

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church

Teach us how to pray, week 1: "Father"

Scripture: Luke 11:1-13, Psalm 103:1-18

Opening Hymn: Come Thou Fount Of Every Blessing (Nettleton)

Choruses: You are Holy (Prince of Peace) & Open the eyes of my heart (Baloche)

After Prayers: #449 -- Lord, listen to your children praying

Closing Hymn: #324--Great is thy faithfulness

Rev. Steve Filyk

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There is the sound of shouting coming from the backyard.

Mom opens the door to investigate,  
and realizes it's her son.

He is praying.

His praying out loud.  
He is shouting, "God please give me a bicycle."

"Tommy", his mom asks "why are you shouting?"

God isn't hard of hearing."

The boy replies, "Yes, but grandpa is."

Do you pray?

What is the nature of those conversations?  
Who are you speaking to in those prayers?

Recent research from Angus Reid

Tells us that "One-third (36%) of Canadians pray  
at least once or twice a month...

Frequent prayer is common among Hindus (57%) and Sikhs (62%),  
but less so for Roman Catholics (41%), Protestants (34%)  
and Jewish Canadians (32%)."<sup>i</sup>

What is maybe most astonishing is the fact

That more than half of those surveyed  
Are praying seldom to never."<sup>ii</sup>

That half of our neighbours never pray,  
is for many of us, quite astonishing.

Most followers of Jesus find their day sprinkled with prayers:

Offering thanks before a meal,  
Sending up a quick 'God help them'  
when passing an accident,

Closing the day with a litany

Of gratitude and concern.

For those of you who pray regularly,  
 or even occasionally,  
 what is prayer for you?

Do you have a set time or place?  
 Do you have a checklist of topics?  
 Is the prayer formal or conversational?

And who do you see yourself talking to?

Over the next few weeks, we will be looking  
 at the Lord's Prayer as it's found in chapter eleven  
 in the Gospel of Luke.

What I find a little surprising is that within the context of Luke,  
 Jesus is well into his ministry:  
 There's been much teaching and healing,  
 He's already sent off the 12 and 72 on mission trips.

It is well into Jesus' ministry  
 Before his disciples get curious about the fact  
 That Jesus often wanders off for prayer  
 before they finally ask him to instruct them on his practice.

We will be looking at this prayer over the next four Sundays.  
 But in order to really appreciate this prayer  
 As it is found in the Gospel of Luke  
 You'll need to review a more recent translation of the Bible,  
 One that relies on the best and earliest manuscripts.

Let me show you a slide to quickly highlight some of the differences  
 Between the Lord's prayer in Matthew in Luke.  
 This is from the New International Version.

In the NIV Luke is shorter, abbreviated.

Matthew 9-13

"This, then, is how you should pray:

"Our Father in heaven,  
 hallowed be your name,  
 your kingdom come,  
 your will be done,  
 on earth as it is in heaven.  
 Give us today our daily bread.  
 And forgive us our debts,  
 as we also have forgiven our debtors.  
 And lead us not into temptation,  
 but deliver us from the evil one."

Luke 11:2-4

He said to them, "When you pray, say:

"Father,  
 hallowed be your name,  
 your kingdom come.  
 Give us each day our daily bread.  
 Forgive us our sins,  
 for we also forgive everyone who sins against us.  
 And lead us not into temptation."

This difference can be seen in the NIV  
 And other translations that rely on the earliest and best manuscripts.  
 You won't see this difference in the King James Version!

What these differences reveal is that Jesus didn't  
 Provide his disciples with one set prayer  
 Meant to be repeated word for word,  
 But he talked about prayer on different occasions  
 And used a flexible model.

We might get into the implications of some of these variations  
 But for now I'd like to talk about the address that Jesus gives us in Luke.  
 Simply, 'Father'.

No, not 'Our Father in heaven' but 'Father'.

So what is the significance of this sort of address?  
 In terms of the varied Jewish depictions of God,  
 Jesus could have told his disciples to address God as King

As the Psalmist notes in Psalm 10:  
 "The Lord is King for ever and ever;  
 the nations will perish from his land."<sup>iii</sup>

In Second Chronicles, the 4<sup>th</sup> King of Judah Jehoshaphat, spoke to God in this way:  
 "Lord, the God of our ancestors,  
 are you not the God who is in heaven?

