

Sermon: C Proper 12 2016
St. Augustine's-in-the-Woods
24 July 2016
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Luke 11:1-13
Genesis 18:20-32
Colossians 2:6-19
Psalm 138

“Lord, teach us to pray.” Jesus replied to his disciple in just 38 words in our English translation of Luke’s gospel.

No seminar or workshop; no lecture or power-point; just 38 words.

We know those words and say them often; The Lord’s Prayer, the prayer that stays with us all our lives. Often it is the last thing a dying person can still say if it has been a lifelong prayer.

It is at our center as followers of Jesus.

Over the centuries it has been added to, elaborated, and even simplified, but its meaning remains the same and our need for it continues.

It begins with “Father,” a common Hebrew form of praise that Jesus utters in the familiar “Abba,” as in Daddy, a loving and understanding parent.

“Hallowed” (“Holy”) makes God’s name and existence different from ours.

God has power we don’t have, over a Kingdom we all yearn for.

The Lord’s prayer begins with praising God and then turns to us.

“Our daily bread” suggests all the things we need to survive not only

today, but in the eternity promised by Jesus--a heavenly banquet.

So this prayer is not only rooted in the present but takes us way beyond.

“Forgive us our sins” means we are praying to a merciful God who understands not only our human frailty but also our need for freedom from guilt over what we have done amiss.

“As we forgive everyone indebted to us” stands not as a prerequisite to God’s forgiveness, but as a way of being in the world that frees not only those whom we have held hostage to our hurts, but us as well, as we let go of not only the hurt, but also our anger at those who have hurt us. Years ago John Calvin noted that forgiving others puts US in a better place to receive God’s forgiveness.

“Do not bring us to the time of trial.” A lawyer friend of mine says Jesus put this in because he understood the trauma of trying a case! Surely it refers to all those things that threaten to undo us--temptations, afflictions over which we have no control.

I hear it as a plea for grace, God’s lovingkindness, to get us through whatever threatening situation comes along.

And that’s it--all 38 words worth! All we need, really.

Jesus then delivers a parable urging us to persist in prayer--keep on knocking on

God’s door, keep on asking, keep the conversation with God going.

Jesus then assures us that God is as kind as a loving parent who will give good things to a child who asks; no snakes or scorpions--very reassuring!

The basis of prayer, as Jesus has instructed here, is the relationship each person has with God and with his or her fellow human beings.

Prayer is conversational, intimate, and not dependent on knowing proper words. It should start with praise and thanksgiving to God, but can go anywhere from there if truly prayed from the heart.

The writer Anne Lamotte says for her there are really only two prayers:

“Thank you, thank you, thank you” & “Help me, help me, help me!”

--which is pretty much right on track with Jesus!

In our Old Testament lesson today we hear Abraham pleading with God to have mercy on the people of Sodom and Gomorrah who have broken an ancient law of the desert by not offering hospitality to travelers.

His argument with God resonates with Jesus' encouragement to be persistent in with God in prayer. I find Abraham's nagging God to be so very human and even amusing--as if he is challenging God to be kind and forgiving to the people--making sure that God is a god of mercy and not of revenge--as other ancient gods surely were.

In Paul's letter to the church at Colassae, we hear stunning words that contrast the perils of living for human values only that include deceit, greed, hate, and fear, with living for Christ who has drawn us to himself, left our sins on his Cross, raised us up, and given us God's power through the Spirit.

With God's power we are enabled to speak out, to do all we can for the good of all people, to live fully into the freedom God desires for us and for every human being.

Prayer has the power to not only keep us in touch with God, but also to focus us on implementing God's yearning for the establishment of God's kingdom, God's reign, in the here and now.

Prayer is transforming. It enables us to see amazing things God is doing, even when they are not what we thought we wanted. When we pray in God's Name, we become more alive, enabled to do things we never thought possible.

So be persistent; keep on asking, knocking on God's door--for yourself and for the world. God's grace comes to all who so desperately need it.

Lord Jesus, teach us to pray.

