

“Holy Be Your Name!”

Matthew 6:9, February 2, 2020; 10:00 am
Congregational UCC, Buena Vista, CO
Rev. Rebecca K. Poos

PRAYER

God of wisdom and insight,
May the words that I speak, and the ways
they are received by each of our hearts
and minds, help us continue to grow into
the people, and the church, that you
have dreamed us to be. Amen.

THE LORD’S PRAYER (MATTHEW 6:9-13)

(The Message)

⁹“The world is full of so-called prayer warriors who are prayer-ignorant. They’re full of formulas and programs and advice, peddling techniques for getting what you want from God. Don’t fall for that nonsense. This is your Father you are dealing with, and he knows better than you what you need. With a God like this loving you, you can pray very simply. Like this:

Our Father in heaven,
Reveal who you are.
Set the world right;
Do what’s best—
as above, so below.

Keep us alive with three square meals.

Keep us forgiven with you and forgiving others.

Keep us safe from ourselves and the Devil.

You’re in charge!

You can do anything you want!

You’re ablaze in beauty!

Yes. Yes. Yes.

Matthew 6:9-13 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

⁹“Pray then in this way:

Our Father in heaven,

hallowed be your name.

¹⁰ Your kingdom come.

Your will be done,

on earth as it is in heaven.

¹¹ Give us this day our daily bread.^[a]

¹² And forgive us our debts,

as we also have forgiven our debtors.

¹³ And do not bring us to the time of trial,^[b]

but rescue us from the evil one.^[c]

I. REMEMBER WHEN?

The Lord’s Prayer. Or, maybe you know it better by another name:

The Abba prayer—early Christians

The Our Father—Catholic Community

The “Lord’s Prayer”—Protestant Tradition

Pater Noster—The Latin. Also, part of the Rosary—as

when one came to the 11th bead, the instruction was to stop and pray the Lord's Prayer.

Let's see a show of hands—how many of you remember learning the Lord's Prayer at some point in your life? How many of you remember *when* you learned it. Anyone wish to share a story?

What version did you learn? Debts and debtors? Trespasses and trespassors?

One preacher who grew up Presbyterian, thought his wife “had it all wrong” when she started praying the Lutheran way! Debts, trespasses, how many forever and evers, etc!

Misinterpreting the Lord's Prayer.

When my twin daughters were young, I taught them to say this prayer before going to bed. As I listened outside their door, I could hear them say, "Give us this steak and daily bread, and forgive us our mattresses." My husband and I always had a good laugh over this. That was over 50 years ago, and the memory still remains in my heart.

- From San Francisco: When I was a child, I learned this prayer as "Our Father, who are in Heaven, Howard be thy name." I always thought that was God's real name.
- Missoula, Mont: My son, who is in nursery school, said, "Our Father, who art in Heaven, how didja know my name?"
- Uniontown, Ohio: I remember thinking this prayer was "Give us this day our jelly bread."
- Grand Junction, Colo: When I was younger, I believed the line was "Lead a snot into temptation." I thought I was praying for my little sister to get into trouble.

II. WHY IMPORTANT?

Whatever we call it, it is definitely the “official prayer of Christianity.”

This ancient prayer has been used and recited, passed down and practiced for centuries, even millennia. The scriptures give us the first versions (slightly different)—in The Gospel of Matthew and The Gospel of Luke.

Ancient texts of the Early Church like the *Didache* tell of its use in worship in the first and second centuries. In fact, these texts *tell* faithful to use it! Often and all over the world.

The Celts practiced this prayer from at least the 7th and 8th centuries, as it appears in their worship missals. The prayer Jesus taught had a central role in Celtic churches and was a part of *every* Eucharist celebration and every sacrament.

Its importance cannot be overestimated. For the Celts it was not just an easy-to-memorize, easy-to-roll off the tongue chant, but a synopsis of the gospel and the life of faith—the core teaching.

For the Celts—and for many other ancient Christian communities—this prayer *summed up* in a few short sentences everything—what happened in worship, our place in this world, the nature of God and our relationship to God and one another in the journey of faith.

It proclaimed God's holiness, thanked God for meeting our daily needs and for forgiving us, and reminded us to help meet those needs for others and forgive as we are forgiven. The Lord's Prayer is Christian life and faith in a nutshell!

There are some "fun facts" about it that we'll discover over our time together. For instance, did you know that before clocks were in common use, that The Lord's Prayer was used by cooks to time their cooking? I kid you not! There are recipe books that tell the cook, "Simmer the broth for 3 Lord's Prayers!"

Scholars describe the Lord's Prayer in a number of ways. For it is anything *but* a simple, chant-like verse to be rushed through week in and week out. It is from the lips of Jesus himself, a gift given to the disciples then and now, upon their request: "Master, teach us how to pray."

John Dominic Crossan begins his exploration of The Lord's Prayer" with this amusing take: "The Lord's Prayer is Christianity's greatest prayer. It is also Christianity's *strangest* prayer. It is prayed by all Christians, but it never mentions Christ. It is prayed in all church, but it never mentions church. It is prayed on all Sundays, but it never mentions Sundays. It is called the "Lord's Prayer," but it never mentions "Lord." (*The Greatest Prayer*, p. 1)

It is so much more than a "nice little prayer. It is "A radical manifesto and a hymn of hope." We understand

Jesus better when we study his own ultimate prayer. There are different versions, starting from scripture, but they are all valid. All versions fit within Jewish context. There's no reason to think Jesus taught only one version.

