

Sermon for mid-week Lent 1: Prayer

Scripture Reading: Luke 11:1-13

Now Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when he finished, one of his disciples said to him, “Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.” **2** And he said to them, “When you pray, say:

“Father, hallowed be your name.

Your kingdom come.

3 Give us each day our daily bread,^[b]

4 and forgive us our sins,

for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us.

And lead us not into temptation.”

5 And he said to them, “Which of you who has a friend will go to him at midnight and say to him, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves, **6** for a friend of mine has arrived on a journey, and I have nothing to set before him’; **7** and he will answer from within, ‘Do not bother me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed. I cannot get up and give you anything’? **8** I tell you, though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his impudence^[c] he will rise and give him whatever he needs. **9** And I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. **10** For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. **11** What father among you, if his son asks for^[d] a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; **12** or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? **13** If you then, who are evil, 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!”

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Dr. Karl could pray like nobody’s business. I would sit in awe as the man would pray to God so effortlessly, and with such good words. Karl would ask for things that I hadn’t even imagined were possible to pray for. Not because they were so extraordinary, that I wouldn’t have thought about them, but rather because they were so incredibly ordinary that I simply overlooked them and took them for granted. And yet Karl thought of them as coming from the hand of God, and therefore should be acknowledged as such. And he was right, of course.

Our pastor had started a men's morning prayer breakfast at a local restaurant in Holland, Michigan, where I was living at the time. I was still working for the cable company, and Chris and I had been married for three or four years at that point. I had only been a Lutheran for about a year and a half.

Very few things will get me out of bed at 6:30 in the morning. But going out for breakfast is one of those things. I was also trying to be more intentional about being a Christian, and so going to a prayer breakfast seemed like a good idea. I had been invited to attend by a friend I had met in the congregation. Over the years I would learn a lot from my friend Norm. In fact I would credit him as being the single greatest contributing factor to why I'm standing here now.

The idea of the breakfast was to start with about 10 or 15 minutes of chit-chat and then we would read a passage or two from the Bible and have a discussion. Then we would have a time for prayer where each person at the table would pray aloud. That prayer might be long or short, personal or for the nation or someone. Everyone had their own style.

It was somewhat awkward at first. Pastor would start and finish, and we would go around the table. It got easier as we went along, but it wasn't long before we all began to notice how well Dr. Karl could pray. I recall one day that I arrived a little bit late and all the seats were taken except the seat to the left of Dr. Karl. So I sat down. I remember thinking that it was a privilege to sit next to him as he was someone that I looked up to and admired. Tom usually sat in this chair and usually sat to the left of the pastor across from Norman. I'm a man of habit, and here I was sitting on the wrong side of the table and next to Dr. Karl. I found myself feeling a little disoriented. So it did not immediately dawn on me that at prayer time, I would have to follow Karl. But it had occurred to Tom. And when the light finally turned on in my head, I looked over at Tom, who laughed, because he knew what I was thinking... You moved so that you would not have to pray after Dr. Karl. It was funny and when Pastor wanted to know what we were laughing about, I spilled the beans.

I didn't want to make Dr. Karl self-conscious, because we found his prayer style somewhat intimidating. That it was truly a compliment, because I wish I could pray half as well. And at that point, everyone began to compliment Karl, which I think genuinely surprised him. I think we might have embarrassed him a little. But he took it well. By way of explanation, he shared that he had learned to pray that way from listening to his father.

Looking back at that answer, it occurred to me that my father was also very good at saying prayers. My father would always lead prayers before and after the family meals. For some reason, I never learned to pray like my father. He was a fine example of a devout Christian, but he didn't really teach us how to be like that, except by example.

Here in our Lesson we see Jesus' disciples craving for more than just his example. They want to learn to pray in the manner and style that Jesus prayed. They wanted to be taught. To be told. To have it laid out for them.

Jesus gives them a blueprint for a prayer life in the prayer that he taught us.

I struggle to remember my father's table prayer that he used for Sunday dinner. I recall the rhythm of it. And As I recall it I can almost hear the sound of his voice. I can't imitate it, but it went something like this. "Our Father in heaven, we come unto you at this noon hour on this Sabbath day, asking your blessing upon this meal that we are about to eat. Bless this food unto our bodies and pardon our sins. We ask this in Jesus' name, amen."

There is a rhythm to the Lord's prayer too. I'm afraid that rhythm is a little faster in my head, than in yours; I apologize for that and I will try to slow it down, when I think about it. But it's not the rhythm, it's the words we need to be aware of.

I am grateful to the sainted Dr. Brauer who was my worship instructor at Concordia Seminary, for teaching his students how to pray a simple collect in 5 steps.

1. You begin with a name of God, Just as Jesus did... in this case, Our Father who art in heaven. But depending on what you are asking for in the request, you may wish to use one of the other many names and titles for our God, addressing God, according to the Trinity, as Father or as Son, or even to the Holy Spirit. As Lord, or Eternal or Almighty, as the Vine or the Living Water or the Light of Life, or Incarnate Word. So many names we could use. Let me offer this one as I construct a sample collect for someone who is worried about a test or a trial they are facing... **"Great Deliverer"**

2. Next we might lay out a basis for our request, based on what God has done or is like, that indicates why we are confident when we make our request. Often we might refer to an example from the Bible. **"As you led your people through the wilderness into the promised land, providing for the needs of their bodies and souls..."**

3. The request, or petition: **"Lead your servant also, as he must navigate the path you have laid in front of him, that he too may know the assurance of your divine care and protection."**

4. The benefit or result of the expected answer to the petition, such as **"so that he may continue to serve you in your kingdom here on earth and bear witness to your grace and generosity."**

5. The **Amen**, giving credit to the one true God and great deliverer from all sin, even Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen. Meaning, let it be so. And placing the entirety of the prayer in the will of God.

And so we are BOLD to pray, as Jesus taught us to be.

In fact this has influenced my prayers when in the midst of those who are facing hard times here on earth to use this form of a collect in conjunction with what Jesus teaches us here....

Our Lord God, the divine Jesus Christ, we pray to you this day out of our fear of this difficult circumstance. Although we know, as your people, we should not be afraid.

Because no matter what becomes of us in this world we will be with you in the new world to come. We know you have taught us saying, "Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion?" Even so, God our father, this situation we are in looks bad. It looks like snakes, or spiders or scorpions. And we are afraid. Afraid of the pain, and the outcome, the potential for things to go wrong and not the way we desire them to go. You yourself know the reality of the fears we suffer in this sinful and fallen world. You yourself on the night you were betrayed prayed earnestly to your father to take the cup away. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with us in our weakness but has understood what it means for us. But you are our father, and we know that if our earthly fathers know how to give good gifts to their children, how much more will you, our heavenly father, give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

We ask you to help us and send your Spirit to us as we pray to comfort us, just as you were comforted in the garden. We trust in your name to protect us and we submit to your will as did the Lord. In the same way, hear us and answer us in our time of distress, in Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

What a gift we have in prayer, that we can call boldly on the Grace of God. Amen.