

Proper 12C – July 27, 2025

Colossians 2:6-15, (16-19)

Luke 11:1-13

Teach Us to Pray

*A sermon preached by The Rev. Dianne Andrews at
St. Barnabas Episcopal Church, Bainbridge Island, WA.*

As the end of life approaches... and as memories fade... a prayer that remains tenaciously at the forefront... is the prayer Jesus taught his disciples. It is a prayer that many of us learned at a young age. It is a prayer that can be said in moments of desperation and at times when no other words come to mind. It is a prayer that is said communally every time we gather around the Holy Table to share Christ's love in a meal of bread and wine. It can also be a challenging prayer to unpack as it opens by addressing a transcendent God in heaven, one who is far greater than we... as mere mortals... can begin to comprehend. It is a prayer that calls us not to be passive when praying the words "thy kingdom come, thy will be done..." for we are to be participants in the work of helping God's reign become fully realized on earth, even if that merging of heaven and earth arrives beyond our lifetimes. It is a prayer that has the potential to be recited mechanically and mindlessly with no engagement, no real prayerfulness. It is also a prayer that has the potential to do its work in us every time we pray it... IF we approach prayer with open hearts and listening minds. Whenever we pray, using whatever method of prayer, the process is simple: ask, wait, listen, and receive.... What Jesus teaches us is simple: knock and the door will be opened unto you... ask and it shall be given... seek and you will find. Prayer is one of the primary means through which we seek to know God's presence. As I like to say, we never invite God to be with us... because God is always here. My prayer is that God helps open us up to a greater awareness of God's abiding presence.

What today's gospel lesson is not about is the transactional, shopping list approach to prayer... as if God were some sort of cosmic vending machine filled with answers and solutions to our needs and wants. Prayer is not about offering up our prayer petitions as if they were shiny quarters to be inserted into a slot in order to elicit expected cosmic outcomes. The problem with such a transactional approach to prayer is that it is mechanical... it asks very little prayer-er. We know well... that prayer is not like a magic wand that will wipe away our problems, cure all disease, or take away life's challenges and hardships. But true prayer has the power to do its work in us... to connect us with the Source... to transform us. The disciples had watched Jesus communing with God... and asked that they be taught how to experience the sense of peace, trust, and intimacy that they observed when Jesus was in prayer. The first prayer of the disciples... was simply *asking* Jesus... to teach them how to pray.

Prayer was a very private matter for Jesus. We hear, often, that Jesus went away... by himself... to pray. Prayer was the heart and foundation of his life and work in the world. When Jesus knew that his arrest was imminent, Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane while he sweated drops of blood that spoke of the painful, agonizing truth that he was experiencing. The blood-stained prayer fully expressed the experience of those tortuous moments that were a prelude to his arrest and execution. When it came time to walk to the cross, Jesus did so with calm and courage.

One preacher recalls the impact that the Lord's Prayer had on him in the midst of an angry crowd of Vietnam war protesters that had gathered at a massive federal courthouse building in New Haven, Connecticut. The preacher says of this turbulent moment in the 1960's:

"The National Guard troops, which had been stationed there for some days, grew edgy. Suddenly, the crowd surged forward, and the troops prepared to defend the buildings and resist the crowds. Bloodshed appeared inevitable.

"Then a few people, up toward the front of the crowd, suddenly fell to their knees, praying at the top of their lungs, 'Our Father, who art in heaven...' Others in the crowd fell to their knees... and those who knew it, repeated the prayer. Even one of the soldiers, at hearing the familiar prayer, took off his helmet, put it over his chest, and began to repeat the prayer. The demonstration continued, but without bloodshed. At the end of the day, as demonstrators made their way home and soldiers dispersed, someone said, 'I don't think we really changed anything today.'

"One of the others in the group was heard to say, 'I'm not so sure. Praying that prayer on the steps of the courthouse certainly changed me. And that's a start.'"¹

The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. knew the agony of praying, "your kingdom come...":

"During the Montgomery Bus Boycott there were many threats against King's life. Early one morning, after being awakened by a threatening call, he was unable to fall back asleep. Discouraged and exhausted, he climbed out of bed, shuffled into the kitchen, and made himself a cup of coffee. He began thinking of how he could remove himself from leadership in the boycott without appearing to be a coward. He sat down at the kitchen table, staring at his cup of coffee. He folded his hands and prayed. 'I am here taking a stand for what I believe is right. But now I am afraid. The people are looking to me for leadership, and if I stand before them without strength and courage, they too, will falter. I am at the end of my powers. I have nothing left. I've come to the point where I can't face it alone.'"²

Dr. King continues:

"At that moment I experienced the presence of the Divine as I had never experienced [God] before. It seemed as though I could hear quiet assurance of an inner voice saying, 'Stand up for righteousness, stand up for truth, and God will be at your side forever.'"

