

# *“Praying with Confidence”*

Sunday, July 24, 2016

Ninth Sunday after Pentecost

 (Luke 11:1-13, NRSV)

This is the Word of God for the people of God.

*Thanks be to God.*

[2<sup>nd</sup> Service: *Affirmation of Faith*]

[MESSAGE]

I suspect that each one of us has a different experience of our life in the church when we were children.

If you are one of those who “*grew up in the church,*” then you may have some memory of how your parents and Sunday school teachers first began to develop habits of prayer in you.

Growing up as a Roman Catholic, the very first prayer we learned was the simple Sign of the Cross: “*In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*”

We used this prayer as the beginning and the ending of all other prayer and worship activity.

We also learned: “*Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost. As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen*”

Lifelong Methodists will recognize that as the “*Gloria Patri*”, a part of our traditional liturgy since John Wesley’s time.

There are all sorts of prayers that we learn as we grow and participate more and more in church.

Certainly, one of the most familiar is “*The Lord’s Prayer,*” which we hear about in today’s reading from Luke’s gospel.

Jesus gave this prayer to us when the disciples said, “*Lord, teach us to pray.*”

You see, learning to pray at any age is helped by having a model that shows you how to pray.

That’s what those little prayers we learned as children are for – to give us a starting point.

## **How do you pray?**

Why should we be confident to pray?

To whom do you pray?

For what do you pray?

In school we learned four reasons to pray:

- to praise God;
- to thank God;
- to ask God's pardon;
- to ask God for what I needed, or even wanted

***So, as we encounter God's Word this morning,***

***let us pray***...Father, we come to you this morning seeking a deeper understanding of what it means to pray with confidence as children of God. Teach us to pray in ways that strengthen our relationship with you and help us to depend on you. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

This gospel story is more than just a re-telling of a special moment in Jesus' prayer life.

It is more than a story of how we got "***The Lord's Prayer.***"

It is more than Jesus teaching the disciples how to pray.

This story is another example of how prayer was integrated into Jesus' life all the time.

Luke's gospel points to Jesus' prayer life in several settings:

- Jesus “*withdrew to deserted places to pray.*” (5:16)
- “*He went out to the mountain to pray*” and “*he spent the night in prayer to God.*” (6:12 and 9:18)
- Jesus prayed before he chose his apostles. (6:13-16)
- He prayed when he fed the 5,000. (9:16)
- He prayed the night before he died. (22:39-44)
- He even prayed from the cross. (23:34, 46)

**Prayer was woven into the fabric of his life.**

What Jesus offers in this lesson is a model for how we might construct our own prayers.

It is a lesson important to the disciples that has remained important to the life of the church for two thousand years.

Jesus gives us specific words to address God, words to praise God, and, *only then*, words to petition God.

These specific words establish a pattern that we can then use anytime, in any context, as we develop and pray our personal conversations with God.

Jesus began: *“When you pray, say: ‘Father, hallowed by thy name; your kingdom come...’”*

The first thing we notice is how intimate this greeting is.

There is no plural possessive **“our”** in front of **“Father”**.

This is personal, between me and the God who created me.

Jesus says we are to approach God as “Abba” – a word that conveys a close, personal relationship.

Much has been written about this single word that invites us to think of God as one who considers each of us as part of the family.

This one word indicates that we are as dear to God as any child can be to a father.

To people whose existence is fragile, both then and now, this reminds us that there is one who cares

for us and is near to us in the midst of every circumstance.

Next, Jesus calls on God to be God:

- *“Hallowed be your name”*
- *“Your Kingdom Come”*

In these two phrases we proclaim that God alone is holy and blessed and “in charge”.

We acknowledge and submit to God’s authority.

Further, we proclaim that the Kingdom of God is the only solution to bringing peace and justice to this world.

By proclaiming these truths, we offer God the praise due him and we acknowledge that only God has power to make these things happen.

So, first we greet God as father, and then we praise him for his power and turn over everything in this world to his authority.

Only now do we get to the part where we can ask for what we need.

