

Pray Then In This Way...
Message for February 24, 2019
North East United Methodist Church
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*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."*

-Matthew 6:9-13

Several years ago, I was flying to Minneapolis, MN in order to take a class. I remember praying as the plane began to takeoff from the runway. I have flown countless times to many places around our world, but every time I am very nervous when the plane is taking off. I often joke that we are about to takeoff into the skies in a machine with well-over a million individual parts built by the lowest bidder. The thought is not very comforting.

Therefore, every time I take off in an airplane I am praying. I remember this day in particular because as I was praying I was looking out the window of the plane and watching the green fields below pass swiftly by. I began praying *The 23rd Psalm...* "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want...He makes me lie down in green pastures..." Abruptly I stopped in the middle of the prayer, looked out the window again at the green fields below, and quickly cried out to God, "but not these green pastures, Lord...not these."

At times our prayers can be rote, mechanical, simply a force of habit, and it takes something to wake us up and realize the words we are lifting up to God...to realize what it is we are saying and to ask ourselves if we really mean it. *The 23rd Psalm, The Lord's Prayer, The Apostles Creed*, and even many of the hymns we sing have become such a part of our Sunday worship, such a part of who we are...

We pray...we sing...without thinking...without holding on to the meaning behind the words and allowing those words to change us, to transform us.

Our weekly Bible study recently finished reading Don Underwood's book, *Pray Like Jesus*. In his book, Underwood helps one take apart the Lord's Prayer, thinking deeply about each phrase, what it means, what one is proclaiming when they pray Jesus' prayer. Underwood writes, "*Most Christians know [this prayer] by heart and can easily recite it. In fact, that may be part of the problem: it is so well-known and easily recited that most of us never even think about the words as we rattle them off silently or in a corporate worship setting.*"

I thought we should take a deeper look today and next week at the words we pray every Sunday and many times in between Sundays. We must remember, this prayer, *The Lord's Prayer*, was shared with us, taught to us, by Jesus, the Son of God. These are words sent from heaven that we have the amazing privilege to know and to speak back to God. Underwood writes, "*In fewer than seventy words Jesus remarkably covers the breadth of the Christian message and experience.*"

The author imagines the moment...

They saw him out there every morning, on his knees, early, as the sun rose in the east. Until he had come along, their understanding of prayer had revolved around what they had heard from the Pharisees: loud, long, self-righteous and self-serving. But he was different. He could spend hours at a time in silence, as if he were listening more than asking. And when he rose from his prayers and joined them for the day's work, he seemed to be powerfully energized while also utterly at peace. There was an unmistakable and unique quality to this man they called Jesus, and the longer they stayed with him the more they suspected that it was rooted in his practice of daily prayer. So one day they asked him, "Teach us to pray." And he did.

Jesus began..."***Our Father...***"

William Barclay writes, "*It might well be said that the word Father used of God is a compact summary of the Christian faith.*" What does Barclay mean?

When we pray, "*Our Father..*," we are making multiple claims, standing on multiple truths. We are claiming that we believe there is One God..."*Our*

Father...” We are claiming that our God is a loving God, a personal God, a God of love with the heart of a “*Father.*”

Furthermore, The Lord’s Prayer does not teach us to pray “**My** *Father*;” it teaches us to pray, “**Our** *Father.*” As Barclay writes, “*God is no one’s exclusive possession. The very phrase Our Father involved the elimination of self.*” You and I are connected to one another; we are children of the King of Kings. All of us, every person, matters to God and in His infinite mercy, God offers all of us adoption into His family, the opportunity to become men and women of “*royal lineage.*” 2 Corinthians 6:18 states, “*‘And I will be a father to you, And you shall be sons and daughters to Me,’ says the Lord Almighty.*”

And as children of God, “*Our Father*” is approachable; we can have an intimate relationship with God. Barclay relates an old Roman story which tells how a Roman emperor was enjoying a triumph. Barclay writes, “[This emperor] *had the privilege, which Rome gave to her great victors, of marching his troops through the streets of Rome, with all his captured trophies and his prisoners in his train. So the emperor was on the march with his troops. The streets were lined with cheering people. The tall legionaries lined the streets’ edges to keep the people in their places. At one point on the triumphal route, there was a little platform where the empress and her family were sitting to watch the emperor go by in all the pride of his triumph. On the platform with his mother, there was the emperor’s youngest son, a little boy. As the emperor came near, the little boy jumped off the platform, burrowed through the crowd and tried to dodge between the legs of a legionary and to run out on the road to meet his father’s chariot. The legionary stooped down and stopped him. He swung him up in his arms: ‘You can’t do that, boy,’ he said. ‘Don’t you know who that is in the chariot? That’s the emperor. You can’t run out to his chariot.’ And the little boy laughed, ‘He may be your emperor,’ he said, ‘but he’s my father.’*”

Barclay continues, “*That is exactly the way the Christian feels towards God. The might, and the majesty, and the power are the might, and the majesty, and the power of one whom Jesus taught us to call Our Father.*”

Jesus continues...”...***who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.***”

Barclay argues, “*We must never use the word Father in regard to God cheaply, easily, and sentimentally. God is not an easy-going parent who tolerantly shuts his eyes to all sins and faults and mistakes. This God, whom we can call Father, is the god whom we must till approach with reverence and adoration, and awe and*

wonder. God is our Father in heaven, and in God there is love and holiness combined.”

