

## “Lead Us in the Path of Jesus”

Matthew 4:1-11; 6:9-13, March 1, 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)

<sup>9</sup>“This is how you should pray:

Our Father in heaven,

let your name be kept holy.

<sup>10</sup>Let your kingdom come.

Let your will be done on earth

as it is done in heaven.

<sup>11</sup>Give us our daily bread today.

<sup>12</sup>Forgive us as we forgive others.

<sup>13</sup>Don’t allow us to be tempted.

Instead, rescue us from the evil one. 

<sup>14</sup>“If you forgive the failures of others, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. <sup>15</sup>But if you don’t forgive others, your Father will not forgive your failures.

### WHY PRAY?

We’ve been looking in-depth at what we’ve called “The Lord’s Prayer,” “The Our Father,” “The Abba Prayer,” lo these many weeks this winter.

We have delved-in, studied a little Greek, Hebrew and Aramaic, learned that this prayer, “The Great Prayer” has been central in the life and faith walk of the earliest Jesus followers, down through the ages, through myriad traditions and places, until today.

Useful for cooking and daily reflection and staying on the path of Jesus. Ancient recipe books: “Simmer the soup for 3 Lord’s Prayers, salt to taste, and eat!”

Today, we remind ourselves of the nuggets of inspiration and new understanding we have gleaned about this ancient and rich prayer, and also asked ourselves the question that underlies all:

Why do we pray? What *happens* when we pray—if we take this ancient prayer into our core and make it a part of us? Memorized at an early age for many of us; recited week after week in worship, or even daily. I know some of you have taken the suggestion to heart to pray it every day.

For Prayer—the Lord’s Prayer and *all* kinds of prayer are central to the walk of faith—all through the Hebrew scriptures and the Gospels and Epistles.

My friend and colleague Sarah Lund, answers that question in a simple and beautiful way:

“What happens when we pray. The quick answer is, ‘It is a divine mystery.’ Or more simply: nobody knows.

So what can I say?

I can say what happens to me when I pray...

I can tell you that prayer nourishes me like a banquet at a heavenly feast.

I can tell you that prayer stills my anxious spirit like a warm, caring hug.

I can tell you that prayer refreshes me like an invigorating walk on the beach.

I can tell you that prayer reminds me I am not alone like talking with a friend. I can tell you that prayer guides me like my GPS.

I can tell you that prayer grounds me like a trees’ deep roots.

I can tell you that prayer instills in me hope like the rising sun of a new day.”

## **LOOK BACK OVER THE LORD’S PRAYER**

### **Our Father, who art in Heaven.**

“Father of Us.” *All* of us. Our Householder. The one who cares for all in the household, like a loving parent a provider, Mother and Father of all. Overseeing daily life and food and a roof over heads. Much more than a biological father, but Creator, Protector, Provider and Model.

Father of Us is OUR father, not MY father. God is personal, yes, but personal *in community*. And calling God our Father is a political statement. To call God “Father,” means that Caesar, or any earthly ruler or

leader who calls for our allegiance is *not* our Father, Lord, or ruler. Not the true authority over us.

### **Hallowed Be Thy Name**

Holy. Hallowed—set apart. One we can never fully know this One. And that’s a *good* thing! For we cannot put God in a box. Cannot decide that how *we* name and think of God as the *only* way.

A reminder of our need for a sense of awe, mystery and wonder when approaching the Divine. A healthy and holy tension for us to keep in mind. Our father is up close and personal, but mysterious and holy too.

### **Thy Kingdom Come**

God’s realm or preference; God’s way of doing things —what the universe looks and feels like when the Holy One is running the zoo, so to speak! Not an earthly monarchy, but a “kindom”—a family, a community, a holy household.

A place, a realm, where the hungry are fed, the naked are clothed, the sick and imprisoned are visited. Where the Lion lies down with the Lamb. Where the birds find shade. A place to nest and rest. A haven. Where we, God’s people, put our heart and soul into building bridges instead of walls.

I love how Madeline L’Engle describes the Kingdom:

*Thy Kingdom come*. That is what co-creation with our Maker is all about, the coming of the kingdom. Our calling, our vocation in all we do and are to try to do is

to help in the furthering of the coming of the kingdom—a kingdom we do not know and cannot completely understand.....Being a loved and loving part of the body; praying together; singing together; forgiving and accepting forgiveness; eating together the good fruits of the earth; holding hands around the table as these fruits are blessed, in spontaneous joy and love, all these are foretastes.” (p. 137, *The Rock That is Higher*)

### **Thy Will Be Done**

“Not a statement of retreat or conciliation -- but an "on tiptoes" eagerness to see what the Father is doing in (and with) you.” (Kate Robertson)  
Not resignation, like Eeyore! “Oh well. Life is not going as I’d hoped, but “Thy will be done.”

But, in close relationship with our holy, loving God, we join hands and declare: “Thy will be done! Bring it on! Let’s see what we can do—bringing fierce love to reign and rule—on earth *and* in Heaven.

Thy Will be done is teamwork. Co-creating our lives with Christ. Being on tiptoes in every moment and in every prayer—eagerly awaiting, with excitement and great hope— to see what God in Christ will do with us and for the world.

### **Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread**

A reminder to live in abundance, not scarcity! That, if we are not afraid to ask for all our needs to be met, we can choose to thrive! Not just survive!! Ask enough for tomorrow! And the *next* day! Not just physical food,

but all our hungers and needs—spiritual, relational, emotional, mental—everything!

And—and a very important *and* it is: It’s not just praying for *my* daily bread. But for *enoughism!*

*A challenge* to God’s people—us! Do *all* have enough? The Lord’s Prayer proclaims, “No! And change is necessary.” When we pray this prayer, we make a commitment to jump-in with Jesus and give ALL bread.

