

9<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost  
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Prayer is part and parcel of the Christian life of faith. It's something that we are called do day in and day out each and every week. Sometimes we do it alone, sometimes we do it in small groups, every Sunday we gather here and we pray. For some prayer is the only way to start the day, for others it's something that occurs at all kinds of different times throughout the day. For others it's something that happens not nearly enough. But without fail, every Sunday the Christian community gathers together to pray in the midst of worship and without fail we use the words that Jesus himself taught us, words which we hear in the Gospel this morning.

It comes as no surprise that Jesus teaches his disciples about prayer. All throughout the Gospel of Luke prayer plays a very visible and important role in the life of Jesus. In Luke Jesus is in prayer before nearly every major turning point in his ministry. Jesus is in prayer before calling the 12 disciples, he is in prayer before Peter confesses Jesus as the Messiah. Jesus is in prayer before the Transfiguration and before his betrayal in Gethsemane. Even as he is on the Cross, Jesus is in prayer. Finally we find Jesus at prayer as he is at table with the disciples just before they found Jesus to be present in bread and wine. Prayer is radically important in the Gospel of Luke, it is radically important in Jesus' ministry, and it should be important in our lives as well.

Prayer is important because it brings us back to core truths. Core truths about ourselves and core truths about God. In prayer we stop in the midst of our lives and we listen, and we become aware of the presence of God. In this awareness we are transformed, we see the world through new eyes, we see our lives through new eyes. As finite humans we need prayer; prayer enables us to see life as it is. In prayer God opens us to the reality of the world.

When the disciples ask Jesus to teach them to pray Jesus does not sit them down and give them a large and eloquent prayer. The *Our Father* in Luke is a mere 38 words. Jesus does not tell them the right and the wrong way to be present to God, what Jesus *does* is teach them a simple prayer. Jesus teaches them a prayer that reminds them about the basic realities of God and life.

The words of Luke's prayer differ some from the Lord's Prayer we say on Sundays. The rest of our version can be found in Matthew and the closing doxology (for thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory) comes from an ancient Greek text. That said, it's hard to miss the similarity between this prayer and what we say each and every Sunday.

Each Sunday we say the Lord's Prayer. Time and again I find myself saying this prayer without thinking, it's simply something we do. But as I've thought through the words of this prayer, as I've examined my own life and the teachings of the Church it has been hard for me to deny the incredible power and deep wisdom that this Prayer offers day in and day out. So, what exactly is Jesus teaching us about God and ourselves in this prayer?

*"Our father, who art in heaven"*

The use of Father for God is not a reference to God's gender, rather it is a reference to the relational and loving reality of God. God being our father points to the fact that God is the one who provides for us, the one on whom we depend, the one who loves us deeply and closely. Just using of the Aramaic word "*abba*"—"daddy" points to a deep closeness and love with God. Thus through Jesus speaking of God as father we can understand that God is deeply relational and loving.

*"hallowed be thy name"*

When we speak of God's name being hallowed we are talking about the holiness of God. Holiness is being set apart from everyday life, being utterly other, being exalted and worthy of our devotion, love, and life. God is not part and parcel of the brokenness of the human world. And thus we can see that while God is close and personal just as a loving and intimate father, so is God set apart, and deeply differentiated from us in our human condition.

*"thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven".*

God has a plan for this world. Just as the heavenly realm incarnates the beautiful realities of God. Just as the heavenly realm is a place where suffering, pain and death are no more, so too shall God's kingdom on earth be. God has a plan for the mending of our world, a plan in which all that is broken is brought to wholeness, a plan in which all that is wrong shall be made right. A plan which was brought into being in Jesus Christ himself and a plan which we as Christians are called to enact through all that we do, say, and believe.

*"Give us this day our daily bread"*

At the same time that this prayer teaches us about the nature of God it also teaches us about ourselves. In this prayer we clearly see that we are dependant on God. Just as we need our human parents as infants so too do we need God for all of our lives even for things as basic as our daily nourishment. All that we have, all that we need, comes from God. In these simple yet profound words Jesus calls us to realize that God truly does provide for us. God knows of our daily, physical needs. Each time we sit down to a meal the fact is a prayer IS being answered, God is providing that which we need for life, for sustenance, and for service.

It is also instructive to note that Jesus doesn't have us pray for tomorrow's bread but instead for today's bread. Our culture is convinced that planning and preparation are an absolute necessity for human life. If we plan and work hard we will have provided that which we need for the future. At least that's what we try to tell ourselves, but falling stock markets, and all the other chances and changes of life remind us that in reality we are not in control of our future. The Our Father reminds us that as created beings we are dependant on God. As such the Christian hope is that what we need will be provided by God, not by our worry. As Jesus says elsewhere, "do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today." (Matt 6:34 NRSV)

*"forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us"*. Jesus dramatically reminds us of the human need for forgiveness; forgiveness for ourselves and forgiveness for others. As humans we are reminded that we make mistakes, we fall short of the goal which God's kingdom calls us to. Sometimes these mistakes are made consciously and sometimes they are made unconsciously. No matter what the case, as Christians we are people who realize that at all times we stand in need of grace—grace from God and grace from one another. Thus we hear in these words that forgiveness for our sins is something that is radically connected with our ability to forgive others. Forgiveness is a two way street, it is a way of life, not simply something that happens after the confession on Sundays.

*"And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil"*

Finally Jesus teaches us that as humans, yes even as well-off American citizens, we are deeply in need of protection. On our own we are not capable of being safe no mater what we do, no mater what our plans. As created beings we are incredibly dependant on each other and upon God. And thus we are reminded that it is God who keeps us safe in the midst of all the dangers of this life, it is God who walks with us through the trials and tribulations of life and it is only through God's grace and love that we remain safe.

This prayer, which we say each and every Sunday, contains deep and powerful reminders of who we are and of who God is. These reminders are life changing if we listen to them, if we open our hearts and minds to them. Through prayer, and specifically through this prayer, God often works to transform the way we live and the way we see. Through prayer God draws us back to the reality of human life, a reality that is based on love but also upon dependency, a reality that is based on forgiveness and forgiving; a reality that is based upon a deep relational love as between a caring father and a child.

As we pray the Lord's Prayer today let us all listen to what God is saying to us through these powerful words and may we be drawn ever deeper into the presence of God who is always calling us into a deep and life-giving relationship.