

MARCH 7 WORSHIP SERVICE

WELCOME AND OPENING PRAYER

Welcome to each one worshipping with us at Alexanderwohl – whether you're here, in the building or zooming in from your home or watching the recording; we're glad you're here! Let's take a moment now and greet one another. If you're here in person, I invite you to turn and greet those around you (greet...) and now I invite those with cameras to turn them on and greet one another on your screens (greet...) This morning in our Upside-Down King series, we'll focus on Luke 11 – Luke's particular way of telling the story of how Jesus taught his disciples to pray.

We'll take a couple of minutes to share opportunities for celebration and service:

- The flowers this morning are being shared with us by Glen Unrau and his family, for the occasion of celebrating Mary Lou's life; thank you for the gift of these lovely flowers.
- Les Flaming has been in the NMC this week with AFib. He was taken then to Wesley in Wichita, where he is now and is being treated for additional medical issues. Les and Ann appreciate our prayers.
- Irvin Goertzen will be moving from his duplex into a room at Bethesda – possibly as soon as this week. He also appreciates our prayers as he makes yet another big adjustment in his life.

While I read the words of **Psalms 85** now as our call to worship, Caleb will light the 4 candles representing the 4 Sundays until Easter:

*Lord, you were favorable to your land; you restored the fortunes of Jacob.
You forgave the iniquity of your people; you pardoned all their sin.
You withdrew all your wrath, you turned from your hot anger.
Restore us again, O God of our salvation, and put away your indignation toward us.
Will you be angry with us forever? Will you prolong your anger to all generations?
Will you not revive us again, so that your people may rejoice in you?
Show us your steadfast love, O Lord, and grant us your salvation.
Let me hear what God the Lord will speak, for he will speak peace to his people,
to his faithful, to those who turn to him in their hearts.
Surely his salvation is at hand for those who fear him,
that his glory may dwell in our land.
Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet; righteousness and peace will kiss each other.
Faithfulness will spring up from the ground,
and righteousness will look down from the sky.
The Lord will give what is good, and our land will yield its increase.
Righteousness will go before him, and will make a path for his steps.*

Let's pray – Lord God, we acknowledge with gratitude the presence of your Holy Spirit with us in this place. Let the words of our mouths and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you.

OFFERING PRAYER – PASTOR CALEB
(based on VT 1017, 1019, and Lord's prayer)

Creator God, who made all things

Your name is honored and set apart.

Through your goodness you have blessed us with good gifts:

Our time, our abilities, our possessions, our very personhood.

Give us what we need for each day,

so that we can be generous with what we have at each moment.

In your kingdom, there is always enough.

Use the gifts that we offer that your kingdom might more speedily come.

More than our offerings, we wish to give ourselves,

Through Jesus who gave himself for us, Amen

UPSIDE-DOWN PRAYER – PASTOR CALEB
Luke 11:1-4

Jesus' disciples observed him praying. Clearly prayer was integral to Jesus' mission for God's upside-down kingdom.

The disciples make a simple request: "teach us to pray."

I recall very little teaching about how to pray growing up. What was there to teach? You simply talk to God. More or less like you'd talk to someone else, though somehow it always seemed like you want it to be polished or sound good.

Why is prayer hard? Maybe for many of you it isn't.

It may be finding time to set aside, when our days are so busy and hectic. It can be hard to develop a sustainable habit. Even if you have time, the rest of your day invades your thoughts, and before long, time's up.

Maybe you've been "burned" by prayer. By that I mean, you prayed hard for something like healing for someone you love, and it wasn't answered. Either God wasn't there, didn't hear, or didn't care.

Maybe something about it feels like a pointless exercise. You are pretty sure you believe in God, but when it comes down to it, it doesn't feel like anyone's listening. It's hard to sustain one-way conversations.

If it is hard for you, there is some comfort that the disciples of Jesus had to ask for a lesson.

In the end, it's less about what we say (if anything at all) and more about opening ourselves to an awareness of God's presence.

I want us to go line by line through the prayer that Jesus taught, as recorded in Luke's gospel. For that reason, we'll focus just on verses one through four, though I wanted us to hear the longer passage, to hear what Jesus goes on to say.

As we go line by line, I have some images of a wooden cut-out of the Lord's prayer that my grandfather created years ago with the scroll-saw. The blueprint was not his; he must have found a pattern somewhere that he could use.

You might remember that I showed this a couple of years ago. Of course, the words won't be quite the same, as it is based on Matthew's version of the prayer.

Nevertheless, this intricate project shaped my own imagination when it comes to this prayer.

FATHER

Jesus probably taught the prayer in Aramaic, and the first word was probably "Abba," or "father." It is an intimate kind of address, relating to God as a parent and taking the posture of a child.

There are a few verses in the Old Testament that compare God to a father, such as Isaiah 63:16: "You, Lord, are our Father, our Redeemer from old is your name."

You might find it surprising to learn that there is never a time when God is addressed as "Father" in the Old Testament at the beginning of a prayer. It's not an entirely new name for God, because it was a part of the prayer language of Jesus' day.

But Jesus emphasized God's fatherly and motherly qualities. What that means is that all of us who relate to God this way become family to one another. Jesus is our brother, and we are sisters and brothers of each other, across divides of nation, language, class, and race.

