

July 24, 2022. Rev. Kathryn McGinnis

Gracious God, illumine these words by your Spirit that we might hear what you would have us hear, and be who you would us be, for the sake of Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh. Amen.

Our Scripture for this morning comes from the gospel of Luke, chapter 11, verses 1 through 13.

Listen now for the word of the lord.

11 He 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.” ² So he said to them, “When you pray, say: Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. ³ Give us each day our daily bread. ⁴ And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us. And do not bring us to the time of trial.” ⁵ And he said to them, “Suppose one of you has a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say to him, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves of bread, ⁶ for a friend of mine has arrived, and I have nothing to set before him.’ ⁷ And he answers from within, ‘Do not bother me; the door has already been locked, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.’ ⁸ I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything out of friendship, at least because of his persistence he will get up and give him whatever he needs. ⁹ “So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. ¹⁰ For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. ¹¹ Is there anyone among you who, if your child asked for a fish, would give a snake instead of a fish? ¹² Or if the child asked for an egg, would give a scorpion? ¹³ If you, then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”

The word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

Today, our scripture is all about prayer. Here, in these verses, is Luke’s story of Jesus teaching his disciples the Lord’s prayer. A prayer we say every Sunday. A prayer we’ll say this morning. A prayer that is engrained deep into the identity of what it means to be part of a community that follows Christ what it means to be the church.

Prayer, as a broad topic in Christianity, is a bit perplexing. I think a bit mystifying.

We all know prayer is a vital part of a faithful life, both in our individual spiritual lives and communities that come together.

But other than that, we’re kind of left on our own to figure out the specifics. How often should you pray, what counts as a prayer, how should you act when you pray, the list goes on and on.

And unfortunately, I think all this lack of specificity, lack of guidance, leads to a lot of shame and guilt built up around prayer.

I’m not praying enough, I’m not praying the right way, I’m not being grateful enough. Again, the list goes on.

All because we don't know how to pray. And in our scripture today – that's exactly what Jesus does, teaches us, his disciples, how to pray.

Prayer is incredibly important in the gospel of Luke, more so than any other gospel. Luke begins with prayer and ends with prayer. And Jesus is often praying before major events in his life. He dies praying, and when he is resurrected, he prays with his disciples.

So, when Jesus teaches his disciples how to pray it's important.

What I think should be said first about this prayer, that Jesus teaches his disciples, is that it is a Jewish prayer in both structure and format. Even opening with 'Father' or Abba in Aramaic as Jesus probably would have said, is common in Jewish prayer.

Since this prayer is ultimately now a Christian prayer said in Christian communities for thousands of years, it's important to acknowledge and honor the tradition that shaped it.

But the prayer itself, like many, if not all things in Luke's gospel, is quite radical and unexpected. It's blunt. It's terse. It doesn't say more than needed. It's urgent.

And quite frankly, it's rude. Unapologetically so. There is no beautiful opening. It opens plainly with just, 'father.' It's straight to the point. A beautiful point. This prayer is based first and foremost in relationship. In our relationship with God, our parent, Abba, our creator. But straight to it, nonetheless

Hallowed be your name. Different biblical translations translate that line 'May your name be revered as holy' or 'father, uphold the holiness of your name.'

It's honoring the holiness of God's name. How even a name can evoke all that God is. But even more than it, it's asking *God* to uphold the power of that name, the Holiness of God's name in this world that often feels anything but holy. *God* uphold the holiness of *your* name, bring your kingdom. So that all people would come to uphold the holiness of your name so that you would establish the fullness of your reign

And then straight to 3 petitions. For daily bread. Just enough bread for the day. For forgiveness so that we might forgive. For deliverance.

And that's it. It's what Jesus teaches his disciples to pray.

But he doesn't leave it at that, he then tells a parable, a parable that dives a bit deeper into the prayer's meaning.

