

Year C

7 Pentecost, Proper 12

Luke 11:1-13

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

Today's gospel shows us the origin of the Lord's Prayer, which is something we've said so many times we probably take it for granted. Let's take a look at this passage a little more closely, and think about prayer.

Prayer, as we see again and again, is an integral part of Jesus's life. He goes away by himself many times to pray, most famously perhaps for 40 days in the wilderness, and in the garden of Gethsemane. His disciples know that prayer is important to what Jesus is doing, so they want Jesus to teach them how they should pray. Also, they want to be praying in a way that distinguishes them as Jesus's disciples. John taught his disciples to pray in his way, Jesus's disciples want to follow Jesus's way. Jesus's focus for them is how to pray, and what to pray for.

To begin with, Jesus tells them that they may call God "Father." We have had this way of addressing God for centuries now, and so we also take this for granted. We even push back against it sometimes, trying for an ungendered deity. But Jesus calls God Father because he is The Son. In calling the disciples his brothers and sisters, he is sort of adopting them into the family, so they can call God Father, too. In Jewish tradition it wasn't unheard of to refer to God as Father, but it wasn't common. This intimate, familial way of talking to God would be different for the disciples; instead of a distant The Lord your God, they can talk to Daddy. This intimacy is reflected in the grammar, too, although it's lost in the modern translation. Jesus uses the familiar form of address in his prayer—the "thou" form. Because we don't use this in common speech anymore, we've forgotten that the "thee and thou" form is the **intimate** form of address in English. It is NOT the formal address, it's the equivalent of "tu" in French, or "du" in German. It's the form of address you use with family and close friends. That's why we use thee and thou when we speak to God. We're not being formal, we're family—we're being intimate.

Then, notice Jesus **starts** with praise: hallowed be your name—God's name is holy. Although we're blessed to be able to be intimate with Daddy, at the same time, praise **is** the appropriate posture when coming

before the creator of the universe. Then Jesus asks God to be who God is: to bring the justice and mercy of God's kingdom into being. Then, only after the praise does he begin to petition—asking for what's needed. Saying “give us each day our daily bread” is a metaphor, of course; we don't mean only bread, but all of the nourishment we need to survive. Notice, that Jesus isn't asking for more than that. Like the Israelites with manna in the wilderness, he's only asking for what is needed for that day. He and the disciples lived that out, too—remember Jesus says they are not to carry food or money, but to depend upon God, and the charity of the community for their “daily bread.”

Then Jesus asks for forgiveness of sins, “for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us.” This emphasis on forgiveness was also something especially particular to Jesus. Remember how many times he tells people that their sins are forgiven, and then they are healed of whatever ails them. Sin was an affliction, and being able to be forgiven, and to be right with God was a healing blessing. In addition, when we say “forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.” We are asking God to forgive us in the same way that we forgive others. That implies that we **will** forgive others. If we don't forgive others, we don't expect God to forgive us, either. When we pray this together later this morning, think about what we're saying. Do you really want God to forgive you *as you forgive others*? Is there someone whom you need to forgive?

The translations “Do not bring us to the time of trial,” sounds better than “lead us not into temptation,” doesn't it? The idea of God leading us into something that might trip us up sort of flies in the face of who God is. But here Jesus is asking God not to give us more trials than we can bear. The implication here is that is a *given*; God will always give us what we need.

Then Jesus reinforces this idea of God's goodness and sufficiency with a crazy story. And his hearers would have known this for an absolutely crazy story, of something that would never happen. In this culture that prized **interdependence** and hospitality, no one would behave the way the sleepy father behaves here, refusing to get up and give bread to his neighbor. We see that God is never like this—God would never

refuse to help. This story is **not** about being persistent with God—it's designed to underscore how ridiculous the idea is that God wouldn't help.

Then Jesus reinforces this idea **again** with another example. If we, who are flawed human beings, “know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy spirit to those who ask him!”

In practice, prayer can be a tricky thing, though, can't it? Sometimes we pray for things, and we just don't get them. Or we get something very different—or it seems that God isn't listening. In this passage Jesus says God is **always** listening. With that in mind, I offer you Anne Lamott, who says she has two basic prayers that cover everything, “thank you, thank you, thank you!” and “help me, help me, help me!” If we thank God for our blessings, and ask for help with our troubles, we will get a response to our prayers. And always “thy will be done.” It's the prayer that is always answered.

Praying with people is something that I often was asked to do in my work at the hospital. Sometimes I was asked to pray for things that gave me pause, like asking for a miraculous healing. It's not that God isn't capable of the healing, but that this request was usually made when the patient was almost at the end of their life. One night I was praying with a woman whose husband was slipping away from us. Together we prayed for a miracle, and I then went home for the night. When I saw this woman early the next morning her husband had just died, and she reminded me that we had prayed for a miracle the night before. “I bet you think God didn't answer that prayer, don't you?” she asked. “What do you think?” I asked her. “God did answer that prayer,” she said. “The miracle was that he made it okay for me to let him go.”

Amen

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