It is important that we see that these petitions involve three basic needs:

- **Food**; (*“Give us each day our daily bread.”*)

Here we are asking for basic sustenance, not overabundance. This is a reminder of the manna God sent to the Israelites wandering in the desert. God told the people only to gather what they needed for that day’s survival; do not try to store up extra – “just in case”. Those who took too much found that it spoiled. God wanted the people to rely on him for what they needed. He wants the same commitment from us. This part of the prayer is about letting go of the control we think we have over our lives and letting God truly be in charge. We ask God to be the source of all that we need every day.

- **Forgiveness**; (*“And forgive us our sins, for we forgive everyone indebted to us.”*)

God’s forgiveness is a release from our sins. It is *not* a release from our **accountability** for what we’ve done and our need to make amends to those we’ve hurt. God’s forgiveness is about giving us

the strength and power to **be accountable**. God's forgiveness serves as motivation for us to recognize our need to forgive those who have hurt us. Maybe that is why we think of forgiveness in terms of it being for our benefit more than for the ones we forgive. The other person may not care whether we forgive them or not, but when we forgive we are released from the anger and disappointment we feel.

- **Fidelity**; (*“And do not bring us to the time of trial.”*)

**“The time of trial”** that Jesus talks about is not *“temptation.”* That implies an enticement to do evil and, of course, God would never think of bringing us toward temptation; God wants to help us avoid the things that tempt us to sin. This “time of trial” represents circumstances that seek to test the core of our faith. Within the context of the original audience for the gospel, this is the threat of persecution where your life is threatened unless you renounce your faith. The same sorts of persecutions exist today in many different forms; things that threaten to destroy the core of what we believe.

This is a prayer for faithfulness from God; that God will strengthen us and stand by us when the worst comes to steal away our faith.

These three petitions represent the gifts of the Kingdom.

They are the essentials of life for us as individuals and as a community.

They are the essence of our relationship with God because they flow from the very being of God, who sustains, forgives, and is faithful to us.

Jesus ends his prayer session with a parable that offers some advice about persistence.

The parable speaks to the ancient belief in hospitality.

The word “persistence” might better be translated here as “shameless.”

The man in the parable is shameless when he asks his neighbor for help in the middle of the night.

The neighbor may be grumpy at first for the intrusion, but he will eventually get and up and

help the guy out because of their shared cultural expectation of hospitality.

So Jesus suggests that we should be bold when we approach God and shamelessly call on God to be God, as expected.

Jesus then goes on to give us the famous “*ask, seek, knock*” passage.

We are tempted by tradition to hear this passage as “ask and keep asking,” and so forth – again hinting at “persistence”.

Imagine, however, if Jesus is inviting us to trust God – ask, seek, and knock, confident that God will respond.

Could it be that “*persistence*” here is better understood as “*shameless trust*” in God?

Of course you wouldn’t give a snake or a scorpion to a child asking for food.

“See then,” Jesus suggests, can’t we trust that God will do the same for his children and give them all they need?

I want us to go back to the beginning for just a moment.

We've talked about how to pray, what we might say, and how to ask.

But, Jesus seems to focus on **WHO** –

*To whom do we pray?*

This story seems to be less about the mechanics of prayer and more about an invitation.

Jesus invites us into an intimate, personal relationship with God; the kind of relationship Jesus enjoys.

Prayer offers us “the opportunity to approach the God whose name is too holy to speak and whose countenance is too terrible to behold with a familiarity, boldness, and trust of a young child running to her parents for both provision and protection.” (David Lose)

Prayer isn't about getting stuff from God; it's about the relationship we have with God.

There are plenty of Scriptures that tell us God knows what we need without us asking.

But, Jesus invites us here to speak directly to God anyway; God is father, provider, and protector. He invites us to make known our needs, our fears, our hurts, and the deepest desires of our hearts. We speak these things to God with the confidence that whatever may happen, this relationship is strong enough to bear hearing them.

When we face bad things in this world we can be confident that God does not cause bad things to happen to us; it is not God's will for us to suffer. There are many powers at work in the world to cause suffering.

Our relationship with God also gives us the confidence to know that, no matter what, God will stand beside us and hold us up so that we can get through to the other side.

**So, pray with confidence.**

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**