

“How We Pray”

May 2, 2021

Are We There Yet Series – 5th Sunday of Easter

Holy Communion

In-person & Livestream

This litany is comprised of five versions of the Lord’s Prayer:

Matthew 6 (NIV)

Matthew 6 (MSG)

A paraphrase by Sarah Dylan Breuer

An Aboriginal version

A Modern version (used in our Celebration Worship)

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
Our Father in heaven,
Reveal who you are.
Loving Creator,
we honor you,
and we honor all that you have made.
You are Our Father, you live in heaven
We talk to you, Father, you are good
Heavenly Father,
holy and blessed is your true Name.

¹⁰ your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Set the world right;
Do what’s best— as above, so below.
Renew the whole world
in the image of your love.
We believe your Word, Father
We pray for your reign of peace to come.
We pray that your will be done.
Let heaven and earth become one.

¹¹ Give us today our daily bread.
Keep us alive with three square meals.

Give us what we need for today,
and a hunger to see the whole world fed.
We're your children, give us bread today
Give us this day the bread we need.
Give it to those who have none.

¹² And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.
Keep us forgiven with you and forgiving others.
Strengthen us for what lies ahead;
heal us from the hurts of the past;
We have done wrong, we are sorry
Help us, Father, not to sin again
Others have done wrong to us
And we are sorry for them, Father, today
Let forgiveness flow like a river between us
from each one, to each one to each one.

¹³ And lead us not into temptation,^[a]
but deliver us from the evil one.^[b]
Keep us safe from ourselves and the Devil.
give us courage to follow your call in this moment.
Stop us from doing wrong, Father
Save us all from the evil one
Lead us to holy innocence,
beyond the evil of our days,
Come swiftly, Father, Come.

Yours is the Kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever.
You're in charge! You can do anything you want!
You're ablaze in beauty! Yes. Yes. Yes.
For your love is the only power,
the only home, the only honor we need,
in this world and in the world to come.
You are Our Father, you live in heaven
We talk to you, Father, you are good
For Yours is the Power
and the Mercy
and the Glory.

Forever Your Name is All in One.
Amen.

I hope that litany was a blessing to you - and a challenge. The Lord's Prayer doesn't get old, but it can become too familiar. It's good to hear different versions - translations and paraphrases - to open our hearts because it can become something we say - rote repetition - rather than something we pray. I was reminded that we can easily rush through this prayer instead of pacing it more slowly and reflecting more closely on the phrases. It's not the only prayer we pray, but it is the only specific prayer Jesus teaches.

When did you learn about prayer? Maybe it was the lesson to fold your hands, bow your head, and close your eyes - giving God your attention. **SHOW SLIDE:** Marilyn (hands together)

When did you commit this prayer to memory? I can't answer for myself, but I do remember when I realized that our daughter, Ana, knew the words.

She was with me a lot when I would visit homebound friends. She was just a toddler (3 or 4 years old) and very verbal. One day, after I had served Communion to a woman in her home, we prayed together, as was the usual way. When we started to pray the Lord's Prayer, I heard not just our two voices, but three voices! Ana was saying the words with us! She had heard it enough that she recognized it and could recite the words.

It was a lesson to me that kids really do listen to what we say (so we need to be mindful of that!). And it also reminded me that we learn to pray - or at least we learn from hearing others pray. We know people who are "really good pray-ers." All of us can pray and are called to pray, but we also learn about prayer by listening. I don't know that Jesus is offering specific words to be used, but he's inviting his followers to pray simply and purposefully.

As we continue to ask *Are we there yet?* when it comes to what Jesus teaches, we might think of prayer as a part of maintenance of our vehicle or the way we plug in and stay connected if we're charging an electric vehicle. Prayer is a vital part of the journey of life lived in Jesus' way. He takes time to teach his followers about prayer.

So far in this after-Easter journey with Jesus, we've explored "oddly upside-down blessings" in the Beatitudes that sound much different than what the world seems to value. We've heard the impact of salt and light - the power of small acts of love and kindness that build the Kingdom of God. We've focused on the hard words of Jesus that call us to examine our motivations and our connections to one another.

And that call continues as Jesus moves to prayer, but there's a change in his tone. He's been talking about being righteous before God in how we behave toward one another – it's important to let others see your good works, he says, so that they might praise God, too.

