

PRAYER

A sermon by Rev. Peggy Luckman
 Zoar Lutheran Church, Canby, Oregon
 July 27. 2025

Prayer referred to 375 times in the Gospels.

Text: Luke 11: 1-13

When I was a child my parents taught me to pray. It was a simple translation of a prayer introduced first in the late 1700's. I remember my mother tucking me in and listening to the prayer she had taught me as I spoke these words:

Now I lay me down to sleep. I pray the Lord my soul to keep. If I should die before I wake I pray the Lord my soul to take. God bless Mommy, Daddy, Fritzie, Phyllis, Paul and Carl. Amen.

A couple of lines in that prayer didn't seem to bother me as a child. As an adult, "*If I should die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take*" is somewhat unnerving. I like the alternate "*Thy love guide me through the night and wake me with the morning light.*"

I imagine, when this prayer was introduced in the 1700's, death was much more a possibility for the little children. Most of us, most of the time, do not have to fear death of our children thanks to medical knowledge now available to us.

When I was a little girl praying before my Mom I was blessed to be learning to pray. I was learning that God can be trusted and I can ask God to bless my family.

Another prayer we used daily was the prayer at mealtime. Most days we took turns thanking God for our food and asking God to bless it. When we had relatives come, we all prayed together. Sitting around the table, joining hands, we prayed in unison *Come Lord Jesus, be our Guest, and let this food to us be blessed. Amen.*

To this day I can still feel the preciousness of those moments of prayer together.

Dad sometimes prayed "*Bless this food to our use, and us to thy service, In Jesus' name. Amen*" moving our thoughts beyond the meal before us and into an awareness of the Christian's call to service.

Sometimes we are led deeper into our faith practices by the little children around us. When visiting with my son and his wonderful family we would sing *Johnny Appleseed* as our grace: Precious little Aaron - somewhere around 2 years of age ended our grace in a most special way: Let me demonstrate. Sing it with me:

Oh the Lord is good to me, and so I thank the Lord for giving me the things I need, the sun and the rain and the appleseed, the Lord is good to me. Amen. Amen, amen, amen...Amen. Aaron: throwing his hands up: "YEA!" It only took a couple of times of Aaron doing this for us all to add this joyful praise to the end of our grace song.

The church was also a place where the importance of prayer was taught by example as we blessed food at potlucks, said prayers in Sunday School, and in worship, and as kids, sat through what seemed the never-ending Pastoral Prayer. We all prayed the Lord's Prayer at the conclusion of this prayer. I think that all too often I prayed that prayer less in a spirit of true worship but more as a relief that the long prayer was over.

We will come back to the Lord's Prayer in a few minutes.

Let's first look briefly at the second half of today's scripture. Jesus tells the story of someone in need. Someone's need ignored, someone pleading, and eventually a need filled. For me the power in the story is in the implicit permission of Jesus for us to pray, and pray and pray as much as we need to pray. We can pray to break down the doors of heaven if we need to to ask honestly for what we believe we need. This was the prayer I prayed at the birth and death of my first daughter.

People have struggled through the ages with the question of what to do with what is perceived as "the unanswered prayer." Some say "God knows what is best and we need to trust that," Others say no answer is God saying "Wait." I believe there is truth in those answers sometimes, but sometimes there just isn't a comforting answer. Sometimes the pain goes too deep for words. The Apostle Paul says in the eighth chapter of Romans. *Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words.*

As my baby Catherine was being born, I prayed for her to live. I begged God to help her live. But she did not. Several weeks later, still struggling deeply with the pain of that loss, I called my pastor. I asked for help. He sent me to Psalm 22. and honestly, what I found there made me wonder what he was thinking to recommend it to me. It seemed to reinforce my depression.

The Psalm opens with these words: *My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from my cries of anguish? My God, I cry out by day but you do not answer. by night I find no rest...I am poured out like water and all my bones are out of joint. My heart has turned to wax, it is melted within me. But you, O Lord, do not be far from me. You are my strength; come quickly to help me.*

And then farther on: *I will declare your name to my people in the assembly. I will praise you. You who fear the Lord, Praise him! For he has not despised or scorned the suffering of the afflicted one; he has not hidden his face from him but listened to his cry for help.*

The Psalm continues on and paints the big picture of future generations that will worship God. Through the words of the Psalm the Spirit reached down and lifted me up.

I have taken this little side trip away from today's scripture readings to encourage you to remember that so many of the Psalms are amazing prayers, resources in our times of need, celebrations for our times of joy.

