

**Portraits of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke #4:
The Prayer of Jesus**

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East Cobb United Methodist Church
April 3, 2011

Scripture: Luke 11:1-13

What do you do when you get anxious and troubled? Do you run to your room and cry it out? Do you get increasingly talkative and yell it out? Do you run to the neighbors and spill it out? Do you run to the therapist and lay it out? Jesus ran to the Lord and prayed it out.

Do you know how to pray? Do you know what an effective prayer sounds like? Do you value prayer as a part of your Christian experience? Do you pray at all? Is it effective? Or are you like the guy who unplugs his lamp every time before turning it on and wonders why it never works? From, "Dear Jesus, it's Jim." to the Prayer of St. Francis and the formal prayers we offer each Sunday morning, prayer can take many forms. Maybe you don't pray because it is not something that makes sense in your private experience and something that you regard as a performance in public. What did Jesus say about prayer? Jesus was God incarnate. The scriptures clearly tell us that Jesus was God and existed from everlasting to everlasting – a concept which we cannot really get the human brain around. He came among us to teach us how to live in a right relationship with God. All through the gospels, we see where Jesus withdrew to pray. He fed the multitude, then went across the Sea Of Galilee to pray. He took Peter, James, and John up on the Mount of Transfiguration to pray. He led the disciples to the Garden of Gethsemane after the Last Supper to pray. And in our scripture for today, Jesus engages in a conversation with the disciples in response to a question about prayer. So, as we continue our sermon series on the Portraits of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke, it's clear that no portrait of Jesus could be complete without a look at the prayer life of Jesus. [There are sermon notes in your bulletin, and you may pick up a copy of the sermon transcript in the Narthex, at the Crossroads, or on our website www.eastcobbumc.org.]

The disciples had observed the prayer life of Jesus and noted that he did not pray like anyone else they had ever known. In the writings of the prophets, prayer had been a fearful people appealing to a distant, sometimes angry God. But Jesus was praying to a familiar, loving God in a personal, new, and humble way. Like so many other things Jesus did, this was new and confusing to them. He was changing everything for them by teaching and by example, just as he wants to change everything for you if you will allow it. They were so intrigued by his prayers that they asked him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples." (Luke 11:1). We should have the same desire today. There is a sense that we don't pray enough nor with as much focus as we should. We have talked about prayer a lot in various groups in this church recently. A major initiative from our Women's Retreat this year has been the formation of prayer groups. When I look back over the feedback you all have given us in the past two years, prayer is a common thread that occurs over and over in your comments. We seem to understand that prayer is important, but some of us are not very good at it. Don't feel bad about that. We need a good prayer life but are not sure how to get it. The disciples recognized their need and just asked. There is a longing among Christians today to be more effective at prayer. In this passage, Jesus teaches us what prayers should contain; how persistent we should be in prayer; and reminds us of God's faithfulness in response to prayer. We are focusing today on the content.

The Content - Some of you, in hearing Luke's version of what we commonly call The Lord's Prayer, might find it to be a little different. A similar prayer of Jesus is also recorded in Matthew 6:7-14. In Luke, we have a more succinct version of the prayer. Luke is writing after Matthew, already knowing what Matthew has written, so rather than including the whole prayer, he may be giving us a brief summary of it – perhaps its most important elements. Or he could be giving a different account of the prayer being taught to a different audience. Most of you know that when we end our prayer time by praying together The Lord's Prayer, it ends with this line: "For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever, Amen." When you read Luke and Matthew, you wonder where those concluding words come from. Those phrases were borrowed from the Old Testament (1 Chronicles 29:11) and added as a doxology by the early church in some early versions of the Lord's Prayer.