One scholar suggests there is *no* debate or "problem" with the prayer in terms of historicity or content but, there is a problem with *familiarity*!

Christians run through it quickly and by rote memory and hear a word of comfort and not challenge!

Amy-Jill Levine, a Jesus and New Testament scholar says, if you look at the Prayer in its original context, there's far more to it than nice, familiar words of comfort:

"When placed in a first-century Jewish context, the prayer recovers numerous connotations that make it both more profound and more political. It fosters belief, promotes justice, consoles with future hope, and recognizes that the world is not always how we would want it." (Levine p. 42)

III. OUR FATHER/ABBA

Let's look at the first two phrases of the prayer briefly today.

"Our Father, who art in Heaven."

In Greek, this means: "Father of Us." In that day, the Father of Us was Our Householder. The one who cared for all in the household, oversaw daily life and

food and a roof over head. It could be a woman too—Householder was not a necessarily a male term or role in that day, or today.

When applied to God here in this prayer, “Father of Us” means much more than a biological father, but Creator, Protector, Provider and Model.

John Dominic Crossan points us to a core truth here, Father of Us is OUR father, not MY father. For God is personal, yes, but personal *in community*. Not personal in the sense of privacy—God is the Father of all of us!

It is also a political statement, in that context, for Jesus to suggest the disciples call God “Father.” For Caesars on the Throne in Rome were called “father.” This is a little like George Washington called “the father of our country.”

Jesus saying “Father in Heaven” is insisting Rome is *not* the true father. (Levine)

Later, early Christians declared “Jesus is Lord” in a similarly radical, political statement. “Jesus is Lord ad Caesar is not.” That could get you hanged!

Some have made a big story of “Abba” in Aramaic and on Jesus’ lips being like a small child saying “Daddy.” This is a nice, comforting notion, and does convey an accurate sense of the close, intimate relationship Jesus experienced and spoke of with God as Father.

But, it’s not technically true from the perspective of 1st century context and linguistics. Even the first scholars who suggested this “Abba means Daddy” idea in the 1970’s have since recanted that suggestion. (Fun facts—if you want to delve into this debate more, see me after church.)

But. That doesn’t mean that Jesus didn’t have a close personal connection with God, and that we can’t have the same. That *is* accurate and testified to all throughout scripture—in both the Hebrew Bible and New Testament.

“Father of us all, draw near to us your children, and guide us and love us into your likeness.”

IV. HOLY BE YOUR NAME **“Hallowed be Thy Name”**

This phrase is a component of most Jewish prayers. But again, the Lord’s Prayer has a political edge. “You, oh God are Father, not Caesar. You, oh God, are Holy and we pray: “*YOUR* kingdom come, not Rome!” Render the obedience and respect to Caesar what is due Caesar but hallow and worship God above all.

“Hallowed”—not a word we use much—except once a year on Oct 31st!

But it means “set apart,” more than we can imagine or grasp. Like Moses, we remember that, when in God’s presence, we are only Holy Ground, and humble ourselves and take off our shoes and preconceptions. Like Job, we remember when we say these words that

God is God and we are not.

We never can fully know this One. And that's a *good* thing! We cannot put God in a box. Can't decide that how *we* name and think of God as the *only* way.

“Hallowed be Thy Name” captures that—a sense of awe, mystery and wonder. The verses remind us of our proper stance toward and healthy respect for the Divine: Humble respect for the holiness and awesomeness of God, who is our personal Father!

That's a healthy and holy tension for us to keep in mind. Our father is up close and personal, but great and holy too.

V. APPLYING TO LIFE & PRACTICE

Over the next few weeks, we will practice a form of “Lectio Divina”—full immersion into a scripture passage. Like soaking in a hot springs pool, letting the warm water surround and soothe us, while we look at the sky, the trees, the beauty of nature all around, let's soak in it and soak it in.

We will hear The Prayer in a number of versions and languages—from different cultures. We will sing a variety of settings of it from down through the centuries.

I invite you to consider a daily practice of reciting it each morning—either from memory, or reading it from different translations in the Bible or prayer books. Notice how the different denominations and

translations vary ever-so-slightly. Tell me what you're finding! This will be a fun and meaningful exploration together.

Don't whip through it by rote with no meaning or really stopping to think what you're saying; how you're praying. But delve-in. It's profound and radical. Put this spiritual message into your regular spiritual practice.

Some have suggested we should call it “The Disciple's Prayer—rather than “Our Lord's Prayer.” Because Jesus taught it to and FOR the disciples. Gave it to them as a precious gift and a teaching, when they asked Jesus “Teach us how to pray.”

So, as we immerse ourselves into this key practice of our faith, we might consider it Our Prayer—try that on for a season. The Disciples Prayer/Our Prayer. And then, we might consider writing our own.

You don't have to turn it in as homework! But, jot some thoughts down each day or week as you ponder the prayer for yourself. I'm going to endeavor to do this, and invite you to join me in writing your own personalized Disciple's Prayer.

As we come to the Table, we remember Jesus' presence then and long ago, both. Let us join in that ancient and yet so contemporary prayer together as we gather. “Our Father,”