

SERMON  
Time after Pentecost – Lectionary 17  
July 25, 2010

Genesis 18:20-32  
Psalm 138  
Colossians 2:6-15 [16-19]  
Luke 11:1-13

Brothers and sisters in Christ, grace to you and peace from God the Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus, who is the Christ. Amen.

This morning, I would like to begin with a confession. But first of all, I would like to clarify something. When I write a sermon, it is usually a reflection of what I need to hear. Now this may seem a bit self-centered.

But in reality, I figure that if it is something that I need to hear, perhaps it might be something that will speak to the majority of you also. For most of us encounter similar joys and struggles in our lives. Whether it has to do with family situations, relationships, finances, jobs, health issues, time management, or our personal faith journeys, many of us are in the same boat.

Indeed, there are times when I need to be convicted by the Law, and perhaps some of you do also. And then there are times when I need to hear about the love, grace, and mercy of God as proclaimed through the Gospel. And for sure, we all need to hear these words.

Therefore, I try to use the words “us” and “we” as much as possible to reflect that I am not only the speaker of the words, but also the receiver – the hearer. Also, I would never say anything in a sermon that pertains only to you, but not also to me.

With that being said – now my confession. I really struggle with prayer. I know that as a pastor, prayer should somehow come naturally to me, like it should be in my DNA. But it doesn't come naturally and I think that I missed out on the prayer gene.

Certainly, there are times when I pray that I feel really close to God, and believe that God is actually hearing my joys and my cries. But, to be honest, those times are not the norm.

Much of the time, when I am trying to have a conversation with God – because ultimately, that’s what prayer is, a conversation with God – I find my mind wandering. I have trouble concentrating. I find myself doing more talking than listening. I become impatient when my requests seem to go unheard.

However, I guess that I can take comfort in the fact that I am not alone. Our scriptures are filled with psalmists and prophets who cry out, “Where are you Lord? Will you forget me forever? Why have you forsaken me?” The most often repeated phrase in the Bible seems to be, “How long, O Lord?”

John Calvin once said, “There is such a thing as waiting patiently for the Lord with suspended desires.” But it’s hard to suspend desires. It’s been hard for me to discover that God answers prayers in more than one way – sometimes with a “yes”, sometimes with a “no”, and sometimes with a “wait” or a “we’ll see”.

Then there are times when prayer can seem like a mere duty. Whenever I am involved in meetings or public events, people usually say; “Pastor, can you lead us in a word of prayer?” Of course I agree, since that is part of what I am supposed to do as a pastor. But suddenly a plethora (I like that word, “plethora”) of words flood my brain.

In an instant, I try and sort them out so that I can put them together in some sort of way that is cohesive, logical, uplifting, inclusive, graceful, non-judgmental, non-political, comforting, encouraging, hopeful, faithful, meaningful, not too long and not too short. Oh, and by the way, the prayer must also be heartfelt, coming from the depths of my soul reflecting the proper amount of emotional display.

Then, all of a sudden, the room goes silent. And not only is everyone in the room now waiting with anticipation, but I have just called on the name of God. Now, even God is listening! It makes me want to just run away and cry out “Lord, teach me how to pray!”

This brings us to our Gospel story this morning. “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.” Jesus replied, “When you pray, say...” Of course this is when we are given what we call, “The Lord’s Prayer” or the “Our Father.”

Now for some, the Lord’s Prayer could be seen as Law. Here is just another thing that we have to do. And we have to say it word for word just like Jesus dictated. But of course, that’s not so easy either. For this prayer is recorded in the Gospel’s of both Matthew and Luke.

And, of course they are recorded differently. And, of course they were written in a different language than English and therefore had to be translated. The prayer that we pray today is actually a combination of both Matthew’s and Luke’s accounts, with an added ending that came hundreds of years later.

For those of you who come from a Protestant background, we have often accused the Catholics of leaving off the ending of the Lord’s Prayer. You know, the part that says, “For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.” But actually, that phrase is never recorded in the prayer that was given to us by Jesus.