Notice the order of Jesus' prayer. First, Jesus tells us to praise God, then make our requests. Jesus says that we should have a relationship with God that is so personal, we can call him **Father**. This is a monumental shift in the history of the world from the lips of Jesus. From the thirty-nine books in the Old Testament, on only fourteen occasions is God called "Father" by his people. Each time it is national, not individual. There was no concept of God being our personal Father. Jesus on sixty occasions says, "Father" when speaking of God. His contemporaries realized the magnitude of this statement and sought to put him to death, saying, "You keep calling God your Father. You're making yourself equal with God." The Aramaic word Jesus uses in verse 2 is *Abba*, which in our vernacular, would be Dad or Daddy. Now I recognize that some of you did not and do not have good earthly fathers and cannot relate to what Jesus is saying here. You do, however, have someone who is close to you with whom you can share anything. *[Note that Jesus spoke and read in Aramaic, so the image on your bulletin cover and in the notes at the end of the transcript is The Lord's Prayer as Jesus would have read it. It is read from right to left.]*

A little boy was standing on the banks of the Mississippi River waving and shouting at a steamboat that was going by. He was beckoning the steamboat to come to shore. A stranger came by and said, "That's foolish young man. The boat will never come ashore because of your request. The captain is too busy to notice your waving and shouting." Just then the boat turned and headed for the dock. The little boy grinned and said to the stranger, "The captain is my daddy." That is the relationship Jesus is talking about here. Be as close to God in prayer as you are with the closest person to you on earth. Be comfortable enough in that relationship to tell him anything. Nothing is too insignificant to take to Daddy if it is concerning us or is something we need.

Hallowed or holy is your name. God is not just personal and intimate but is the only thing in our lives that we can call holy. We certainly are not. We are at once allowed to be close enough to God to touch and for him to touch us without taking any of the awesomeness away that makes him the God of all creation. So when we pray to God, we pray to a God who is unchanging and altogether perfect. As we pray to God, acknowledging him as holy, it invites us to examine our own lives and the ways in which we are unholy – sinful – that we need the Father's help to overcome. And so it glorifies God, and it humbles us to begin with an acknowledgement of how good our Father truly is.

God has a name. We have to go all the way back to Exodus 3 to discover how that name was revealed. In Exodus 3:13-15, God tells a very reluctant Moses that his name is "I AM WHO I AM" or Yahwah [written YHWH by the Jews]. There were no vowels in ancient Hebrew, so it was unclear how it should be pronounced. However, the greatest problem in pronunciation was the fact that the name of God was too holy to be spoken. The ancient Jews in writing the texts would not even use the same pen to write YHWH that they used to write other words in the text. God has a name. It is holy. Is it holy to us in 2011?

Your Kingdom Come. The kingdom of God is God's reign over us for our own good. To pray this petition means that we recognize that God is in control of our lives. The control issue is a major issue for all of us. We have remote controls for everything these days. The trouble is that we tend to think that we have a button on the remote control device for life. To confess Jesus as Lord and recognize that he rules over us means that we believe God has control over our lives. That's what the kingdom of God is all about.

The kingdom of God doesn't come in fullness until the end of time when He shall reign forever - when every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is King to the glory of God the Father. But Jesus said, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent and believe in the good news" (Mark 2:15). While the kingdom of God will not come in fullness until the end of time, Jesus encouraged his followers to start living as if it had already arrived, because it has. The kingdom of God comes today wherever Jesus comes. Jesus is present in word and sacraments and many other ways. The kingdom of God breaks into Christian fellowship today as a preview of the ultimate reign of God. Pray fervently for the kingdom to be real in your world today.

Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread. This petition of the Lord's Prayer clearly means that we should be grateful for the food which comes to us daily from God and to offer what we call "grace" at all our meals. But there may be more here than gratitude for food. This petition may be

translated, "Give us our bread for tomorrow." In other words, this petition is not only about the physical sustenance we need to live and be productive, but it also refers to the bread of life that we need to meet the challenges of the day and prepare for tomorrow. God's provision is daily and for good reason. If we could store up physical and spiritual bread, we would have no need to come back to God on a regular basis. Remember how the children of Israel were given manna in the wilderness but were cautioned not to take more than they would need for that day. To want far more than we need for today is to question that God promises to provide for our needs. When doubt creeps into our minds, faith leaves, and prayers are of no consequence when there is no faith behind them.