A reminder from Jesus daily, that we don’t have a world hunger problem due to lack of food. We have a hunger problem—both physical and spiritual—due to lack of *distributive justice*. That we are to pray for abundance and act with abundance for *all*.

### **Forgive us Our Debts as We Forgive Our Debtors**

Mallory explored this with us in a brilliant, plot-twisting way. “Maybe this petition is pointing out the idea that the way we experience God’s forgiveness is *contingent* on the way we forgive others.”

Not that the *quality* of God’s forgiveness or character is anything less than amazing and beyond our comprehension—but that our ability to *experience* it might *just* be limited by our own small scope of perception. Our *own* boxes and attempts to put God and God’s love and grace in a small, limiting box.

“Suddenly, it isn’t just about me and my personal relationship with a God who loves me. Suddenly, there’s an expectation. Not

only do we receive forgiveness, but we are supposed to give it, too. Suddenly, this has implications for how I treat people around me. It asks me to dig deep and answer questions I would rather pretend weren't being asked.

"We have prayed for God's will to be enacted among us. We have prayed for our community to thrive and be sustained. And, now, we have prayed to experience the forgiveness of a glorious God who wants nothings more than to restore us to relationship."

I would add to Mallory's insightful urging on this: We also need to forgive one another for being *less* than we expected them to be. For not living up to *our* expectations. I need to forgive my brother or sister for not fulfilling the *image* that I had of them—a persona I might have placed on them. For not being perfect in my eyes. That's hard to do! I have found I've had to pray this prayer over and over in life—but it's helpful to do and oh, so freeing. "I forgive *you* for not living up to all *my* expectations of you."

### **Lead us not into temptation**

This is a tricky one for scholars, because it's been translated poorly from the earliest times. Probably because we humans tend to want to place blame somewhere, so when life gets tough, it must surely be "God testing us." We take ourselves off the hook when we find ourselves facing potential sin because of our own doing, and think that God "led us there!"

Pope Francis suggests a better translation for us to ponder: "do not let us fall into temptation," explaining that "I am the one who falls, it's not (God) pushing me into temptation to then see how I have fallen."

We know "temptation" will befall us in this lifetime and we pray for God's fortifying strength and resistance when it does, just as Jesus was upheld by the Father and tended by the angels in his time of trial and temptation in the wilderness.

### **But Deliver Us From Evil**

Satan as personified evil is a real force to be reckoned with in the scriptures. "Look God, I don't need testing from you and I certainly don't need being brought to the test by Satan." Would be a 1<sup>st</sup>-century Jewish way of saying this bluntly, in a personal relationship with God. We can do the same.

We pray, with the ancient Celts, to be: *free of misdeed and safe from all turmoil.*

### **For Thine Is the Kingdom and the Power and the Glory Forever, Amen.**

And finally, at the end of the Lord's Prayer, in our worship tradition is a Doxology, a word of praise. This was added by early Christians, and is not in scripture.

Here's your last "fun fact" for this series. It's also called an "*embolism!*" This tagline at the end of the prayer. What? Isn't that a brain bleed or some nasty medical crisis?

"Why did the Celts and other Christians feel the need to add these extra words to the prayer that Jesus taught? We can get a clue from even older meanings of "embolism." In Greek, an *embolus* was a **bottle**

**stopper**; something that plugged up a hole; these **stopper**; something that plugged up a hole; these extra prayer sentences may have worked as a spiritual “stopper,” ensuring that the power of Christ’s prayer would remain in the Celts’ hearts, not leak out and be *lost* in the tumult of everyday life. The Latin *embolus* is even more dynamic: the **piston** in a pump. [The Celts’ understanding] may have helped them transfer the power of Christ’s prayer into **action**....a reminder that the prayer is not meant to be recited so much as **lived**. (In *The Winged Man*, Kenneth McIntosh)

### **WHY PRAY THE LORD’S PRAYER?**

And now, we have come full circle: What happens when we pray?

How would you answer that for yourself? How is Christ’s prayer meant to be lived in *your* life? Not just recited, memorized, chanted mindlessly by rote?

Crossan suggests that we seek to *mature* in prayer. To go beyond childish notions of “what can prayer do for *me*? What can I ask of God and why doesn’t God gimme what I ask?”

“Maturity in prayer – and in theology – means working more and more *from* prayers of request (complaint or petition), *through* prayers of gratitude (thanksgiving or praise), and on *to* prayers of empowerment (participation or collaboration) –with

a God who is....like the air all around us... everywhere, for everyone, always and both totally free as well as absolutely necessary.” (The Greatest Prayer, p. 2, 28)

That we grow in our understanding of The Lord’s Prayer as praying for God’s intervention in *our* lives to God praying with us for *our* collaboration in what God is doing in the world? The Lord’s Prayer—a “radical manifesto and a hymn of hope for all humanity in language addressed to all the earth.”

So, as we sing this hymn of hope for all humanity, we pray for ourselves, our neighbors, all of creation. We collaborate *with* God to bring in and live in God’s Kindom, seeking to live in the Holy Household where all are cared for, provided for and protected. We pledge ourselves to putting our prayer into action—praying for abundant love and grace, wholeness and health of body, mind and soul—not just for ourselves but for all God’s beloved children.

We conclude our reflection on the Lord’s Prayer with this Early Celtic Embolism:

*Free us, O Lord, from every evil—past, present, and to come—and through the intercessions on our behalf of Your blessed Apostles Peter, Paul, and Patrick, give us life-giving peace in our time, that helped by the strength of Your mercy, we may be always free of misdeed and safe from all turmoil, through our Lord*

*Jesus Christ Who reigns with You and the Holy Spirit,  
God throughout all ages of ages. Amen.*