

“Teach us to Pray”
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Hickory Neck Episcopal Church
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Luke 11:1-13

Jesus is praying in a certain place. The disciples come up and see him. They see how intent he is, how he prays with his whole self. They’ve seen him pray before, and they realize that they don’t know how to do what he’s doing. When Jesus finishes, one of the disciples gathers up his courage and says, “Lord, teach us to pray.”

Now if I had been that disciple, I doubt that I could have put it so succinctly, Lord teach us to pray. I probably would have said something more like, “Lord, I’ve been trying to pray like you, but I’m not sure how. I’m worried that if I don’t pray the right way, then God might not hear me or answer me. It seems like I must not be doing it right, because my prayer doesn’t seem to bring me peace and courage like yours does. My mind gets distracted, and sometimes I even fall asleep. Jesus, do you think God still loves me, even if I’m not very good at praying?”

If we discussed my prayer life further, it would probably come out that I think about praying and worry about praying and read books about praying more than I actually pray. I don’t know about all of you, but I often feel very insecure about my prayers. Sometimes I wonder - if I can’t do it right, is there any point in doing it at all? I long to be able to hang out in that clump of disciples and say, Lord teach me how to pray.

But the disciple said, Lord, teach US how to pray. And Jesus did. He didn't give that particular disciple a personal prayer that he could say by himself. Instead he gave the disciples a prayer for their community. He gave them a model prayer, a pattern for praying. He gave them a prayer that would come to define his community of followers.

He said to them, "When you pray say,
Father, hallowed be your name."

When you pray, know that you are in relationship with God, God who is both as close to us as a parent is to a child and who is also the great Creator of the universe, deserving of praise. Our wondrous God who is both a mystery too great for us to comprehend and also is as close as our own heartbeat. The image of parent may not be helpful to everyone, for our parents are human and imperfect like us, and we have to be careful not to project the images of our parents onto God, but we *can* think of God as being like the perfect parent who loves us unconditionally, who gives to us abundantly, who shares our every joy and every pain. The relationship is the important thing, whatever image helps us to express that relationship and hallow it.

When you pray, say,
Your kingdom come.

When you pray, pray for the kingdom of God to come. Do you ever think about what that really means? For me, the Lord's prayer has often just been something I say on Sunday morning as part of the service. I know the words

so well that I don't even have to engage my brain to say them. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. In her book *Teaching a Stone to Talk*, Annie Dillard writes, "On the whole, I do not find Christians, outside of the catacombs, sufficiently sensible of conditions. Does anyone have the foggiest idea what sort of power we so blithely invoke? It is madness to wear ladies' straw hats and velvet hats to church; we should all be wearing crash helmets. Ushers should issue life preservers and signal flares; they should lash us to our pews. For the sleeping god may wake someday and take offense, or the waking god may draw us out to where we can never return."

Your kingdom come.

If we really think about what we're saying, it's a bit frightening. What if God's kingdom came right now? Are we ready for that? I'm guessing I wouldn't be headed home after church for lunch and a nap. When we pray for God's kingdom to come, we are praying for the world to be transformed, for the last to be first and the first, last, for the poor, the hungry, the sorrowful and the oppressed to be blessed, for the powers of this world to be turned upside down so that God's power may reign. Pray for this kingdom to come, but don't forget your crash helmets.

When you pray, say,

Give us each day our daily bread.

When you pray, pray every day and even for your most basic needs. You don't have to wait until you're sick or someone has died. We need God for everything, from the very sandwich we may eat after church today to guidance in making our big decisions to comfort and strength in time of

trouble. In our society with its emphasis on self-sufficiency, it's easy to forget that we are dependent on God. Praying for bread has often been a difficult part of the prayer for me because I've never been in a position to be without food. But notice again that the prayer does not say give *me* my daily bread. Instead it says *us*. I may always have food, but there are plenty of people in this world who do not. In the kingdom of God, we will all have our daily bread, and like the manna in the wilderness, there will be enough for everyone. When we pray for that kingdom to come, we acknowledge how much we need God, not just for our own needs but for those of others.

When you pray say,
Forgive us our sins
For we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us.

When you pray, ask for forgiveness. When you pray for forgiveness, remember that as a person forgiven of your sins, it is your responsibility to forgive others. Ah, Jesus, this is a hard one. I'm not sure which is harder, truly forgiving others, or truly believing we are forgiven. Jesus knew that forgiveness was something that we needed to pray about, both for ourselves and for our collective sins. Sins of racism and oppression, sins of intentional action and sins of inaction, private sins and corporate sins. Father, forgive us, for we know not what we do. Father, forgive us also when we're fully aware of what we do, and grant us the grace to forgive others, even as Jesus forgave those who crucified him.

When you pray say,
Do not bring us to the time of trial.

This one seems pretty clear. Anne Lamott writes that her two best prayers are Help me! Help me! Help me! and Thank you! thank you! thank you! I think many of us have the Help me! prayer down pretty well, particularly when we are in the time of trial. But there's more here than a cry for help during difficult times. Of course there will be times of trial, we will not be free of it until God's kingdom comes. There seems to be an implication though, that God not bring us to times of trial that we can't endure. After all, Jesus faced temptations from Satan as well as his dark night in Gethsemane and the torture of the cross. He endured. His trials were not too great to overcome, and so we also ask that God not lead us to trials too great to bear.

And that's it. As Luke tells it, when Jesus taught his disciples to pray he gave them six short lines of prayer that contained everything that his followers through the ages needed to know. We are in relationship with God. We praise God. We seek the kingdom of God. We ask for our daily needs and those of others. We ask for our own forgiveness and the ability to forgive others. We pray to be saved from trials. Jesus then tells them the story about the persistent friend asking for a loaf of bread and encourages the disciples to be diligent in asking, knocking, and seeking so that they might continue to receive, find, and walk through open doors.

Jesus taught his friends to pray. But even more than that, he prayed himself. He didn't spend a lot of time worrying about prayer; he prayed. His prayer was his way of being in relationship with God. His prayer was what fed his ministry and sustained him even as he prepared to die. And you know what? Nothing has changed. Prayer is still the way that the church engages its

relationship with God. Prayer is still what feeds our ministry and sustains us. Prayer is still how we listen for God's call. It's tempting to think that there are all these other things we can do as disciples; go to another conference or seminar, listen to another sermon, read another book, confer with another consultant, but in the end, what we're left with is the call to pray. Jesus taught us how.