But wait, make sure you're not doing this stuff so that you'll get praise from others. It's what God sees that matters. Someone put it this way: "The refreshing and liberating fact is that God is not much concerned with how you pray; God is more interested in what you pray about and what your attitude is while you pray." This seems to flow from what Jesus just addressed - not just our actions, but our motivations and intentions. Yes, this is a model prayer, and a reminder of how we love God and love one another in a community. **SHOW SLIDE:** Rose (hand cross)

Last Wednesday, a small group gathered in our sanctuary to lift up prayers for ourselves, our congregation, our community, our country, and our world. Every time we're here, I realize the power of naming the prayers of our hearts - of sharing with each other what we want to share with God.

That happens when we participate in our Prayer Chain, and there are many times when prayer is what we can offer when people are in pain or when people rejoice. We might think it's insignificant, but ask anyone who has been on the receiving end of prayer, and you'll hear grateful hearts for the blessing of knowing that people care and that people went to God on our behalf.

The same is true when we offer prayers at our Prayer Vigil. Reading through written prayers is a reminder of the blessing that we don't shoulder the burdens alone. We can "take it to the Lord in prayer," as the song says. Prayer doesn't solve a problem or offer an automatic fix, but it does offer comfort, peace, and sometimes even conviction.

The prayer Jesus teaches might have shocked those who first heard it. It wasn't that prayer itself was anything new - faithful Jews prayed faithfully in all kinds of ways – prayers of praise, lament, blessing. It was how Jesus prayed that was so different - and new.

Jesus offered this prayer at a time when the Roman Empire dominated. People of faith faced persecution under Rome's reign, and it was important and urgent to claim God's Kingdom - God's rule and order – even above those who were in power. Those who followed Jesus are called to think differently and act differently from the rest of the world. We're called to pray differently than those who are seeking acclaim and attention for themselves. We need not be loud and showy or extra wordy. Volume and length do nothing for us. Prayer is a reminder of our dependence on God - and our need for sincerity and humility when we pray.

Even in the first phrase - *Our Father* - Jesus claims God as Father of all, which might have drawn a gasp. Jesus is claiming his authority and inviting to see ourselves differently in relationship to God and to each other. We are God's children, called to follow. Jesus prays for God's name to be hallowed, God's will to be done, and God's kingdom to come—and for strength to carry out the commands Jesus gave earlier on in the sermon, even to forgive rather than being vengeful. This is really the Disciples' Prayer - not so much a formula - but a way of understanding prayer and connection to God and each other. This is so much about *how we pray* rather than *what we pray*.

When we pray Jesus' model prayer, it goes beyond God and me. One person says that it's really a community empowerment prayer about being in relationship with God and each other. Jesus teaches us to honor God (11:2b) and yearn for God's reign (11:2c). Right now we can only imagine our world to be covered by God's peace.

We're called to rely on God's daily providence (11:3). How many of us struggle with just having what we need – not what we want? Give us enough for today.

We're called to seek God's forgiveness (11:4a) and forgive others (11:4b). There are times I wish Jesus would've stopped at "forgive us" and didn't add the part about forgiving others. I can ask for forgiveness, but the call to forgive is hard. Sometimes that phrase even gets caught in my throat in those moments when I'm struggling with forgiving others.

We're called to trust God's protection (11:4c) – help us to avoid temptation and evil. This is about how we live together with God, how we pray and seek God's will, and how we're transformed through prayer. We can't do this alone. Temptation is there all the time. The power of evil, and we have to resist it with God help.

A 17th century rabbi explained (prayer) this way: If you watch a man out on a boat grab a rope and pull his boat to shore you might think, if you were confused about weight and motion, that he was really pulling the shore to his boat. People have much the same confusion about spiritual weight and motion: In prayer, some believe that you are pulling God closer to you. But in fact, the heartfelt prayer pulls you closer to God.

SHOW SLIDE: Ron & Vicki (holding hands)

Henri Nouwen says, "When we are connected with God and God alone then we discover that the God of our prayer is the God of our neighbor. Therefore: The closer we come to God, the closer we come to each other." What a powerful word for us!

As Jesus teaches and offers tools for our spiritual lives, he was offering something new - something different - and something challenging. Living as a citizen of the Kingdom of God isn't simply being given a new name, but a new way of embracing the world and seeking to transform it to be more like God desires it to be. Thy Kingdom

come...It's possible when we pray - talking and listening to God - and allowing God to work with us and through us.

So we come to the table, we confess our sins in prayer because we know we don't come without the need for forgiveness. This meal is simple, yet powerful because it reminds us of God's grace that invites us to pray and be connected. So we pray as we come to the table of grace...