

The Lord's Prayer: A Description of Love - Luke 11:1-13

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A Sermon by
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At the outset, let me suggest several things about the Lord's Prayer.

First, by praying the Lord's Prayer we are being made into a people whose life together is a sign to the world that God has not abandoned the world and left it to its own devices.

Second, by praying the Lord's Prayer we are affirming to the world that God is present with us as a people on the move.

Third, by praying this prayer we are declaring that we are a people moving out from our old ways and means, that we are ordinary people who have been given the extraordinary authority to be part of the divine assault upon the realm of evil which is all around us.

And, make no mistake about it, we do live in a realm of evil, a realm which is potentially dangerous to us who are on the Christian journey, therefore, we need to pray this prayer.

Why?

Because the prayer Jesus teaches us names the dangers we face in life and also provides us the help, the necessary skills, we

need for negotiating the dangers we encounter on our faith journey.

Christianity means conflict, never forget that the one who teaches us this prayer is the crucified one.

When we pray Our Lord's prayer let us be mindful of the fact that this prayer comes to us from God in Christ. It comes to us from the one who has intruded among us in a spectacularly mysterious and peculiarly wonderful way.

In praying the Lord's Prayer, we Christians are continually confronted by the mystery of God in Jesus the Christ. This mystery, God among us as Jesus, is not something that comes naturally. God becoming a human being doesn't "make sense" in the ways the world teaches us to make sense.

So this prayer comes to us out of a wonderful mystery, a mystery based upon the life, death, and resurrection of God in Jesus the Christ.

Another thing we must clarify as we think about this prayer has to do with how one becomes a Christian.

As much as we try to convince ourselves that we, on our own, decide to become Christians the truth is we don't decide to become Christians and then find that the Lord's Prayer is a helpful means of expressing our faith.

We don't choose to become Christians and neither do we

choose this prayer.

The truth is, God in Christ chooses us, and this prayer is chosen for us and taught to us by the one who chooses us.

This prayer, like God in Christ, reaches out to us, forms us, invites us into the adventure called discipleship.

Being Christian is a result of having been initiated (baptized) into a group of people (church) who are shaped by mysterious practices like Christian prayer and communion. To be a Christian is to submit one's life to a trustworthy authority, namely Jesus Christ, who teaches us rightly to pray.

When Jesus' disciples asked him about prayer, in today's gospel, Jesus told them:

“When you pray, say:

Father, hallowed be your name.

Your kingdom come.

Give us each day our daily bread.

And forgive us our sins,

for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us.

And do not bring us to the time of trial.”

Then he told about a poor man who kept pestering his neighbor at midnight, beating on his door until he got out of bed

and gave him the bread he needed (Lk 11:5-13). To me, this is Jesus way of telling us that we ought to be similarly persistent in our effort to pray.

Note the very first word Jesus instructs us to use in prayer. “When you pray, say, ‘Father...’”

With that one word “Father,” we learn that our lives are bent toward a parenting God in a way which makes us children of God.

As we repeat and repeat this prayer we are reminded again and again of the mysterious reality that God is our parenting Father and we are God’s daughters and sons. We are reminded that this prayer is not our idea; but is taught to us by God in Christ.

God is fully aware that the world can be a dangerous place for us. Need we remind ourselves that our world is always assaulting us with other accounts of reality, always offering up other prayers to other gods? This, the Lord’s Prayer, is essential for survival as a child of God in this world.

“Lord, teach us to pray... “ Teach us. When Jesus teaches he teaches us, a community of disciples.

When as a community we join our voices in this prayer, we are reminding each other that being a Christian is too tough to do alone. We are admitting that we would never have known how to

pray as Christians had not God in Christ reached out to us and taught us. This prayer identifies who we are.

Being persistent in praying the Lord's Prayer, allowing it to become second nature to us, takes time, habit. We pray out of habit.

Habit is good.

Most of the really important things we do in life, we do out of habit. We eat, sleep, we love, shake hands, hug our children out of habit. Some things in life are too important to be left up to chance. So we do them "out of habit."