So you see, when we read the prayer as we have it today in English, we can in no way claim that this is the only “true” or “correct” translation.

I would like you to take out your red hymnals for a minute and turn to page 112 in the front part of the hymnal. As you can see, there are two versions of the Lord’s Prayer. Actually, both of these versions have been in the Lutheran hymnal for the past 35 years. If you notice, one uses “old English”, language from the time of King James. The other uses newer language that better represents how we speak today.

I remember that in my previous congregation, I started to use the modern day language prayer once in a while during worship. You would think that I was Satan himself! One man came up to me after worship and said, “How dare you change the words of Jesus!” I bit my tongue and said; “You have a wonderful afternoon.”

So we can see this prayer as Law – as yet another burden that is put upon us. Along with loving our neighbor, picking up our cross, telling people about the Gospel, feeding the hungry, helping the poor, healing the sick, now we have to recite this prayer whenever we pray.

Or, we can see this prayer as a Gift. A gift that has been given to us for the times that we just cannot come up with the words on our own. A gift that will speak to us of God’s will so that we don’t get God’s will confused with our will. A gift that will sustain us in times of suffering and persecution. A gift that will become part of our being. A gift that no one can ever take away from us. This is what the Lord’s prayer is to me.

So let’s take a closer look. First of all notice that this prayer is for all of us. It is not a private, individual prayer. There are no “I’s” and “me’s”. There are only “our’s”, “us’s”, and “we’s”. It is a communal prayer that unifies us as the Body of Christ.

It begins with “Father”, or “Our Father” in Matthew’s Gospel. It makes the prayer very intimate. It speaks immediately of relationship. God seeks to have a relationship with God’s people. God initiates this relationship and we respond by saying “Father”.

Now I must say that we cannot get hung up on gender issues here. I know that for some people, the word “father” has negative connotations. Perhaps you grew up with an abusive father, or a father who left, and was not there for you when you needed him most. Therefore, to call God “father” might bring back painful memories for you.

However, in this prayer we address God as “Father” because it is in the same manner in which Jesus did. But also realizing that there are also times when God is referred to as “motherly” in Scripture.

The main point is that we come to God in an intimate way, as a child would come to a loving parent.

“Hallowed be your name”. This is recognizing that God’s name is holy and worthy of our worship and praise. It puts the relationship in proper perspective, namely that there is a God, and we are not God. There is only one God, who is holy and seeks a loving and caring relationship with us, God’s people.

“Your Kingdom come” reflects our desire that God’s Kingdom breaks into our world in the here and now. It helps us to yearn for the attributes of God’s Kingdom – things such as love, peace, joy, mercy, and justice. It helps us to realize that the earthly kingdoms of this world are not God’s Kingdom and we are called to choose which Kingdom we will be part of and which King we will follow.

“Give us each day our daily bread”. This daily bread is both physical and spiritual. Here, we pray for God to give us what we need each day at a time. We pray for the simple gifts that sustain us as we continue to be partners with God in bringing forth God’s Kingdom.

We don’t pray for an abundance that will give us a sense of security for the future, since our only security lies in God’s love and mercy. This daily bread also feeds us spiritually through the body and blood of our Lord shared in Holy Communion.

We realize that even though God gives us all that is God’s including his only Son, we still pull away and act contrary to God’s will. Therefore we pray that God will “forgive us our sins”. These are sins that are known and unknown, things we have done, and things we have failed to do.

And while experiencing this incredible forgiveness that God mercifully gives us, we pray that we too will “forgive those who are indebted to us”. For when we experience such a great gift, we have no other option than to share it with others”. That is the way of God’s Kingdom.

And finally we pray that we are protected from the “time of trial”. Trials and tribulations will come our way no doubt. Therefore, we ask that God will give us the strength we need in times when we are more attracted to the Kingdom’s of this world and its ways, than to God’s Kingdom.

Yes, I still have trouble praying at times. Therefore, I am thankful that Jesus has given us this great gift of what we have come to know as “the Lord’s prayer.” Amen.

May the peace that passes all understanding be with you now and for life everlasting. Amen.