

First Lessons: Colossians 2:6-19  
Psalm 138  
Gospel Lesson: Luke 11:1-13

The Seventh Sunday after Pentecost  
July 26, 2022

## **“Say What...?”** **Sermon by Pastor Paul Campbell**

Grace and peace to you from him who is, who was, and who is to come, Jesus the Christ our Lord. Amen.

True confession, I really wanted to preach on the snake and the scorpion part, where you're giving your children something that they weren't asking for and something that could be deadly. But I decided that's not going to be a good win for me for a sermon, so I decided to go with Luke and his version of the Lord's Prayer.

In our family as our children were growing up one of the phrases that came to be uttered on a regular basis was, "Say what?" That often happened when we were living up in the Twin Cities and I would say to one of the kids, or all the kids, "How about going out to the driveway and shoveling that eight inches of snow that fell overnight? Wouldn't that sound like fun?"

"Say what?"

Or in another season, "How about if you go out and mow or pull weeds, or whatever?"

"Say what?"

So that sort of became part of our litany and we got along together.

Well today we're going to look at the Lord's Prayer which is different than the one that we normally pray, which is found in Matthew. Two versions of the same prayer. So then following my litany we can say "Pray what?" Which version should we pray? They both come from gospels, Matthew and Luke. Why two versions of the Lord's prayer? To get to that point we're going to look at the context, the timing, and the audience of those two phrases.

Matthew is Jewish, and he is teaching Jews how to alter the prayer they've been praying for years to make it Christian. He's teaching them how to correct or in effect to fix their prayers. For example, in Matthew, Jesus at the end says, deliver us from evil, and some translations include from the devil. Well, that's a very heavy sort of theological concept, but the Jews needed to learn what that is all about. Then a footnote, if you look at the version here that we have in Matthew that we say in church, at the bottom where the words are in italics, that's called the doxology, and that wasn't even from the gospel writer. That was attached by the Church of England in 1549. So, when we pray this prayer it's a combination of scripture, Matthew, and the church.

Now we can get a clue why Luke's is shorter and simpler when we understand that Luke was a gentile and he was teaching gentiles about Jesus and how to pray. They weren't looking for theology, they didn't want to know much about the devil, they just wanted to know how to pray the Lord's Prayer as people newly converted to the Christian faith. Not surprising. When I was teaching confirmation and I was talking to the students about these versions they always wanted to study Luke. I said no, that's not what you're going to be praying in church, so we're going to do the long one. That always got a rousing boo from the kids. So it's very interesting to understand that there are two very distinct, different points of view. Different audiences, different teaching techniques when we talk about the Lord's prayer which leads us to how do we pray? How do we communicate ourselves to God? The gentiles just wanted to know how.

A few of you will remember the show *Dragnet* from the 1950s. The rest of you are too young, but that was a favorite show and I think it was 28 minutes long. It was about Sergeant Joe Friday and his colleagues always going out and solving a murder and he only had 28 minutes to do it, because that's how long the show was. Every show he would say the same thing, and those of us who were fans of *Dragnet* would wait for it because as he was interviewing people you know he had to move it along. So, if somebody was talking too long, he would say, "Just the facts ma'am, just the facts." He didn't need a lot of explanation, just give me the facts. So, this is Luke's mentality as he was trying to teach the gentiles. For Luke it was all about the daily bread. When he's talking the daily bread, he not talking about that thing we eat, he's talking about God giving us *everything* that we need. Maybe not everything that we *want*, but what God is giving us is a relationship, and prayer is part of this, giving us that relationship that we can take anywhere we go, anytime.

Now we know that there are other folks who want to teach about prayer who are often centered on greed. You can flip through the TV channels or scroll through the internet, and you can find preachers telling you that they can help you have fame and success and money and all of these types of things if you only believe in what they have to say to you. And after they get you hooked, then they say at the end of the program, don't forget to go to the payment site and enter your credit card number so that we can put that squeeze on you – to pray basically the prayer to them. Well, we know that God cannot be bought. On the cross Jesus did not pray for release from the cross, he did not pray God would come down and throw a lightning bolt and hit his executioners. On the cross Jesus prayed for the people around him, the people who didn't understand and the people who were grieving, he prayed for them. It's about relationship.

In my 43 years as pastor, I have learned a lot about prayer – not that I always got it right, but I've been at many bedsides when people are saying goodbye to their loved ones and the grief and the guilt that comes from a teenager who dies of a chemical that they were storing on their farm, or a woman who had just given birth to a stillborn baby. Those are times for prayer, but I never knew really what to say. Nothing was going to make that better, and so sometimes it's good just to be there. It's tough because we want to *fix* it don't, we? But we just can't fix it.

A few years ago when I was in my third year of seminary Donna and I were on internship in a congregation in Oregon and my mom called with the news that my dad was dying in Omaha. The congregation took up a collection and we had enough money for a couple of airline tickets and so we were on our way to Omaha preparing for that thing that you can never prepare for. So we were sitting in the hospital room and we would take turns and after a while the doctor told me that my dad's death was coming soon, so I volunteered to stay there with him and the rest of the family could go home. So I sat there and I looked at this sunrise that was coming up through the hospital window and I was praying and I was thinking. It was so quiet because when someone who is near death, you know, the doctors and the nurses really don't have anything to offer so they're not coming around. They more or less came once in a while to check on me, but there it was an almost eerie silence, but it was a time to really try to connect with God.

Shortly before dawn, I had ramped up my conversation with God and I said all right God, I got it. I know how this is going to work, I know what to say. Just then my dad went into a pre-terminal breathing. The nurse came and explained that to me. What he would do is he would gasp for air and then not breathe, and then gasp for air again, and not breathe. And I said, "God I got nothing here, I got nothing, I don't know what to do I need your help." Events can really get to us, and to go with parable that is in the gospel, without knowing it, I was knocking on the door. And God was opening that door, and was I prepared to walk through that door? So, it is a powerful, powerful parable.

There is no fixing it. One of the best things I learned in seminary is the ministry of presence. And I know the Stephen ministers do this too. There are times when the most important thing is to just *be there*. There is nothing you're going do to fix it, there is nothing you can do to really make it better. But your presence there is all the love that is needed. It may be that hug that they're looking for. So when

the family came, we were all around there and we all just spent some quiet time. I would utter a prayer that was certainly not adequate, but it was all I had. And God was there.

Author Anne Lamott said, "The two best prayers are 'Help me, help me, help me' and then 'thank you, thank you, thank you, thank you, thank you.'"

One more note on the knocking. The word that is in our gospel that is translated as 'persistence' can also be translated as 'be bold.' Be bold. When praying, be bold when asking for help. Be bold when you're looking for guidance and peace in your soul. Don't over analyze praying. There is no correct formula. But be bold.

So this week ponder your relationship with your creator, because that is what prayer is about it. It is God working in us, guiding us, loving us and sometimes it takes more door knocking than others, especially when we think we're in control. The door of God's guidance will always come and be with us, giving us trust and calm, and peace. And we sing, "It is well with my soul."

And that's the good news. Amen