

**A Prayer of Relationship; Luke 11:1-13, Philipians 4:6-7; Pentecost 7/Prop 12**

**Second Presbyterian Church**

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**Theme: Jesus teaches us to pray so that we can have a deeper and more meaningful relationship with God.**

**Scripture:**

11[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.’ <sup>2</sup>[Jesus] said to them, ‘When you pray, say:

Father, hallowed be your name.

Your kingdom come.

<sup>3</sup>Give us each day our daily bread.

<sup>4</sup>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 [Jesus] 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; <sup>6</sup>for a friend of mine has arrived, and I have nothing to set before him.” <sup>7</sup>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.” <sup>8</sup>I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, 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. <sup>10</sup>For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. <sup>11</sup>Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for a fish, will give a snake instead of a fish? <sup>12</sup>Or if the child asks for an egg, will give a scorpion? <sup>13</sup>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!’

**Sermon:**

When I was young, say maybe junior high, I decided I would pray the Lord’s Prayer as soon as I got into bed and turned out the light. I would pray the Lord’s Prayer first, before I got started on all the things I needed to request from God. I started, “Our Father, who art in heaven...”; but, one of two things almost always happened. First and most of the time I fell asleep before I got to the end. (What I

wouldn't give for those days again!). Or, I would say the words from rote memory not really focusing on what I was saying. I would quickly realize I was saying words but not really meaning them, then make myself go back to the beginning and try to mean what I was saying, then I would fall asleep before I got to the end.

The next morning I would wake and try to determine just how far I got in this fairly short prayer. Suffice it to say, I had a pretty weak prayer life.

I really had no earthly idea how to pray or what prayer meant.

In today's passage from Luke, we find Jesus in prayer. Actually, Jesus is a wonderful example of a healthy prayer life. He often prays, and his prayer life is mentioned numerous times in Scripture, including possibly his most discussed prayer by theologians which came from the cross, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" quoted in both Matthew and Mark, but the words were originally found in Psalm 22. (Matthew 27:46, Mark 15:34, Psalm 22:1)

In today's passage, when Jesus is finished praying, "one of [his] disciples...went to Jesus and said to him, 'Teach us to pray.' The implication here is that prayer can and probably must be learned."<sup>1</sup> No one ever taught me how to pray in all my 12 years at private Christian school or during my formative Christian years in my Presbyterian church. Who knows if I prayed "the right way" when I was young, or if I pray "the right way" today? One thing is pretty certain, that rote Lord's Prayer didn't open up much of a conversation between me and God.

I would say that trying to determine the "right way" to pray shouldn't be the important thing to consider about prayer. I want to consider this question: "What does it mean to ask Jesus to teach us to pray?"<sup>2</sup> What did the disciples really want to know? What do we want to know about prayer? "Why do we pray," I believe will lead us to answer the question "how do we pray?"

I believe Jesus' teaching boils down to one central idea: our relationship with God.

Why do we pray to God? Because we want to have a relationship with God.

This relational aspect of prayer is made known in the first word of Jesus' teaching of the prayer, Father. If you don't like the word father, substitute mother, parent, friend, Good Shepherd; all these names should indicate an experience of relational intimacy. Jesus invites us to use that term because of God's desire to be in relationship with us. In fact, using the word "father" is a radical and political departure from the terms demanded by the Roman Empire for their leaders. These human leaders considered themselves gods and demanded obeisance and

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<sup>1</sup> Stephen Farris "Luke 11:1-13.—Commentary 2: Connection the Reading with the World," 196-197 in *Connections: A Lectionary Commentary for Preaching and Worship, Year B, Volume 3, Season After Pentecost*, eds, Joel B. Green, et al (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2019), 196.

<sup>2</sup> Farris, 196.

submission, never relationship. In contrast, God desperately wants to be in intimate relationship with us, and it is this relationship that makes our prayers possible.<sup>3</sup>

As the prayer moves on, “before [it] turns to our petitions, it focuses outward, toward God: ‘hallowed be your name...your kingdom come.’”<sup>4</sup> By recognizing God’s holiness, we remember that although we are in relationship with God, we are not God. God demands our respect and is above all humans and all human things. This recognition of God as holy reminds us of the greatest commandment from Deuteronomy, *The LORD is our God, the LORD alone. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might* (6:4-5). It is respect, due not just to God, but to all in which we have relationship.

Next comes the petitions we bring to our Holy God, prayers for bread, forgiveness, and deliverance; petitions to One we trust as relational. Scholars interpret these petitions differently. One could say that prayers for bread could represent all those things we need, with “daily bread” being those things we need for today. When asking “forgive us our sins” (v 4), we are reminded “that prayer for forgiveness require[s] that we forgive [others]...Forgiveness must flow both from God and toward others, or it cannot flow at all.”<sup>5</sup> Finally, we pray for deliverance. This ask can be the sticky wicket. Matthew’s version says, “do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one” (Matt 6:13). This ask seems much more subjective than the other two, but recognizes that we need God’s mercy and protection.<sup>6</sup> It is a way of recognizing our own weaknesses and fallibility. *We cannot do this on our own. We need you Holy On, our relationship.*

In Philippians, Paul reminds us not to be anxious about anything, *but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God* (Phil. 4:6). Paul’s words speak to persistence, which is addressed by Luke right after Jesus teaches his disciples to pray. But there is always the age, old statement: *But, I prayed and prayed and prayed to God, and God did not answer my prayer. My loved one died anyway.*

When we are in relationship with God and persistent in prayer, how do we wrestle with our feelings that God has not answered our prayers like we wanted?

First, I would say to let God know how you feel. If we’re honest with ourselves and have a true relationship with God, we can share all our emotions with God, both good and bad. God can handle our anger, our questions, and our

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<sup>3</sup> R. Alan Culpepper, “Luke 11:1-13—Commentary 1: Connecting the Reading with Scripture/Commentary,” 194-196, in *Connections: A Lectionary Commentary for Preaching and Worship*, Year B, Volume 3, Season After Pentecost, eds. Joel B. Green, et al (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2019), 195.

<sup>4</sup> Culpepper, 195.

<sup>5</sup> Culpepper, 195.

<sup>6</sup> Culpepper, 195.

frustrations because God loves us unconditionally. God will walk with us in all of our hurt, frustration, and pain. This is what a relational God does and sometimes that relational God shows up as a dear friend at our doorstep. *Trust me*, says God.

Secondly, when we deal with our prayer frustrations, remember we are not God. “There is no guarantee in Luke that we will get what we ask for.”<sup>7</sup> When addressing this very issue, Jesus says at the end of Luke’s account for today, *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 God* (v. 13). God may not give us what we ask for, but God will give us the Holy Spirit to be with us. Stephen Farris, an emeritus professor at the Vancouver School of Theology, says it this way: We do not always get what we ask for, even in loving, generous spirited, nonshopping list prayers. We may not even always sense the presence of the Holy Spirit. There are ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’ moments. The ultimate gift of prayer [from our relational God] is, in the end, the Holy Spirit, God’s [very] own presence.” We are given this gift because God knows what we need before we even ask, and we can trust our God with whom we have our very being to know our needs.

What does it mean to ask Jesus to teach us to pray? Why do we even pray? I believe we pray because we want to have a deeper relationship with the One who loves us and desperately seeks our relationship. How do we pray? We pour out our hearts honestly, trusting in the One who wants to give us everything and who is even willing to give us God’s own self.

Thanks be to our Father, Mother, Parent, friend, God. Amen.

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<sup>7</sup> Farris, 197.