

Genesis 18:20-32; Psalm 138; Colossians 2:6-15; Luke 11:1-13

“Lord, teach us to pray”

Grace to you, and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Today’s sermon is a meditation on the Lord’s Prayer. In Luke’s gospel, this prayer is occasioned by one of Jesus’ disciples who said, “*Lord, teach us to pray.*” Jesus taught them a prayer that has come to be known as the “Lord’s Prayer” or the “Our Father.” It is a prayer that should be on our lips each and every day. Yet I wonder if we daily pray these brief words with devotion and wonder.

Over the years, people have come to me like that disciple, asking, “Pastor, teach me to pray.” At such times, I’ve sat down with someone to talk with them about prayer: explaining that prayer is not simply a set of fixed words, but rather, prayer begins believing that God listens to me, loves me, and hears my prayers. Prayer begins with faith and trust in God.

Prayer is an ongoing conversation with God that continues over a lifetime. Prayer deepens our understanding of ourselves and our world. Be ready, because prayer has the power to change you.

This is what Paul is describing in today’s reading: our life of faith and devotion to Jesus Christ is a journey that makes our whole lifetime a pilgrimage. St. Paul writes, “*As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.*” To walk in Christ is to be on the way with him. He is the way, the truth, and the life who makes the ground you walk upon, holy ground. To walk each day in prayer with him is to be on a holy pilgrimage.

Paul mixes metaphors (but what mix!), saying that to walk in Christ is to be rooted in him – like a plant or a tree – we are always growing in faith. To be built up in him means your life is always under construction. He is the solid rock – the foundation firmly establishing you in faith.

Yet we cannot walk with him, be rooted and built up in him without daily turning to him in prayer. Prayer is our daily pilgrimage with him. Like that disciple, each day we should also ask him, “*Lord, teach us to pray.*”

The first thing we notice in the Lord’s Prayer is that Jesus addresses God as “*Our Father,*” daily reminding us that we have a Father in heaven who cares about us, whose name is holy, and who seeks to reveal his will and kingdom here on earth as it is in heaven. Jesus is teaching us that God is not far away. If we but call upon him, his kingdom will draw near, within, and around us.

Jesus teaches us to pray: “*Give today our daily bread,*” encouraging us to trust God will daily give us all we need. Many of us have perhaps not looked at the Greek text but the word *epiousion* translated as “daily” (as in “*daily bread*”) is so rare that it only occurs only in the Lord’s Prayer in Matthew and Luke and is found nowhere else in all ancient literature. *Epiousion* doesn’t simply

mean “daily,” it is much more than that – it literally means “super-essential” or “ultra-necessary” bread. Early Church Fathers therefore understood it as both “daily” bread and as the “super-essential” spiritual bread of the Eucharist.

Today, we’ve had the privilege of hearing Jason Blanton speak about Bread for the World. Each day, we give thanks for our daily bread, the food we receive and the food we share with others. Food is the “super-essential” daily necessity that all people around the world need, and in praying for it, we are not only praying for our bread, we are praying that our Father in heaven will provide enough essential bread for all people. We are praying for the world.

In the *Small Catechism*, Martin Luther wrote,

What then does “daily bread” mean? It is everything included in the necessities and nourishment for our bodies, such as food, drink, clothing, shoes, house, farm, field, livestock, money, property, an upright spouse, upright children, upright members of the household, upright and faithful rulers, good government, good weather, peace, health, decency, honor, good friends, faithful neighbors, and the like.

Our *epiousion* or “super-essential” daily bread includes all we need to live and to help others live.

The stained-glass windows in St. Mark’s Reception Room are a visual interpretation of the Lord’s Prayer and the panel representing this petition includes two fish, five loaves, a chalice, and symbols of wheat and grapes. Since the early church, Christians have understood “daily bread” to include the bread and wine of the Eucharist. This is why we pray the Lord’s Prayer during the Eucharist. Jesus’ words, “*This is my body, given for you,*” remind us of our need for the daily and “super-essential” bread of heaven, Jesus Christ, who gives himself for all people in this world.