I'm sure you have noticed how in church we generally do the same things over and over again, week after week, telling the same stories and singing the same songs. Habit.

Some complain that this makes church boring.

While I don't defend boredom, I do say that habits are important, particularly in a faith that is so against our natural inclinations, a faith that is so at odds with many of the deeply ingrained and widely held assumptions of this culture.

We therefore must do things out of habit as Christians because it is so difficult for us to pay attention to God in a society that offers us so many distractions. The habit of praying this prayer is one way we remind ourselves of who we are and whose we are amid the distractions of this world.

In teaching us Jesus has not left us to our own devices in our relationship to God and to each other. We need not flail around, trying to think up something to say to God. All we have to do is say, “Father...” and instantly we know whose we are and who we are. We are God’s we are God’s family.

Another thing. Note that this is the **Lord's** prayer. Lord is a possessive.

This prayer is our Lord’s.

He owns it.

It belongs to him.

We, who are accustomed to thinking of prayer as a good strategy for getting what we want, an appropriate opening for football games and important civic meetings, may be surprised that we must be *taught* to pray.

This prayer is not for getting what we want but rather for bending our wants toward what our parenting God wants.

This is our Lord's Prayer which means that this prayer, unlike some other modes of prayer, is distinctively related to the one who teaches us to pray.

This prayer is the enactment of the story of a parenting God who called a people into existence through Jesus.

In praying this prayer we become the people God has called us to be in Jesus.

“Lord, teach us to pray ...” Didn’t the disciples know how to pray? The notion of having to be taught to pray may sound odd.

I believe it is supposed to sound odd, especially in a society that teaches and worships individual autonomy, unbridled freedom, and detachment, a culture that teaches us to live so that we are determined by no tradition, that we are accountable to nothing outside the self.

In such a culture, we get confused into thinking that it is possible to pray by ourselves, on our own.

It is possible to pray falsely. There is always someone willing to teach us, form us. We may be "taught" by a capitalist community, a communist community, a socialist community, a religious cult community, a political party community rather than the Christian community, but make no mistake about it, we are and will be taught.

Most of us have been taught that every thing, including religion, is something that we ought to choose for ourselves.

Choosing for ourselves is a value so widely held in our society, so firmly sanctioned by the economic order and the society, that choosing for ourselves seems natural, innate.

But, we did not choose to believe that personal choice is the highest human virtue. Rather, we were taught to believe that

nothing is important in life other than that which we have personally chosen. The irony is that the belief that nothing is important in life other than that which we have chosen is a belief that we have not personally chosen! The supermarket, shopping center, TV, radio, magazines and newspapers have been our school.

We have been taught to believe that we should never tell anyone what they should or should not choose. After all are not all choices equal? You simply choose whatever best suits your lifestyle.

Yet to learn to pray Jesus' prayer means we believe we are being made righteous, worthy members of God's kingdom. In praying this prayer together, we testify to God, and anyone else who will listen, how God has dealt with us. He has dealt with us as a saving parent.

Salvation is not some individual achievement, not the result of some flash of personal insight, not the securing of life's sense of meaning, although all of that may happen in the process of praying this prayer.

Salvation is the delightful surprise of having our little life caught up in the purposes of God for the whole world.

Salvation is having our life bent toward God when all we thought we were doing was memorizing a little prayer.

Salvation is having the courage to tell the world what has happened to us now that God in Christ has intruded among us.

The Lord's Prayer is a lifelong act of bending our lives toward God's way. This prayer says: "thy kingdom come." We have built our kingdoms all over the world and the wreckage is all around us.

Matthew, in his gospel, adds to this prayer the phrase, "thy will be done." There are quite enough programs out there teaching us the various ways we can achieve our will in this world.

But as we pray together the Lord's Prayer it is God's kingdom, God's rule, God's reign, God's will we are bending our lives toward. Our lives are caught up in the larger purposes of our parenting, saving God as we pray this prayer. May the Lord continue to teach us to pray as we sing together hymn 589, "Our Father, Which Art in Heaven."