You rule over all the kingdoms of the nations.  
 Power and might are in your hand,  
 and no one can withstand you."<sup>iv</sup>

Jesus could have encouraged his disciples  
 That when they pray, they should remember God's  
 sovereignty and address God as king.

Jesus could also have told his disciples to speak of God as Creator.

Listen to the voice of God  
 As recorded in the prophet Isaiah:

"To whom will you compare me?  
 Or who is my equal?" says the Holy One.  
 Lift up your eyes and look to the heavens:  
 Who created all these?

He who brings out the starry host one by one  
 and calls forth each of them by name.  
 Because of his great power and mighty strength,  
 not one of them is missing."<sup>v</sup>

Jesus could have told his disciples  
 That when they pray they should  
 speak to God as their mighty and magnificent creator.

But of the many different images used for God  
 Jesus tells his disciples to address God as Father.

This is significant.  
 They are not told to enter God's presence as a humble vassal.  
 They are not told to enter God's presence as  
 An insignificant speck within the cosmos.

They are directed to speak to God as their Father.  
 Through Jesus they are to claim an intimate relationship  
 of love and dependence  
 with the very same God who is all these other things  
 (king, creator, shepherd, etc...).

What an astonishing privilege!  
 When we come before God in prayer  
 We aren't simply coming as servants,  
 or lower life forms,

We are coming before God like daughters and sons!  
 Jesus would have us know  
 That we are extraordinarily dear to God,

As dear as the children of the parents among us.

Of course, not all people find Jesus' description of God as Father comforting.  
 Some people have grown up with absent or abusive Fathers.  
 They struggle with this metaphor.

If you are in this boat,  
 You should note how Jesus further describes  
 this Father-child relationship  
 At the end of today's reading.

In those final verses,  
 Jesus notes that most fathers  
 provide food for their hungry children.

Jesus mentions this not to confine the Fatherhood of God  
 to our own experience of our parents  
 but simply as a stepping-off point.

If even the lousiest father will at least care for basic necessities  
 then 'how much more'  
 Will our heavenly Father talk with us, listen to us,  
 And offer us the greatest of all gifts.

When his disciples ask Jesus how to pray  
 He begins by telling them to address God as Father.  
 He wants them, he want us to know  
 That we can approach God with the confidence  
 And the expectation that our voice will be heard. PAUSE

As many of you know there was controversy  
 This past November  
 When the Chaplain General issued a directive  
 To all Canadian Armed Forces chaplains

That we would not pray during the upcoming Remembrance Day Commemorations  
 But would offer a spiritual reflection instead.  
 After public outcry this directive was put on hold  
 And is currently being reviewed.

But this was really just the culmination of a longer history  
 where public prayers offered by chaplains  
 have been subjected to various restrictions  
 Especially those names and images  
 That can be explicitly identified  
 with any particular religious tradition.

In my decade within the Canadian Military  
 it has always been clear to me  
 That it would never be appropriate to end a public prayer  
 with that phrase: "We ask this in Jesus' name".

As a Military Chaplain I can't end a public prayer in Jesus' name.  
 But I wonder if I could get away with this simple address:  
 "Father."

What a powerful way to draw people  
 into a new and different understanding of prayer.  
 Not a conversation not with someone distant and uncaring,  
 But someone close and intimately concerned  
 with our lives and our well-being.

I wonder how you and I would benefit  
 by using this address more regularly in our own prayers.

When Jesus taught his disciples to pray, he began with the address: "Father".

Thanks be to God. Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> Korzinski, David. "Canada across the religious spectrum: A portrait of the nation's inter-faith perspectives during Holy Week -." 13 May. 2022, [angus Reid.org/canada-religion-interfaith-holy-week](https://angus Reid.org/canada-religion-interfaith-holy-week).

<sup>ii</sup> Cardus, 21 Sept. 2023, [www.cardus.ca/research/faith-communities/reports/the-shifting-landscape-of-faith-in-canada](https://www.cardus.ca/research/faith-communities/reports/the-shifting-landscape-of-faith-in-canada).

<sup>iii</sup> Psalm 10:16 NIV

<sup>iv</sup> 2 Chronicles 20:6 NIV

<sup>v</sup> Isaiah 40:25-26 NIV