by desires. What we feel and desire too many times determines our choices. How many of us make decisions, believe we know what is a priority either by a dream we have or a desire we feel? Now, don't hear me wrong. Dreams are not wrong and not every desire is incorrect. Yet, Jesus says when we pray our prayer is not, “Lord, give me the life of my dreams.” Our prayer is not, “Lord, give me what I desire.” Our prayer is about something more – it is about purpose. Our prayer should be about the purpose of God — the very will of God — being done on earth; and more so, being done in my life and your life and our lives together. What we are seeking in prayer is not to align God to our dreams and desires but for us to align our dreams and desires to God. Jesus is not our personal assistant to do our bidding; Jesus is our Lord, to whom we have declared everything. Jesus reminds us that prayer must be about purpose. It is aligning our lives to God's purpose.

Prayer is about provision. Max Lucado suggests in his book *The Great House of God* that the next three petitions are about provision for our past, present and future.¹ He states, “Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us,” indicating our need for provision in our past. When we think about our past and our failure, do we think God can possibly forgive us? Is there enough grace for what I have done or failed to do? Could God love me enough to welcome me back? Can God be patient enough with me to wait on my ways to change? Is there a provision for my past? Jesus says we can pray for that provision. We can go to the Good Father and ask, “God, forgive me.”

We can be sure about God's provision for this day: “Give us this day our daily bread.” In the United States, many of us cannot understand the depth of this prayer. Many of us are going to be praying in about 30 minutes, “Lord, let me stop this eating,” or “Lord, help me have self control to put down the fork when I am full.” Yet many in our world, and in the United States and our own state, are at risk when it comes to daily provision. It is estimated that 1 in 6 households in America face hunger or are at risk in regards to hunger. In the world, the estimate is 1 billion people are living hungry and 36 million will die as the result of hunger. In North Carolina we are the 10th hungriest state in the Union. It is estimated, in our state, that 1 in every 5 children are at risk of hunger.

I give you these figures to simply say that if you are full this morning and heading out to eat after worship, you are in a small percentage in this world. For us to pray, “Give us our daily bread,” does not have the same tone as others who may pray that prayer. It was also true for Jesus' disciples. When they prayed, “Give us our daily bread,” it was not metaphorical, it was literal. “God, you are a good God, provide for us today.” Let me mention two things around God's provision for today. First, to pray this prayer is to be reminded that God is our provider. We are dependent upon God no matter how independent we might think we are. Yet, here is the other part of this. It is the plural “our” in this prayer. We view prayer as very personal, but this prayer is a communal prayer. Give us our daily bread. God's provision for us is also God's provision for others. So, when we are praying God's provision for us, God chooses to provide for others through us. God's provision is for our past but it is also for our present day.

God's provision is for the future. Jesus says to pray, “Lead us not into temptation.” Here Matthew adds to the Lord's Prayer what we find in Luke 11 with the words, “Deliver us from evil for thine is the kingdom and glory forever.” God's provision is also for the future. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.

The term “temptation” is a neutral word. It means simply trial or test. So we know that God tests us to lead us to faith. Yet, the Bible is clear that God does not tempt us. James writes, “Let no one say that when he is tempted he is tempted by God.” So, what is the difference? It is the way we approach it. In fact, the trial or temptation might very well be the same situation. It is a trial when we follow Jesus in it. It becomes a temptation when we do not follow Jesus in the midst of it. Notice Jesus says we should pray, “Lead me not.” You can't be led unless you are willing to follow. When we follow Jesus, whatever our tests might be, they are not temptations. They cannot be used to lead us to sin, but instead to lead us to choose faithfulness, and therefore to grow us into maturity.

I think it is also right for us to just cry out to God, “God, protect me.” This is a very basic prayer of the heart. One of our cries is to cry out to God for protection. The Bible is filled with such prayers. “God, be our hiding place, be our refuge, be our protection.” In a very basic sense this is a prayer to God for provision of protection in the future. It is like praying, “God, you know my weaknesses, you know what I struggle with in life. Help me...guard me, protect me, deliver me. Don't let my future trip me up. God, you have provided for me in the past, you are providing for me in the present. Now, Lord, I trust you for the future as well.”

Although Luke does not include the last quality Mat-

thew does, and that is concluding the prayer with praise. Matthew says that Jesus concluded the prayer, “For thine is the Kingdom and Power and the Glory Forever.” Matthew’s recording of the prayer ends in praise. Jesus says that when we pray, we can pray to a person, we can pray for purpose, we can pray for provision for the past, present and future. We can and should end in praise.

This ending is a doxology of praise. It is the child of God coming to a conclusion. We come as children of God and pray. We pray to a Loving Father who reveals purpose and that what is the most important is God’s will. We pray to a God whose provision is complete. God has provided us forgiveness in the past, abundance in the present and protection in the future. The only response is total praise. “God, yours is the Kingdom.” That is, all power belongs to God. “God, you are in control. God, you are sure. Your ways will not be thwarted. God, you are worthy of glory. All that happens in your Kingdom’s reign is to bring you glory. It is not about me or us; it is about you, O God.” The prayer ends with hope: “Forever and ever.” Whatever we might be facing now, whatever this life might bring us, it is not the last word. Our prayers should remind us that our hope is eternal and is placed in the God who created us, redeemed us and is coming for us. Praise be to God.

Eugene Peterson’s *The Message* translation of the Bible reads this way in Matthew 6:

“And when you come before God, don’t turn that into a theatrical production either. All these people making a regular show out of their prayers, hoping for stardom! Do you think God sits in a box seat?”

“Here’s what I want you to do: Find a quiet, secluded place so you won’t be tempted to role-play before God. Just be there as simply and honestly as you can manage. The focus will shift from you to God, and you will begin to sense his grace.

“The world is full of so-called prayer warriors who are prayer-ignorant. They’re full of formulas and programs and advice, peddling techniques for getting what you want from God. Don’t fall for that nonsense. This is your Father you are dealing with, and he knows better than you what you need. With a God like this loving you, you can pray very simply. Like this:

*Our Father in heaven,
Reveal who you are.
Set the world right;
Do what’s best—
as above, so below.
Keep us alive with three square meals.
Keep us forgiven with you and forgiving others.
Keep us safe from ourselves and the Devil.
You’re in charge!
You can do anything you want!
You’re ablaze in beauty!
Yes. Yes. Yes.² ▲*

¹ Max Lucado, *The Great House of God*. 1997. Word Publishing.

² *Holy Bible: The Message* (The Bible in Contemporary Language). 2005. Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress.