Thy kingdom come...

King's prayer was answered quickly... *"Almost at once,"* he writes, *"my fears began to go. My uncertainty disappeared. I was ready to face anything."*

...ask, wait, listen, and receive...

In a Toronto Star newspaper article entitled "The Radical Truth Behind the Lord's Prayer," the author writes:

¹ William Willamon, *Pulpit Resource* July-September 2001, pg. 38.

² Dr. King, "Stride Toward Freedom," *Lectionary Homiletics*, July 2001, pg. 34.

“To pray the words from the Lord’s prayer, “Your kingdom come,” is to invite God to have [God’s] way in our lives. It’s inviting God to clean house and take up residence within us. To pray “Your kingdom come” is to recognize that our ways, and the ways of the world, are not God’s ways. And this is something made clear in scripture.”³

The Lord’s Prayer is found two times in the gospels... in Luke, as we heard today, and within the Sermon on the Mount as told by Matthew. Depending upon the translation, the prayer has around 60 words with five petitions in Luke’s version and six petitions in Matthew version. Jesus prays in his Jewish tradition with petitions that draw from the Jewish/Aramaic prayer known as the Kaddish. In Hebrew, Kaddish means means “sanctification” or “holy.” Included in the prayer are the words:

“May his Kingship be established in your lifetime and in your days, and in the lifetime of the entire household of Israel, swiftly and in the near future; and say, Amen. May [God’s] great name be blessed, forever and ever.”⁴

The prayer also draws from the Eighteen Benedictions of the Jewish tradition,

*Blessed are You, O LORD, who desires repentance.
Forgive us, our Father, for we have erred, pardon us, our King, for we have intentionally sinned,
for You pardon and forgive.*

The Talmud, a collection of writings about Jewish religious law and theology historically thought to be a guide for the daily life of Jews includes a prayer petition that reads:

“...lead me not into error, nor into iniquity, nor into temptation, nor into disgrace.”

In other Hebrew scriptures you will find the petition, *“Give us this day our daily bread.”⁵* Sound familiar?

What Jesus is essentially doing, is distilling a wide range of prayer elements from the Jewish tradition into one prayer of six petitions.

There are many ways to pray. The formula is simple: ask, wait, listen, receive. The answers may not always be what we want. Sometimes when waiting and listening, all we hear is silence... and that is a response. Once we have prayed our petitions, once the words have been uttered aloud or in our hearts... it is far too easy to move on and out of prayer. The blessings of prayer are truly received with patient, listening hearts. In the Lord’s Prayer, we have a structured form that weaves together the riches of our larger tradition. When Jesus’ disciples asked that he teach them to pray, he offered the foundations of a prayer we say in worship every Sunday. The invitation to prayer is, always:

“Knock, and the door will be opened.”

³ Ron Csillag, “The Radical Truth Behind the Lord’s Prayer,” *The Toronto Star*, February 23, 2008.
https://www.thestar.com/life/the-radical-truth-behind-the-lords-prayer/article_c7ca778f-e567-52ff-9be3-b6019d348032.html#:~:text=The%20best%2Dknown%20invocation%20in,fixed%2C%20statutory%2C%20public%20prayer.

⁴ <https://bethabrahammemorialchapel.com/kaddish-prayer/>

⁵ Op.cit. Csillag.

For a multitude of generations before any of us was born, the Lord's Prayer has been faithfully prayed. The prayer moves us beyond our individual needs and wants. It asks us to consider where we have sinned and gone astray... to remember that the poor and hungry need bread... and to remember that we all need the sustenance that only God can offer. We cannot be Christian alone. In praying the Lord's Prayer together, we join with the whole communion of saints who have prayed the prayer in the past, are praying it at this very moment, and will pray it in times to come.

Jesus used the Aramaic word "abba" for father... which is less like the formal address for a parent... and more like the intimate term "daddy." Heaven is as close as a heartbeat. The prayer invites us into closer relationship with our creator and with one another. It calls us to step beyond the smallness of our existence... as the reign of God... the dream of God... is set before us... inviting us to give ourselves gladly to the hallowed project...

For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are God's, now and forever...

Amen...