Jesus teaches us to pray: “*Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us*” – words reminding that as we ask for forgiveness, we are also to be quick to forgive others. We are to live out God’s forgiveness to others, because daily in addition to feelings of bitterness and animosity, we hold grudges, forgetting to pray for our enemies and those who persecute us. Praying for our own forgiveness should make us more forgiving of others.

Jesus teaches us to pray: “*Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil.*” As the Father saved Jesus from trial and temptation in the wilderness, God walks alongside us amid our trials and temptations. Today’s reading from Genesis is a tremendous witness to the power of perseverance in prayer, as Abraham asked God to spare the city of Sodom. Notice how Abraham spoke to the Lord, “*Let me take it upon myself to speak to my lord, I who am but dust and ashes. Suppose five of the fifty righteous are lacking? Will you destroy the whole city for lack of five?*”

“*I who am but dust and ashes.*” The utter humility of these words is striking: Abraham calls upon our Father in heaven, emphasizing his own mortality as dust and ashes. Abraham is asking that the Lord save Sodom from its time of trial and to deliver it from evil. When we pray, do we like

Abraham, acknowledge our own dust and ashes before God? Do we ask God to save our enemies and to those who persecute us?

The phrase “*dust and ashes*,” also reminds me that we, humanity, are the ones who have misused the gift of our reason and rationality by making the bullets and bombs that reduce our neighbors to dust and ashes. God does not manufacture weapons of destruction, human beings do. Daily on the news we see images of cities reduced to dust and ashes. Consider the blockbuster bombing of Dresden in World War 2, the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and more recently the obliteration of Ukrainian cities and the entire region of Gaza, and we will begin to see the power of this petition to save us and our neighbors from times of trial, delivering us all from evil. Do you daily ask God to save this world from times of trial and evil? Do you daily remember that you are dust and ashes?

In this prayer, Jesus is teaching us to pray not only for ourselves and our own moral failures, but also for our neighbors in this world. Prayer has the power to change us from self-centered people seeking our own advantage and profit to people who pray and work for others. Each day, ask, search, and knock that God the Father might give you the Holy Spirit who will lead you in prayer by opening the doors of holy action toward others.

Prayer changes us. Prayer makes the ground you walk upon, holy ground.

Lord, teach us to pray, because in praying, O Lord, you change us.

Lord, teach us to pray – transform us into living signs of your kingdom here on earth. Amen.

*A brief note on the doxology at the end of the Lord’s Prayer (“For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen”).¹

¹ Though the doxological ending of the Lord’s Prayer is not included in either Matthew (6:9-13) or Luke (11:1-4), a word about it may be helpful here. The most ancient witness to a doxology at the end of the Lord’s Prayer is found in *The Didache* (8:2), one of the oldest early Christian writings and the oldest written catechism of the church. Written in the first century between 60-90 CE, “*Didache*” means, “The Teachings,” and contains sections on ethics, the Eucharist and Holy Baptism, as well as church order. The date of the *Didache* makes it contemporaneous with the writings of the New Testament, and the Lord’s Prayer contained in the *Didache* is dependent upon Matthew’s text. The presence of a doxological ending suggests the very high place given to this prayer in the life of the early church. The doxology is reminiscent of other acclamations about God in use at the time of the apostles. Regarding translation, very early the Lord’s Prayer was translated into Greek from the original Aramaic prayer of Jesus, which is now lost. This means that scholars have no clear way of knowing, for example, the original word which was translated as *epiousion* (“daily” or “super-essential”) or the means of the final transmission and shaping of this prayer. The history of English versions of the Lord’s Prayer begins in the form of the prayer found in William Tyndale’s translation of the New Testament in the Gospel of Matthew (1526).