Now let's return to the Lord's Prayer. I am sure many of you have studied Luther's Catechism and have heard much of what I am about to share. If that is so, may the following be an invitation to reflect again on the beauty of this prayer and the power contained within it.

We begin with *Our Father* - Not my Father, but in this context, as a group of people praying together, we recognize with the first word that our relationship with God is intertwined with our relationship with each other.

Father - in the Aramaic that Jesus spoke, the word Father here is more accurately translated "Daddy" acknowledging that trusting, intimate relationship of child to parent. Many of our denominations have moved to Our Father, Our Mother in an effort to be sensitive to the people who had awful relationships with their earthly fathers. Some say "Creator" - in hopes that it will be more inviting to a young Christian to explore the love of God in their lives without roadblocks. What Jesus conveyed in his choice of word in Arabic was the parent, who is ever-loving, ever-nurturing, like a daddy of full, intimate, healthy relationship with his children.

Who art in heaven -wherever God is: up there, out there, or in Celtic terms, in everything that is - everywhere as close as the breath we breathe and yet beyond us - in that which is eternal in life and afterlife as we know and believe it to be,

Hallowed - holy, revered most awesome. *Is your name*. For centuries, in Judaism, the name of God, particularly the Tetra-gram-maton (YHWH), is considered too sacred for human beings to say. Instead, during prayers Jews often use terms like "Adonai" (meaning "My Lord") or "HaShem" (meaning "The Name") in everyday conversation to refer to God. The Tetragrammaton is the four-letter Hebrew-language name of God in much of the Hebrew Bible. The name is thought to come from a verb that means 'to be', 'to exist', 'to cause to become', or 'to come to pass'.

Names are powerful. When I say a name, someone comes to mind. When I say the name Pastor Michelle doesn't something of the essence of who she is come into your awareness? As a child, I started collecting signatures. when Grandmother sent me a card, I cut her name out. Same with friends, aunts, uncles. I have continued this from childhood, and have a wonderful collection of signatures from people I have loved throughout my life. I recently sorted them by how they were in my life - family, friends, different church, communities. I love those signatures, because when I look at them something of that person's essence lifts into my awareness. So it is when God's name is spoken -whether in Hebrew as Adonai, HaShem, Creator, God. Because God is so holy, we speak with reverence, with gratitude, with thanksgiving, with awe.

Thy kingdom come I know of the big push to change this to kin-dom. For me, there is something about a kingdom with Christ the King, a glorious reality where Love is in all and through all, where justice, mercy and kindness are pillars of the reality that God's will continually is unfolding. For me, within that kingdom, there is kin-don, and if changing the word has helped us as God's people come to see the Kingdom more clearly than that change can serve us well. But let us never forget the One who is in all, through all, and over all. Knowing that lifts up the wonder of his love for us.

Thy will be done We have only to look to Jesus to know what the will of God is. When we pray these words, the power of the Holy Spirit prays with us, filling us with the desire to do the will of God.

On earth, as it is in heaven. - here- there- everywhere.in a transforming world that it might become more just, peaceful, caring, loving, filled with hope and joy

Give us this day our daily bread - nor more than we need, but enough for today. For Luther this means food, shelter, a job, daily needs for life. I believe it is a prayer for not just bread made from the grain of the earth. but daily bread - the fulfillment of our daily needs and nourishment for our souls from the One who is the Bread of Life.

And forgive us. For we so often fail to do what we ought, and break relationship with God and others through our thoughts and actions And we do what we should not, forgetting our purpose as the people of God.

Forgive us as we forgive - Luther believed we could not be forgiven by God if we did not forgive. I don't believe that. I believe God forgives us. But we cannot know the depths of that gift if we do not forgive. When we restore relationships, when we find it in our hearts to be forgiving people, we understand more fully God's forgiveness for us.

Lead us not into temptation - keep us strong when temptation comes. We do this by keeping our hearts and minds on Christ so that we honor God in all we think and do.

Deliver us from evil - both personal evil acted upon us or that which we may act upon another, and systemic evil, so present in our nation and in all the world today. The worst example of systemic evil that I have heard of is the shooting of children and parents who are standing in line for food in Gaza. That is incomprehensible to me. That is an action born of systemic evil.

For me this line also is a prayer for release from despair that I am prone to feel about the evil that is all around us today. Deliver us from evil is a prayer that we be granted the gift of sustaining hope when we lean toward despair.

And finally the Doxology - added to the prayer Jesus taught and first mentioned in the Didache written the end of the first or early in the second century.

What could be a more glorious end to a sermon than the Doxology found at the end of the Lord's prayer?

*"Thine is the kingdom, and the power,
and the glory, forever and ever.*