He tells the story of man who knocks on his friend's door in the middle of the night asking for food, because a friend of his came to his home and he doesn't have any food to give him. It sounds like an unlikely scenario, and it's meant to. But it all really hinges on verse 8. ⁸I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything out of friendship, at least because of his **persistence** he will get up and give him whatever he needs.

Jesus here is saying that the man will get up from his bed and give the food because his friend was persistent in asking.

But the Greek word for persistent – it's perhaps better translated here as shameless. The man was so shamelessly knocking on his friend's door in the middle of the night that the man in bed had no choice but to get up from bed and give the food.

Thus, this parable doesn't just teach us to be persistent in prayer. It teaches us to be shameless in prayer. To be so shamelessly persistent in our prayer that God will eventually wake up, come down, and open the door.

No politeness, no fluff – shamelessly straight to the point demanding God answer and help those in need. Help us who feel abandoned. Help us who feel as if God is asleep, has shut the door, and is unwilling to wake up.

Now to be clear...this persistence, this shamelessness is not meant for anything we want.

For the man in the parable, knocking on the door, his shameless persistence is not for him at all. It's for food that his friend needs.

The lord's prayer prays only that God would give us the bread we need for the day, for God to forgive our sins like unpaid debts, so we can forgive the debts of others, and for God to protect us from all that might separate us from God.

As Justo Gonzalez writes; "This is not a list of petitions. It is a single, ardent call for the kingdom in which God's name is hallowed, and in which all have what they need."

A call for God to give only what those who serve the kingdom need to sustain them in the struggle. But a shameless, blunt, rude call, nonetheless.

One of the biggest impacts on my own prayer life has been studying the Old Testament.

Praying shamelessly to God, unapologetically knocking on God's door in the middle of the night and demanding that God get up and give us what we need to sustain us in this world filled with suffering.

This may feel a bit blasphemous to us – especially us Presbyterians. But it's deep within the heart of Judaism.

The Hebrew Bible is full of prayers that take the anger, suffering, and despair that all too often accompany life on this earth – they take it all to God and demand that God hold it, demand that God answer. And God does.

For that is a faithful response. This parable tells us surely as the friend would and does get up in the middle of the night, so too God will get up and answer our prayers.

Surely as a parent takes care of their children, so too will God, our Abba, provide for us through the holy spirit in abundance.

We can be so mystified and intimidated by prayer.

But when Jesus teaches his disciples to pray, He doesn't begin with you must have a certain attitude, or be pious, or pray at a certain time, or hold your hands a certain way, etc.

No, he just begins with a Word. The Word. And that very first word invokes and reminds us of our intimate relationship with God, our Abba.

And it's trust in that relationship that faithfully emboldens us to take it all, everything from joy to despair, from hope to suffering, to shamelessly take it all to God and be persistent until we get an answer.

As Cynthia Jarvis writes, "God has first spoken the one Word to us in Jesus Christ; now we need only muster the good sense to speak back. If by God's grace we do, we will find ourselves (literally) in conversation with a friend who knows our every weakness because he himself has cried out in anguish and been met with silence. How else but in conversation with him... could we trust that God is a God who will come after us when we are lost, dine with us when we are cast out by all others, welcomes us home after we have wasted our lives, and who will keep us from falling too far?"

We need not overthink prayer. We need not be intimidated by it. We need not feel guilty about it. We need only to shamelessly speak a word.

For these words Jesus teaches us – they cover the breadth of Christian life.

So, if we do not have the words, or we cannot find the words, we can speak these words that cover all, all we might need to sustain the hard work in bringing about God's kingdom.

And if we do have the words, this prayer teaches us how to use them.

For true, faithful prayer, grounded in our relationship to Abba made possible through the Word, this prayer emboldens us to shamelessly knock on God's door. To keep knocking until it is opened.

And know when it opens, and we receive God's answer – the gift of the holy spirit – pray then to have the courage to truly listen.

Amen.