

Sermon on Luke 11: 1-13
7th Sunday after Pentecost, July 28, 2019
Lutheran Church of the Redeemer
By James Erlandson

In my 32 years of pastor ministry (about half of my lifetime), I have over and over been amazed by the power of certain prayers and scripture passages to speak to people of faith, of every age. The 23rd Psalm. The Beatitudes from Matthew. The Lord's Prayer. Some of these prayers and passages are raised up from the depths of memory even as memory fails. Take for instance, our brothers and sisters who suffer from dementia or Alzheimer's as they age. Time after time I have found how their ears perk up, their eyes focus, and they join in on the familiar words of confession and forgiveness, or Jesus' words of institution before receiving Holy Communion. It is one of my treasured memories in my father's last years, that when I gave him communion in his unfamiliar home of assisted living, as his memory began to fail, he could say every word of the Lord's Prayer. When he couldn't remember what he ate for breakfast or lunch, he knew his table prayer by heart: "God is great, God is good, and we thank him for our food", and could say it alone. In one of my most recent home visits, a beloved brother in Christ, whom many of you know very well, who was unable to track our conversation as he once could, joined right in on the Lord's Prayer when we began to pray the prayer – word for word! Is this prayer, and other words of faith, buried deep in the subconscious of the brain, and able to come up "on cue", or is it a "miracle of faith"? I don't think it is either-or. It happens all the time, with people who have committed these words to memory! It just reinforces the value of each one of us learning the core teachings of Jesus, and committing his words to memory, to call upon when we need them in daily life, when we hit the lowest moments in life, or need them in times of crisis.

On recent Sundays, the question has been: "*How shall we live?*" In today's gospel from Luke, Jesus' disciples saw Jesus praying, and asked him to teach them to pray, as John the Baptist taught his disciples. John was a well known teacher and prophet, who preached a gospel of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, which brought many people from Jerusalem and Judea to the Jordan River to listen and be baptized. When Jesus came upon the scene, and called disciples to follow him, they wanted to learn how to pray as they saw Jesus pray. So Jesus taught them what we know today as the Lord's Prayer. Maybe you know this prayer!
*When you pray, say: Father (Abba, "daddy"), hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread.
And forgive us our sins, for we forgive everyone indebted to us.
And do not bring us to the time of trial.*

That's it. A longer, more flowery version in Shakespearean language is the more "traditional" version which most Americans have memorized. But this is Luke's original prayer that Jesus taught.

It begins with the statement of God's holiness, as the Creator of the world – but one whom we can still call by the familiar term Father, or "Daddy". We stand in awe of the one who made all of this with such care. Our address for God recognizes the tension between the awesomeness of the One who made the universe in all its vastness, and the parent who speaks personally, who invites you and me to be in relationship, and pray constantly. We pause today on the first day of the week, to worship the Lord and praise God's name, the one who invites you and me to come to pray for our neighbor, our loved ones, as well as our own needs. For our Father has promised to listen, and hear our prayers – we know this because of God's Son, our Lord Jesus, who has had come to us with compassion and mercy.

Then Jesus prays, *Your kingdom come*. God's kingdom is already here: it comes even without our prayers, as Martin Luther said, but we ask that God's realm comes to us today! Jesus said that God's kingdom is in you, and me, through faith. God's realm is not only "up in the sky" somewhere, in heaven – God's realm is here with us, in our world today. We just seldom are aware of it, or recognize it when it comes. To me, it comes when you or I see an "outsider" as a neighbor, or an enemy as a friend, a subject of derision as a human being. I see God's kingdom come when people of faith go to the southern border to show compassion for migrants in detention, giving food and clothing before they are sent across the country to an unfamiliar place.

