

Sermon for 7-28-19
Gospel -- Luke 11:1-13
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Prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, teach us. Teach us to live, teach us to love, teach us to pray. Open our minds and hearts and souls to receive the precious truths of your eternal wisdom. Amen.

"Lord, teach us to pray."ⁱ It's a simple request from a student to his teacher. And Jesus responds with words that many of us know by heart:

*"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."ⁱⁱ*

OK, maybe we *think* we know it by heart; and maybe the version we know is a little bit different from the one here in Luke's Gospel... but to tell you the truth, I don't think Jesus cares which version we pray. I don't think it matters!

That may sound shocking and even scandalous to anyone who's convinced that "their" version is "THE right" version -- whether traditional or contemporary language, Catholic or Protestant, King James or NRSV or *The Message*, whatever. I don't care. Arguing over these details of word choice and phrasing and translation while there are people in the world who don't know how much God loves them seems like the silliest kind of Christian navel-gazing.

Here at Christ Church, we use the "traditional" version from the Book of Common Prayer: "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done..." At my previous parish, we used the "contemporary" version: "Your kingdom come, your will

be done..." That's the version we taught (my son) Jesse. And when I learned the Lord's Prayer growing up in our super-progressive church in Raleigh, NC, I was taught to pray: "Our Father and Mother, who art in Heaven..." I still stick "and Mother" in sometimes, but I do it quietly so as not to alarm anyone.

But folks, whatever language we use, it's the same prayer. It's the Lord's own prayer, the one he taught his disciples when they asked for his guidance. And with this prayer, this precious gift straight from the mouth of Jesus, the stakes are way higher than just 'using the proper version.'

The real danger that comes with praying the Lord's Prayer every Sunday (and often far more frequently) is **domestication**. When the words become so familiar that we can recite them without thinking, we lose the essence of the prayer. We feel no impact. We smile and think "Well, that sounds lovely" but we don't engage with the words of the prayer and actively imagine the theological values it illustrates.

When we say the Lord's Prayer without thinking about what it means, we've taken something lively and vibrant and challenging and even a bit wild, and domesticated it. We've made it our soft, friendly little prayer pet -- and we miss out on so much substance.

Turns out, the Lord's Prayer isn't quite as simple and soft as we tend to think.

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The first two lines -- in Luke's version: "Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come." It's all about God, God's holiness, God's intent for the world. Think how many of our prayers begin with a self-focus. God, help me. God, forgive me. God, comfort me. Or, if we're especially compassionate, help my friend/neighbor/family member. Our tendency is to operate out of self-regard, and regard for those closest to us. Jesus begins his prayer by

putting the focus back where it should be, on the One who is Source of All Being.

And friends, "Thy kingdom come" isn't just a nice idea. **Thy** kingdom come, **thy** will be done -- we're praying that God's reign, God's intent, God's dream for all Creation might be realized. God's intent for us -- our highest possibilities, our noblest activities, the blessed shalom of the "Peaceable Kingdom" which the prophet Isaiah described so beautifully: "They shall not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea."ⁱⁱⁱ

When we say "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven," we are asking God to transform all the brokenness and imperfections of this world; and, let's be honest, most of that brokenness is of our own creation. We humans enact all the dominance and abuse and exploitation and violence and supremacy on display in this world... it's not God.

So in this prayer, we're asking God to wipe all that away, to sanctify our world, to bring heaven to earth -- which means no more human privilege, no more human power, no more human authority, only God over and above all. No extra blessings for me and mine, because all are equal in God's sight. Am I really ready for that?

The next part of the prayer, the bulk of it, is three requests for God. First: "Give us each day our daily bread."^{iv} I like bread; I'm a big fan of carbs in general. But what is my daily bread? It's that which I need for physical nourishment to survive. And I don't know about you, but my refrigerator and kitchen cabinets currently hold a lot more than just the bare necessities for survival. There's dark chocolate, and fancy flavored coffee, and cashew milk, and diet soda, and expensive protein bars... and so much more. In this country, we throw away \$165 billion worth of food annually^v; while people in Yemen and Haiti and Sierra Leone die every day for lack of their daily bread.

Food scientists say that we could produce adequate food to feed every person on earth today, but we'd have to change our lifestyles radically. We'd have to eat less meat; we'd have to give up many of the extras and luxury items we enjoy so much; we'd have to adapt our agricultural techniques; we'd have to eat more locally... the list goes on.

And yet, we pray "Give us each day our daily bread," and so do millions of other Christians all across the planet. Are we really ready for that?

The final two requests in the Lord's Prayer are pretty straightforward -- "forgive us our sins"^{vi} and "do not bring us to the time of trial."^{vii} We all want to be forgiven for the many wrongs we've done, and thanks be to God, Jesus took care of that! He's got that one covered. We have to accept the forgiveness -- but that's another sermon for another time. And we don't want to face intense trials or temptations that would threaten our lives and our relationship with God. But in between those two requests is a real kicker: "... for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us."^{viii}

That's a high bar, folks. God, forgive us for all that we've done to hurt you, just like we forgive everyone who has ever hurt us. Do any of you feel like you've gotten this one right, you have completely forgiven every person who has ever betrayed you or insulted you or done you wrong? I haven't. People who've hurt me deeply over the years -- especially the ones who never apologized or showed any remorse... I haven't forgiven them. I've tried to talk myself into it, to make myself forgive them, but I'm not even sure I know how.

And yet, time and again, I pray, "God, forgive me my trespasses, as I forgive those who trespass against me."

I am **so thankful** for the mercy of Jesus Christ. Aren't you?

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You've all heard the phrase, "Fake it 'til you make it." Let's change that around a bit and let it be our motto for the Lord's Prayer: **Pray it 'til you mean it.**

We may not be ready, we may not be sure, we may not even be able to imagine what the world would look like if these words became reality... but we love our Savior, and we trust in our Lord, so we will pray it 'til we mean it. We will take a deep breath, and pray again the words he taught us -- whatever version we like! -- saying:

Our Father & Mother in heaven, hallowed be your name....

Amen.

ⁱ Luke 11:1 *NRSV*

ⁱⁱ Luke 11:2-4

ⁱⁱⁱ Isaiah 11:9

^{iv} Luke 11:3

^v <https://www.marketwatch.com/story/this-is-why-americans-throw-out-165-billion-in-food-every-year-2016-07-22>

^{vi} Luke 11:4

^{vii} Luke 11:4

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