

## Lord, Teach Us to Pray Psalm 85 Luke 11: 1-13

A number of years ago Larry Davies in his *Sowing Seeds of Faith* email newsletter wrote: "Prayer should be as critical and functional as the steering wheel on your car." He prayed, "Without you, O Lord, I can go nowhere!" Yet, for many, prayer is actually more like the spare tire...seldom used except when something goes flat. In other words: "Don't call us... we'll call when we need you!" Often that is a common view of prayer- when all else fails, prayer is an action to be pursued- something reserved for dire circumstances.

We talk a lot about prayer in the Church, and do a lot of praying in the community of the Church as well as teach our younger ones about prayer. The Presbyterian Book of Order requires that church meetings are opened and closed with prayer. We have the Prayer Tree that is activated when individuals, struggling with health issues, the reality of death, or one of many life struggles, feels the need and desire for others to support them before God. In your bulletin for this morning, you are encouraged to pray for our young people at camp this week. They were each given a Prayer Stone to keep with them at camp and used regularly- in gratitude when happy, and for strength- when uncertain.

It is likely that each of us has experienced the power of prayer. I, personally, have been strengthened in these past weeks with reassurances of prayer support- for which I am grateful. The knowledge that others are seeking God's loving arms of support on your behalf gives a strength- the full value of which may not be felt until later.

In spite of our familiarity with prayer, we- like the disciples- often feel the need to ask, "Lord, Teach Us to Pray." Somehow, it seems we feel that the words need to be perfect and make sense before it is truly an acceptable prayer. It is as if God is so far "up there" that the only way we can be heard is if we say our prayers in just the right way and with just the right words. Maybe this happens when we feel we do not have the right to address God in our own words and our bumbling way. How unfortunate because this holding God at arm's length often limits our time spent in prayer. We also get busy doing other things and fail to acknowledge that true prayer should and can be woven in and out of the very fabric of our lives. A breath filled prayer for strength to handle a situation is likely more what God wants than a carefully worded lengthy paragraph.

A favorite illustration of mine- and many of you have heard it before- A hiker, walking the paths of a mountain, came upon a young shepherd boy tending a flock of sheep. The boy was using a stick to draw a variety of letters in the dust of the path. When asked what he was doing, the boy said he was praying. The hiker expressed surprise at that since the letters didn't even form proper words. The boy quite confidently replied, "Oh, that's OK, God knows what I

need- I'm just writing the letters and God will put them together." It seems that is the kind of a child's simplicity for which we need to strive and not focus on carefully worded prayers that sometimes are intended to impress others.

It is only in Luke's Gospel that Jesus' disciples ask him to teach them to pray. Jesus does so by giving them the model prayer presented in verses 2-4, but also by regular example and encouragement. Luke's Gospel portrays Jesus at prayer far more than the other Gospels: nine times in Luke as compared to five in Mark, three in Matthew, and two in John. Jesus also offered three parables on prayer- one of which is in today's text.

The actual words of the prayer as Jesus taught are found in two passages in the gospels- Matthew 6- as part of the Sermon on the Mount and also in Luke 11- today's scripture. The version found in Matthew has more words to it and some of the phrasing is more familiar. However, neither has the "doxology" – "for thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory"- nor the final "Amen" as we know and usually say it. It is felt that those words were added by the early church for liturgical purposes- a doxology and an Amen complete a prayer.

The Lord's Prayer is one of the most familiar portions of scripture. I am grateful that we use it each week during worship services so that even our youngest members will commit it to memory. It deeply touches my heart when I become aware that my 102 year old mother as well as a ten year old standing beside me are saying the Lord's Prayer. Even though we may, at times, struggle with the words when praying with other church traditions, most of the familiar words just flow out of our mouths without thinking about them. Maybe that is a good reason to stop once in a while and consider Jesus' response when his disciples said, "Lord, teach us to pray."

