

Matthew 6:5-15; Lenten Service 3A; 3/22/17

The Lord's Prayer

Pastor Ellen Schoepf

Matthew and Luke's gospels tell us that the followers of Jesus asked him how to pray. In answer, Jesus **taught** them to pray and he did this by offering a prayer we call the Lord's Prayer. This prayer not only teaches how to pray, it opens us to the things for which Christ would **have** us pray. The Lord's Prayer is divided into sections. It begins with an introduction, followed by seven petitions, then ends with a doxology.

Our Father in heaven. This introduction sets the stage for the entire prayer as we are reminded that we speak simple words as a child to a loving parent.

Hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as in heaven. These three phrases are the first three petitions. And, they are not so much about God's name, message, rule, or even God's will, as they are about us. As Luther pointed out, God can take care of name, kingdom, and will for Godself and God does. In different ways, these three petitions

all ask God to use **us** to tell the good news and to tell it the way God meant it to be told. They ask that our very lives **reflect** God's rule over the world. When we pray these petitions in faith we make them our own. And, we may be staggered by the answers because the emphasis is always on God's initiative and God's intention to make **us** a part of the answer to these prayers. God uses **us** to help bring about God's kingdom on earth.

Give us today our daily bread. This petition is not so much a request that God will give us our daily bread – representing all that we need to live – but that God will make us aware that these things are **gifts** to us from a creator ceaselessly at work for our good and the good of **all** people. If we look back at the explanation to the First Article of the Apostles' Creed, Luther wrote that if some people do not have what they need to live, it may be because all people do not recognize that things are given to us by a God upon whom **everyone** depends for life. Therefore, this petition also requires that we share the gifts we have been given.

Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.

This petition asks for the most important of the gifts of life, the forgiveness of our sins. This petition makes us aware that the most fervent Christians battle against their own sin throughout their lives. No one can leave this behind and enter each new day without the forgiveness only God can grant. Luther said, “Where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation.” This petition asks not only for forgiveness for each of us, but also for the power, courage, will, and ability for us to forgive those who have wronged us. God’s forgiveness makes possible and is represented in our forgiveness of others.

Save us from the time of trial. The 6th petition is not a request for protection against bad decisions or wrong behavior. Important as those things are, this prayer is about something still more important. It asks God to keep us by grace in a relation of trust and confidence. It is a request that God keep us in the gift of faith so that we can continue to receive all of its benefits – forgiveness and life.

And deliver us from evil. The 7th petition ends the Lord's Prayer as we request that God protect us from danger. It also asks God to tend us when we enter into an experience no human can evade, the experience of death. Luther wrote, "We ask that when our final hour comes, that God may grant us a blessed end and take us by grace from this valley of tears to God's very self."

For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen. The end of this prayer is a doxology that provides words of confidence and praise. These words are a way of saying that we know God can and will answer the prayers Jesus taught us to make. To say "Amen" means Yes, it shall be so. We say Amen because we are certain that such petitions are pleasing to God and heard by God.

Over the next week, I invite you to pray the Lord's Prayer slowly, petition by petition, allowing time to reflect on what Jesus was teaching in each petition. Jesus, himself, has commanded us to pray in this way and God has promised to hear us.