Forgive Us As We Forgive Others. Forgiveness of sins is a sign of the breakthrough of the kingdom of God. Jesus not only taught his followers that they should forgive their enemies. He lived his teaching, saying from the cross, "Father (Abba), forgive them for they don't know what they are doing." In the parable about the prodigal son and his father (Luke 15:11-32), forgiveness is offered before repentance is made. That's a kingdom of God way to do things. We are not responsible for someone else saying, "I'm sorry." As Christians, we are responsible for a willingness to forgive even before those who have hurt us see the error of their ways and repent. As Christians, we are responsible for a willingness to forgive even if there is no repentance on the part of those who have hurt us. Our responsibility is to be willing to forgive and to offer forgiveness.

That's the way God treats us. God's people try to do things the way God does them. God is willing to forgive us when we hurt him. Therefore, we should be willing to forgive those who hurt us. If we are not willing to forgive those who offend us, even when from our point of view, they don't deserve it, that's a signal that we don't understand that we have been forgiven, when we didn't deserve it. Our promise to be willing to forgive is attached to the prayer petition about forgiveness. "We will do for others what you, our Abba, have done for us." This idea that God is more willing to forgive than we are to seek forgiveness, and the promise to forgive as we have been forgiven, greatly upset the Pharisees and other religious leaders who first heard these words.

Do Not Bring Us To The Time Of Trial. "Do not bring us to the time of trial" (NRSV) is a better translation than "Lead us not into temptation" (KJV). God tempts no one to sin. The Lord's Prayer begins with the term of affectionate intimacy, "Abba." That means that we can endure anything if our Daddy is close by. Jesus went through the great ordeal when he cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" This is the only place in the recorded prayers of Jesus that he doesn't call God, *Abba*. On the cross, Jesus was bruised for our iniquities, and forsaken because of our sins.

In this petition, we pray that we never have to go through what Jesus went through on the cross: that feeling of abandonment. In Christian history this state of utter loneliness is called "the dark night of the soul." God loves us. He is our *Abba*. We learn to accept that love and love him back. God guides us. We learn to follow that guidance. Then when we really need God and pray to him to help us or someone we love, because what is happening is far beyond our control, sometimes God seems to be asleep. Worse yet, God seems not to care. That is the great ordeal. Some Christians don't go through the great ordeal. Some go through it, get to the end of their rope, tie a knot, hang on, and just barely get through it.

Because the great ordeal is the territory of the evil one who seeks to separate us from God, we pray we will be saved from going there. Because Jesus went there, apparently lost the battle with the evil one, but then conquered all the powers of evil in his resurrection, if we ever find ourselves in the great ordeal, we are called to remember that Jesus got through it, conquered the evil one, and is calling us to overcome the temptation of feeling forsaken. Persistence at such times is difficult but essential. God is listening and there, even when he doesn't seem to be.

We want to have more effective prayer lives. Our Lord instructs us about how to do that. Having affectionate intimacy with our Abba and profound humility before the King of kings and Lord of lords, we are called to pray with persistence, overcoming the illusion that God doesn't care. We are called to believe that God is answering our prayers, even when he seems not to be listening or when he answers them in ways we do not understand.

The Response - In Matthew 6:7, Jesus admonishes us, “When you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think they will be heard for their many words. (NRSV). The greatest danger in using the prayer of Jesus is in minimalizing and trivializing it. The familiar becomes ritual and rote. Prayer becomes performance or recitation. There is value in praying the prayer together, but I want to suggest three levels to praying the prayer of Jesus:

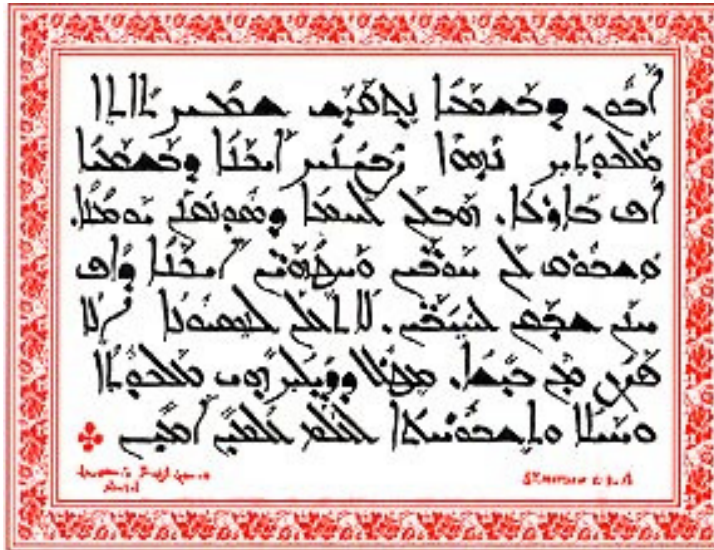
1. With your voice. You let your petitions be known to God through your lips. Not one of us would expect to build a relationship with someone we really care about by never speaking to them, yet often we do not speak to God.
2. Pray inwardly. Use your mind to keep the knowledge of God present in all that you do every day. Glance out the window and thank God – even for a rainy cold day. He has met you in it and given you the privilege of making his world a better place by living in the world today. Use your mind to stay focused on the reason for your existence – to worship and serve God.
3. Pray from the heart. Pour out your heart to God. Scream for joy for that small praise that others just would not understand. Pour out your worst hurts and let your tears flow as you share the anguish that you are not yet ready to share with anyone.

The importance of close and constant communication with God cannot be overstated. In his wonderful study called *Crucified Love: The Practice of Christian Perfection* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1989), Robin Maas points out how, “Just as it makes no sense to tell someone, ‘I love you more than anything in the world, but I just can’t manage to find the time to be with you,’ it makes no sense to claim that we have no time for prayer. When we love someone, we naturally want to spend time together; and when we are ‘in love’ with someone, we make the time to be with our beloved.”

Paul in 1 Thessalonians 5:16 reminds us, “Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” There is a Jewish proverb that says, “Those who sing pray twice.” The thought for the day in The Upper Room Monday was, “Anything that connects us to God is prayer.” Jesus was teaching his disciples and us a way to keep in touch with a beloved Father God, not just a proscribed memorized set of words to be used as a part of our ritual. Find God in those words. Change the words to those you use every day. God wants to hear what is on your heart, not just what is on the screen or in your head. Pray following Jesus’ guidelines every day, several times a day. We talk to close friends a lot. Why do we not also talk to God in the same way? Is there anyone who loves us more? Is there anyone we need more?

So why are we confused? Why are we wondering about the anxiety in our lives? Why are we concerned about our finances? Why are we concerned about the struggles we are having in some of our ministries? Because we are ignoring Jesus. Take it to God in prayer. Are we praying for each other? Are we praying for the saved and the lost? Are we constantly seeking God’s will and following prayerfully God’s lead? Dr. Leonard Sweet says the church treats prayer like parsley on the restaurant plate. It’s there, but it’s not important, and we really don’t know what to do with it. He goes on to say, that we should not be so concerned about landing on our feet and more concerned about landing on our knees. Nothing of any eternal significance will be accomplished without prayer. Jesus has set the example. Now, go home, unplug your lamp, and then turn it on. Got the picture?

Prayer



The Lord's Prayer in Aramaic

Endnotes and Reflections:

- John Wesley learned from his mother Susannah not to have a good opinion of anyone who did not spend at least four hours a day in prayer. "God does nothing save in answer to Prayer," Wesley wrote.
- "It is very probably that the dream of the impossible becomes a barrier of the actual that keeps you from doing what is possible." – Author unknown.
- Prayer is more than what you ask...
More than what you do...
More than what you say...
Prayer is your way of living.
- The Heart of The Lord's Prayer:
Hallowed be thy name...The PRAISE of God.
Thy Kingdom come ... The PURPOSE of God.
Thy will be done... The PLAN of God.
Give us bread... The PROVISION of God.
Lead us not into temptation ... The POWER of God.
Deliver us from the evil one ... The PROTECTION of God.
- E. L. Towns in *Praying the Lord's Prayer for Spiritual Breakthrough*
- "We pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfill all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the works of faith with power." - 2 Thessalonians 1:11:
- "Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful." - Colossians 4:2
- "Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you." -1 Thessalonians 5:16-18
- *Collected Works*, Leonard Sweet, ChristianGlobe Networks, Inc., 1991.
- *Crucified Love: The Practice of Christian Perfection* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1989), Robin Maas, p. 49.