Give us today our daily bread. Well, most of our prayers are prayers of intercession, when we ask God to heal our loved ones, or grant us our requests for food, shelter, daily work and all we (and our families or communities) need from day to day. Luther says that God gives us daily bread without our prayer, even to all evil people, but we ask in this prayer that God helps us to recognize what our daily bread truly is and to receive it with thanksgiving. What is our daily bread? It may not be what we think, or limited to what we ask for. Daily bread can be what we DON'T think we need, those things that are essential for life, and not what we truly desire in our requests. Our daily bread may also include what our *neighbor* needs for life, and the needs of migrants and refugees, those who are in detention, separated from their families, or those in prison, whose needs we seldom pray for or consider. May God grant us wisdom and insight, and the gift of listening for our neighbor's need, and those of our enemies, that we may participate in a just world, where everyone has daily bread.

Forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us. We do? Oh, yes, we pray for God to forgive us, and we have heard from Jesus that

God our Father promises to forgive. It is an expectation of our faith, that God automatically forgives, which we may see as the “reward” for our faith. Especially when we repent, and are truly sorry for them. We have heard the good news that *nothing shall ever separate us from the love of God*. But this is not just our Christian “insurance policy”, taken out by our parents in baptism, which we can redeem even when we let the “certificate of forgiveness” sit in a dusty envelope, filed away in a safe deposit box. Jesus equates God’s forgiveness of our sins with OUR FORGIVENESS OF OTHERS, who may owe us a debt we could never forgive on our own! God forgives you and me, so why is it so hard for us to forgive another person who wrongs us? We are experts at holding grudges, and making others “earn” their forgiveness. But Christ calls us to reconciliation with our neighbor, just as Christ has reconciled us with God. This cost Jesus his blood, his very life, because this is not how things normally go in this world. If we were forgiving, we might welcome our southern neighbor families seeking asylum, fleeing north from gang violence and poverty, rather than building walls, blocking them from entering, or putting them in detention camps, just as we or our ancestors were once welcomed and received many years ago. Or, if your ancestors were brought here as indentured servants or slaves, abused and taken advantage of by people of this nation, then the call of Jesus to “*forgive us our sins*” takes on a new, poignant challenge. With or without reparations, the call of forgiveness comes. Brothers and sisters, we all have so many sins to forgive. Let us all learn to love one another, and reconcile with our neighbors, in the name of Jesus!

Finally, Jesus says, *do not bring us to the time of trial*. In the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus himself prayed: “Father, take this cup from me.” He would have preferred not to die on a cross. But in his next breath he said, “But not my will, but yours.” We all would prefer not to be challenged, or made to face a trial which we imagine is beyond our strength. But, that is not how the world works. We have plenty of challenges and trials in our lives, some more than others, some more than what we think is fair. However, Luther reminds us that we ask in this prayer that God would preserve and keep us, that the devil, the world and our flesh may not deceive or mislead us into false belief, despair, and other sins or shame, and that, although attacked by them, we may finally prevail and gain the victory.

We have many trials to face today, as individuals, as the Church, and as a nation. You and I have all kinds of daily trials, in doing the right thing, in getting along with our neighbors or in our own families, making a living or in matters of failing health. We pray that we are up to the task. In the Church, every congregation these days is feeling the challenge of dwindling numbers, the exodus of people who no longer can make a commitment of faith, with the resulting economic challenges this brings. Our own congregation of Redeemer faces our own financial crisis this year – similar to, but just larger than the financial crises of

years past, which seem to threaten our long-term existence, after almost 130 years of ministry. We have to face this challenge, just as we do the other trials of faith as Christians in our world, as our own country faces questions of our adherence to democracy, justice, and the belief that “all men – all people – are created equal.” Everything seems “up for grabs”, and it is so unsettling!

In other versions of the Lord’s Prayer, there is more. Jesus teaches us to pray *and deliver us from evil*. We ask God to deliver us from all kinds of evil that affect body, soul, property and reputation, and in our final hour, grant us a blessed end with grace into heaven. And finally, in our Lutheran ending, we say a prayer of faith, *for the kingdom, power and glory are yours, now and forever*. Our final statement of faith is that we are all in God’s hands. We cannot prevail in every challenge or trial, and in the end, we shall all die. But we commend ourselves to God, who has our good in God’s hands. May we all have the faith to trust in God’s mercy, and follow our Lord Jesus on the path which leads to life. Thanks be to God! Amen.