When we pray, “...*who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name,*” we are not only recognizing God the Father, the one who loves us and invites us into relationship, but we are recognizing that God is divine, heavenly...we are proclaiming God’s holiness, God’s transcendence, God’s majesty and power. We are proclaiming that God deserves to be revered.

What does it mean to show reverence to God? To show reverence to God means...

- (1) we believe God exists (we cannot show reverence for someone who does not exist);
- (2) we acknowledge God’s holiness, justice, and love for we could not show reverence to an immoral and impure god;
- (3) we have a constant awareness of God...we live in a God-filled world... our awareness of God is not confined to church but exists everywhere we walk and sleep and live;
- (4) Lastly, we recognize that reverence is not simply an acknowledgment of these things but a commitment to obedience and submission. Martin Luther asked: “*How is God’s name hallowed among us?*” And his answer was: “*When both our life and doctrine are truly Christian.*”

In other words, when our intellectual convictions (what we say we believe) and our practical actions (how we live our daily lives) are in full submission to the will of God, we are showing God reverence. As James writes, “*So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead*” (2:17).

When we pray, “*Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name,*” we are proclaiming not only our belief in a loving and holy God, but we are declaring our commitment to be obedient and to submit our lives to the God who hears our prayer, whose Son taught us to pray.

Continuing on...”***Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.***”

Underwood, in his book, *Pray Like Jesus*, writes, “*I like to refer to this part of the prayer as the vision and mission statement for the Christian life...in this prayer [Jesus] makes it clear that our mission is to live life on earth in a way that reflects the kingdom of God in heaven...What if we could catch this vision about the*

kingdom of God and allow it to transform the manner in which we approach our daily lives.”

When we lift these words up in prayer...*“Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven”*...we are recognizing God’s deep desire for the things of heaven to be brought to earth...things like justice, love, equality, hospitality, compassion...we are recognizing the need to reach *“the least of these,”* the hurting, the lost. We are asking God to help make His kingdom a reality right here on earth, but we are also recognizing and accepting the call on our lives to help make this happen.

Isn’t this what the disciples, the early church, did? They met in the Upper Room in Jerusalem and prayed, and then they went out and reflected the *“kingdom of God”* to the world, sharing their possessions, praying and breaking bread together, taking care of one another, welcoming others into the family each day. Underwood writes, *“The church is the only organization in the world whose sole mission is to share the love of God freely, and participating in the mission of the church is one of the most powerful ways in which an individual can live out a personal commitment to make the kingdom of God a reality here on earth.”*

Underwood asks, what if we prayed every morning, *“Lord, what would you have me do this day to make your kingdom in heaven become your kingdom on earth?”* Many Chinese Christians pray, *“Lord, revive your Church, beginning with me,”* a prayer that Barclay says we could rephrase, *“Lord, bring in your kingdom, beginning with me.”*

And the final phrase we will look at today...*“Give us this day our daily bread.”*

This is the phrase of *The Lord’s Prayer* that leaves my lips more than any other, as I find myself praying these seven words throughout each day.

To live one day at a time, not worried about tomorrow, not planning out my future, trusting God to provide all I need today and knowing that God will do the same tomorrow, that I need not be afraid, if one of my greatest struggles. I want to plan things out. I want to know how tomorrow will work out. I want to know how expenses will be covered, how my boys will have what they need to succeed, how my wife and I will spend the years ahead.

God promised the Israelites daily bread that would cover the ground every morning and quail that would fly into camp every night, but God said there was one

condition. That condition was that they could gather as much as they wanted to eat but they could not save or store any of it. They had to trust God to provide for them again the next day.

Underwood writes, *“God had devised a plan by which the people were forced, literally, to trust God on a daily basis.”* He continues, *“If we face our problems and challenges one day at a time, we will always find the strength to endure - as our days, so shall our strength be. But most of us, fallible as we are, are tempted to pile up the weight of many burdens all at once. We will think and worry not just about the challenges awaiting us this day, but also about the failures of the past and the worries of the future...Like the strongest bridge in the world, not even the strongest person in the world can endure the weight of so many thoughts and worries...We [cannot] forget that God gives us the strength to face nearly any crisis, but only one day at a time.”*

When you and I pray, *“Give us this day our daily bread,”* we are asking God to provide our needs for today. We are proclaiming that we believe God will provide, that we need not worry about tomorrow; God can be trusted. We are not asking for tomorrow...and we are not simply asking for ourselves...*“Give US this day our daily bread.”* When we pray, we are shifting our focus from all the things that fill our minds, all the worries and fears of tomorrow, and looking at today...what God has for us today, what God wants us to do today, knowing God has us in the palm of His hand today and we need not be anxious or afraid...we are also shifting our thoughts from ourselves to others...we are not alone on this journey.

*“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...”*

When we pray those words...let it not simply be from memory...let it not be mechanical...but let us think about each word we pray, each phrase we lift up...let us acknowledge what we are proclaiming, what we are committing to, what we are stating we believe...let us pray the words Jesus taught us with all our mind and all our heart.