Even though Jesus often modeled being in prayer, prayer did not begin with Jesus. Prayer is found through out the Old and New Testament- at least 114 times in the King James Version of the Bible. Most of the Psalms focus on the author, David's, many conversations with God- prayers such as Psalm 85 which Marge read earlier. Christ's life on earth, his death and resurrection, broke open the Old Testament tradition of needing to approach God through the priests and with offerings. Christ brought forth new life that we believe gives us direct access to talking with God. Because we have been blessed with this privilege, it is unfortunate that our sense of being unworthy to openly and honestly talk with our God often keeps us separated from God. If God is considered a good friend, prayer could be as easy and sharing the depth of our hearts with a friend over a cup of coffee. A relationship with God because of Jesus Christ, gives us that privilege. Jesus clearly teaches that relationship when he uses the word, "Father" to address God. It is an intimate term symbolizing the closeness like that of a loving father or loving father-figure in our earthly lives.

The first two lines of the Lord's Prayer as found in both Luke and Matthew are concerned with God. Whether it is "Father, hallowed be your name. Your Kingdom come." in Luke or "Our Father in heaven, hallowed by your name. Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." as found in Matthew, both versions bring upfront, the most important concept of all- that of giving glory to God first of all. That does really seem like a critical concept to remember before we simply dive into prayer with a load of requests and wants. Giving God the glory first of all, focuses the purpose of all prayers.

The next lines are focused on "us." In Luke- "forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us. And do not bring us to a time of trial." And in Matthew- "Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one." As we consider these "us" petitions, it seems clear that all point to a total reliance on this awesome God we have addressed in the first lines. The first "us" petition- "daily bread" enough to meet our daily needs- notice the word, "daily"- not necessarily an abundance to fill the freezer and bank account well into the future. In considering the second, "us" petition- "Forgive us our sins"- it is critical to recognize the rest of the phrase, - "...for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us." OR "...as we also have forgiven our debtors." Honestly praying this petition, we agree that the level at which God forgives us is determined by the level at which we have forgiven others. A rather powerful concept and reminder! The third "us" petition- "And do not bring us to a time of trial" prays for strength to withstand all that may come before us. The three "us" petitions focus on bread for daily needs, as well as forgiveness and deliverance- all important to our physical and spiritual lives.

I trust you noted the F-A-C-T-S -the five elements of prayer at the top of your bulletin. F=Faith- belief God exists, A=Adoration- praising God, C=Confession- repentance and recognizing our need for God. T=Thanksgiving- gratitude for what we have been given and S=Supplication- bringing our needs to God. Notice the order- bringing our needs to God last.

Our scripture for this morning from Luke, also includes a parable of Jesus regarding the importance of trusting God will answer our prayers as well as needing to be persistent in our prayers. The parable- a man bangs on his friend's door in the middle of the night requesting three loaves of bread to feed a late arriving guest. At first, the friend refuses to get out of bed. However, when the noise continues and he doesn't want his children to be awakened, persistence wins out and the need is met. Amazing how Jesus seems to encourage this kind of behavior with God! If we really need something, we need to trust God will answer our prayer and then be persistent. Giving up may indicate we didn't expect our prayers to be answered in the first place. It seems just as clear that God truly is conscious of our needs and even though

the answer for which we have been praying seems to be delayed, an answer will come. God invites us to keep connected- keep trying. But all the while, not only do we need to be persistent, we also need to trust God will answer our prayers in some way.

What about the prayers that don't seem to get answered? Are we expecting the prayers to get answered only in our way? It is critical that we remember in our humanity, we often request those things that WE feel are important while God may be glorified in a different way- with a different answer. A closeness to a loving God might just develop through a persistent prayer that gets answered in what may eventually turn out to be in a better way.

The words of Christ advising to ask, seek and knock are encouraging- it is a reminder there is someone who loves and cares for us even when we feel very alone. Jesus points out clearly that a loving parent would not intentionally harm their child- so if a human parent is capable of that kind of care, how much more likely is it that a perfect God will meet our needs?

God wants us to know that we are loved, we are free to ask for what we need, the door to the kingdom of heaven is open to us even before we knock, but especially when we ask to come in.

May we open our arms to accept the awesome gift Jesus gives. The unbelievable wonder of a God who loves us and knows our needs. This good friend always as close as a whispered prayer- never sleeping. A good friend who will listen to our wildest dreams and never laugh- a good friend that loves us enough to NOT give us everything for which we ask. May the thread of prayer be woven through every moment of our lives- always with the goal first of all, to honor God. May we be persistent in asking and trust an answer will come because the door is always open. "Lord, Teach Us to Pray." Amen.

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