

Seventh Week After Pentecost (RCL/C): "The Lord's Prayer"

Genesis 18:20-32; Psalm 138; Luke 11:1-13

July 26-27, 2025

Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Manasquan, NJ

Do you remember who taught you the Lord's Prayer (same as the Our Father, as some of us grew up calling it)? If so, do you remember how old you were?

I don't remember the process of memorizing it, and I can't even recall a time when I didn't know it. I'm almost wondering if I learned it by osmosis, just being in worship and hearing it recited by the congregation every time I went. Most of us learn it early and are apt to remember it our whole life long. Peter can affirm that people we visit may have forgotten the names of their children, but are almost always able to join us in saying the Lord's Prayer. That is how deeply ingrained it is in us, both body and soul.

Does anything strike you in St. Luke's telling of the story about how the prayer came to us?

The Lord's Prayer is included in two Gospels, Luke's and Matthew's. Matthew's version is longer and closest to the prayer we pray in worship. With so much strife in the world, so many stridently different opinions and viewpoints about everything going on around us, I've been especially struck lately by the adjective "**Our**." Before we pray St. Matthew's Lord's Prayer in worship, I say, "Lord, remember us in your kingdom, and teach us to pray: '**Our** Father....'" No matter what else we may disagree about, we are unified in our belief that we share the same heavenly Parent, the same Savior, the same Holy Spirit. Praying "**Our** Father" reminds us that we are members of the same family. It's said that the great Spanish mystic, Teresa of Avila, set out to spend an entire year meditating on the Lord's Prayer. She reported later that she never got beyond the first word: "Our."

One of my faves, William Barclay, has said that the Lord's Prayer is a prayer for all seasons because it covers present, past and future. It talks about our "**present** needs" ("Give us each day our daily bread"), "our **past** sin" ("forgive us our sins"), and "**future** trials" ("do not bring us to the time of trial").¹ It's our Lord Jesus saying, "Bring your whole life before the God who loves you! No, it's not selfish to ask for food on the table, a roof over our head, gainful employment, our own health, the health of loved ones, the health of the planet, everything we need not just to survive, but to thrive." **Ask** for it and **trust** it shall be granted. Pray in faith, for: *"everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks the door will be opened."* (Luke 11:10) Jesus has given us that wonderful prayer acronym, **ASK**: Ask (A), Seek (S), Knock (K).

But lest we fall prey to the "Gimme, gimme, want, want's," we're told to start by praying, *"...hallowed be **your** name. **Your** kingdom come."* (Luke 11:2) St. Luke doesn't include the petition, *"thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven,"* but those are just other words for *"hallowed be **your** name. **Your** kingdom come."* To hallow something is to treat it as holy. The contemporary version of the Lord's Prayer that we sometimes say or sing is: "Father in Heaven, may your name be held holy." We hold God's name as sacred by being sure **not** to use it in vain, not verbally crumpling it up like a Macdonald's wrapper and throwing it on the ground as litter to be stepped on, but also by behaving in such a way that our actions reflect favorably on our Father in Heaven. Rightly or not, parents are still often judged by their children's behavior. Since we're believers, our misconduct can malign God's name.

*"...[H]allowed be **your** name. **Your** kingdom come."* There's no difference between God's kingdom coming and God's will being done. God reigns wherever and whenever we decide to love God and to love what God loves. We can ask for daily bread till the cows come home, we can

receive it with grateful hearts and words of thanks, but if we don't **share** our daily bread, in all its forms, with those who lack it, then God's name is **not** being held holy and God's kingdom is **not** coming within our circle of influence. Heaven forbid that we not **share** our bread with others, but it's even worse if we **take it out** of others' mouths, as is happening with cuts to Medicaid and SNAP. Ask any of our church friends who volunteer at the food pantries or work for social services. Suffering is increasing and help is shrinking. God's Kingdom does **not** come when the budget is balanced on the backs of the poor. In the next chapter of Luke's Gospel Jesus will say, "To those to whom much has been given, much will be expected." (Luke 12:48) He's talking materially and not just spiritually. That little, huge word "our" reminds us that although our faith is very **personal**, it is not meant to be private. Our religion is public and communal. As Christians we are not lone rangers on the journey; we are fellow members of the Body of Christ, traveling together on this pilgrimage of faith. We are to speak up for the voiceless, and to exercise our power on behalf of the powerless, as our Lord Jesus did. When we do those things, even though positive results may be hard to detect, God's kingdom **is** coming, in our midst, on our watch.

One of our daily needs is forgiveness of sins. Jesus makes quite clear that if we're ready to ask for forgiveness, we better be ready to grant it as well. It's sobering enough to pray, "...forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us," but praying, "forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us" makes me picture myself with fingers crossed behind my back and makes me wonder if I'm perjuring myself. "For I myself forgive everyone indebted to me" seems like a bit of a stretch.... For me, for sure, but thankfully not for God.

"And do not bring us to the time of trial." (Luke 11:4c) As St. Luke wrote in the later 1st century to people who hoped and believed Jesus was returning at any time, "the time of trial" probably referred to the final death throes of Satan, the ramped-up end-time suffering that would

precede Jesus' return in glory. What feels more relevant to our situation in the early 21st century is Jesus' wording in St. Matthew's Gospel: "*...lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.*" "Lord, don't let that temptation get near me, because you know how likely I am to fall." Have you ever prayed that a troubling situation or really hard challenge in your life somehow be resolved, eliminated, because you're sure you're failing miserably to measure up to God's expectations? You **want** to do better, but don't know how? "Lord, please remove this obstacle from my path, because it's become a real stumbling block for me." I've also prayed, "Lord, cleanse me so I can cope," and the Lord's gentle but insistent response has been, "This situation **is** your cleansing." What a great reminder of how I can miss the blessing in what I consider to be a misfortune, of how I can be blind to the grace present in a painful circumstance.

"For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen" This is the doxology we tack on, the sign-off that isn't attached to the Lord's Prayer in either Luke or Matthew's Gospel. I need that reminder that Victory with a capital V is already won in our Lord's life, death and resurrection. "For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever." We may ask, "Lord, how do we pray in **these** times," because we're so baffled, flummoxed, dismayed, by all the ways in which evil seems to be in the ascendancy. But the Lord's Prayer **is** Jesus' model prayer for **all** times. If someday we were to forget everything else, Lord-willing we would still remember these 5 words: "Our Father... your kingdom come." It is enough. It will always be enough. Amen

¹William Barclay, *The Gospel of Luke* (rev. ed., Daily Study Bible series, Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975), p. 144.

Pastor Mary Virginia Farnham