



Massanutten

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

As Our Lord Taught
A Sermon Preached by Ann Pettit

July 25, 2010
Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year C)

Luke 11:1-13

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He was praying in a certain place, and after he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples." He said to them, "When you pray, say: 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." And he said to them, "Suppose one of you has a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; for a friend of mine has arrived, and I have nothing to set before him.' And he answers from within, 'Do not bother me; the door has already been locked, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.' I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, at least because of his persistence he will get up and give him whatever he needs. "So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for a fish, will give a snake instead of a fish? Or if the child asks for an egg, will give a scorpion? 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!"

This is the word of the Lord: **Thanks be to God!**

If I were to ask you when you first learned the Lord's Prayer – what would you say? When you were a child in Sunday School? While standing with your parents during worship? Or maybe it was during the ritual of bedtime prayers? As I was thinking about this over the last several days, I realized – I can't answer that question. I have no memory of being taught the prayer; and I don't remember a time when the words weren't familiar. Maybe this would be your answer as well.

Regardless of when we might have learned it, the Lord's Prayer is one of the pieces of our faith experience that becomes a part of who we are over time. Here at Massanutten – and in many congregations – there is a place for it in our worship each week. The words come to us easily and often comfortingly. This sacred prayer doesn't change amidst the chaos that life can become at times.

The ways in which this prayer becomes part of us over the years can be a meaningful point of connection when other things no longer carry that power. It has been humbling to witness the familiar prayer take shape on the lips of those whose ability to carry on a conversation, form thoughts or respond to questions, has slipped away. The deep roots that were formed through years of praying in worship and private create a meaningful bridge as we prayed them together.

At the same time, familiarity can have its drawbacks. We can become so familiar with something that the meaning and power of it is lost. Martin Luther had a rich and vibrant prayer life with the Lord's Prayer having a central place in both his praying and teaching. But he also recognized that the prayer could be misused. He wrote, *'The Lord's Prayer... is the greatest martyr on earth. For everybody grieves it and abuses it, and few cheer and gladden it by rightly using it.'* Luther knew the meaning behind Jesus' words in this prayer, and sought to guard them through careful use.

Jesus is teaching us in this passage – but He does more than teach us **a prayer**; Jesus teaches us **to pray**. He does this using the familiar words we have come to know as The Lord's Prayer while taking us further with stories that open us to a prayerful and faithful response to the life God has given us.

When my children were very small, we, as all parents do, tried to teach them good manners. We encouraged them to say 'please,' and 'thank-you,' and for the most part – when they're not at home anyway – they do pretty well. During those formative years, however, there were a few teachable moments that stand apart. One in particular took place early one morning around the kitchen table, as we were getting breakfast ready. Patrick and I were getting each of the children what was needed, when Brigid, our youngest said, in a somewhat demanding tone, *'gimme some darn toast, dad.'* She was only about two or so at the time – so it was, of course, heartbreakingly cute. That being said,

we corrected her because we didn't want to encourage such a demanding approach when she was asking for things.

When we think about our approach to God in prayer, demanding is probably not the way we'd want it to be described. And yet, as we read this passage, the words Jesus chooses are direct; to the point; and to our ears, a bit demanding:

Give...

Forgive...

Do not bring...

There's no soft-pedaling; no *'if it be your will, Lord,'* or *'we most humbly ask.'* There is only a flat out request for the help of the Lord in various circumstances. Jesus teaches us to come boldly to God in prayer.

While throughout Scripture we are exhorted to bring the prayers of our hearts to God, Jesus reminds us that whenever we pray, we enter an experience that is much bigger than we can know or reflect with our words. When we pray *'your kingdom come,'* we are asking for the power of God to interrupt what is familiar and comfortable, challenging what we've come to accept as normal. For the disciples under the rule of King Herod, praying for the coming of God's kingdom carried a message of rebellion.

These words seek not only what we need for ourselves, but what is needed for a world in which the kingdom of God is recognized and sought after; it's a prayer that says, *"All is not right with the world and we are called to be venues through which God makes things right."* Jesus teaches us to pray with conviction about what is right – and what is not.

Jesus also told a story to help the disciples understand the importance of what he was teaching. In the parable, a man has some unexpected company arrive, and much to his dismay, he has nothing to offer them. This was a significant lapse in hospitality (even more, it appears, than waking your neighbors and friends from a sound sleep). Although the neighbors are friends, Jesus tells us that the friendship is not what will get the neighbor out of bed to help his friend – but persistence will.

How does Jesus teach us to pray? Persistently. Persistently and with an expectation that everything is riding on what we're asking of our God. But there's more. In this parable, the word translated *persistence* also means *shameless*. Because of the friend's shameless calls for help, the neighbor will get out of bed and give them what they need. This is not the most flattering characteristic by which to be identified. It implies a lack of self-respect and willingness to do just about anything to get what we want or need. And yet, this is *Jesus'* story. He holds up the example of a shameless friend who will go to great lengths in order to offer his guest hospitality. Jesus teaches us to pray in a way such as this.

But what does this mean for us who are left to pray for ourselves, each other and a world in which we see infinite needs and our own meekness in the midst of them?

Ultimately, Jesus is telling us that our prayers need to be undergirded by a conviction that what we're praying for is worth it. We pray for the coming of God's kingdom because we believe that the ways of God should be our ways as well. We pray for our daily bread because we believe that everyone should have enough food to sustain them in a healthy way. We pray for forgiveness to be given and received because nobody should have to live without grace. We pray for the well being of all God's children because peace, in the various ways it takes shape in our lives, is the right thing to seek.

We pray for all these things with conviction and a willingness to put ourselves out there – seeking after what is right, *shamelessly*. Jesus calls us to prayer that is an act of the heart, but also of the hands and feet; a conviction that shows itself in the way we live our lives.

In a few moments we'll have the joyous worship experience of offering the sacrament of baptism to Tyler. We join his family in making the commitment to support his entry and growth into the life and faith of the church. It's a powerful moment of acknowledging what God has already done in claiming Tyler as His own. It's powerful in what it asks of us: we're his family of faith; we have a responsibility to provide opportunities for him, and for all our children to discover the joy of God's kingdom.

It's also powerful in what it claims: Tyler belongs to God; in God Tyler finds his home; his rest; his peace. But this is a radical claim on Tyler's life, because this is what defines him amidst all the other things to which he may belong in his life: a ball team, a marching band, a scouting den - even a family. And so this prayer: *'that God's kingdom come'* becomes his prayer as well, and he joins us in being venues through which God makes this happen because he belongs to God.

Jesus teaches us to pray, and so we continue to pray the Lord's prayer in the shape that is familiar to us in our tradition, and we also pray in the manner Jesus taught: with conviction; with boldness; with everything we've got... Let us pray,

O God, make our prayers as earnest and full as are the longings in our lives for your way to be our way and your kingdom to come.

Through Christ we pray, Amen.