We can't address God with a word for familial relationship without being related to everyone who addresses God in that way.

Some people have said that "Abba" is a child's word like "daddy" – this is only half-true: it was both a child's word and an adult word. Yet when you think about it, how many of us actually use the words "father" or "mother" when speaking to own parents?

As a young child, my dad wanted to be called "papa" as he called his dad, and eventually we switched to "dad." I wouldn't call him up and ask "how are you doing, father?" In English, "father" is a formal word.

Abba in contrast is an intimate word. Jesus teaches us to relate to God at an intimate way, and whatever name communicates that relationship best for you is appropriate for prayer.

HALLOWED BE YOUR NAME.

“Hallowed be your name” is religious speak for “let your name be set apart.” It originally meant God must not be reduced to the ideas that people have for their tribal and national gods.

We are all created in God’s image, both women and men, girls and boys, simply for being human – yet, we must avoid creating God in our image.

God’s character is above ours. On the one hand, we believe it is possible for people to have authentic encounters with God – both as witnessed in the stories of scripture and in our experience today.

On the other hand, God will always remain mystery. We can have real faith and openness to God’s reality without claiming to understand it. In this way, “set your name apart” seems to be a counterpoint to calling God “father” or “parent.” None of us can limit God to our own family.

YOUR KINGDOM COME.

“Your kingdom come” flows from “let your name be set apart.”

Just as God’s character is not limited by our selfishness, what we call God’s kingdom is not to be compared with human kingdoms, endeavors, and power structures.

We also cannot fully grasp God’s upside-down kingdom any more than we can grasp God. Jesus spent the whole of his ministry living out, teaching in parable, and dying for God’s upside-down kingdom.

We pray this line, both in grief at the brokenness of our world, and as tenacious faith that God is at work and it is possible to participate with God in that work.

There’s an ancient Jewish prayer called the Kaddish that begins:

Exalted and hallowed be his great name

*In the world which he created
according to his will.*

May he let his kingdom rule

In your lifetime and in your days...

Do you notice the parallels? It’s not that Jesus somehow took his prayer from an early form of the Kaddish, or that the Kaddish borrowed from Jesus’ prayer. What this demonstrates is that Jesus’ prayer is very Jewish. Jesus drew from the religious language of his people.

GIVE US EACH DAY OUR DAILY BREAD.

Bread is a theme that shows up plenty in the gospel stories of Jesus.

There’s Jesus’ temptation to turn stones into bread before he began; there’s the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves and fish, and finally last week we learned how Jesus sent his

disciples out without extra bread, as they had to knock on doors until someone opened up their hospitality to them. Their prayer was literally “give us this day our daily bread.”

This is an upside-down prayer to have just what we need in the present moment. To pray this is both to trust God to provide, and to change ourselves to become more aware of what we truly need or don't need in order to be at peace.

There's an interesting debate about the word translated “daily.” No one really knows what it means, because it is so rare.

It could mean bread for **tomorrow** or the **coming day**; it could mean bread **just for today**; and it could mean **necessary** or essential bread -- just enough bread to meet our needs, “sufficient unto the day.”

Proverbs 30:8 says “give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that I need.”

Many interpreters look back to the story of the Israelites gathering manna in the wilderness, when they were only allowed to gather enough for each day, as it would rot before the next.

At any rate, the uncertainty among these possible meanings doesn't change the basic idea. You're not praying for whatever you'd dream of having, and certainly not praying for a lifetime's supply. You're praying for what you need.

AND FORGIVE US OUR SINS, FOR WE OURSELVES FORGIVE EVERYONE INDEBTED TO US.

Remember when Jesus inaugurated his mission by “proclaiming release to the captives”? It is the same concept. Forgiveness is a kind of release. The same word was used for forgiving a debt, setting a person free, and forgiving another's harm or wrong.

If Jesus' taught his prayer in Aramaic, he probably used a common word for “debt.” In the Judaism of Jesus' day, sin was often thought of as a kind of “debt.” Our wrongdoing leaves us in a place of great indebtedness to God, which is why debt and forgiving of debts shows up so often in Jesus' parables.

Luke's version of the prayer captures both the sin idea and the debt idea. Jesus didn't teach a way to repay our debt to God. Jesus taught that God is merciful and willing to remit our indebtedness, so long as we are doing that for others.

The wording of the second half in Luke is striking: “for we ourselves forgive those who owe us.” They go hand in hand. This is the upside-down economy Jesus proclaims.

So was Jesus really talking about sin as moral failing, using “monetary debt” as a comparison? Or did Jesus also teach a forgiveness of monetary debts to free people from literal poverty? If the sermon on the mount is any indication, it was surely both.

AND DO NOT BRING US TO THE TIME OF TRIAL.

This last line is also shortened in Luke, as it lacks “deliver us from the evil one.”

You are probably more familiar with “lead us not into temptation.” So, is it trial or temptation?

It is probably both. The word specifically means “testing,” and we can be tested by temptation to sin, or tested by hardship and suffering. The prayer doesn’t choose one meaning over the other.

Jesus’ prayer also doesn’t answer the question many have wondered: does God send testing? Is it the devil? Is it just life? Are painful experiences that test us, God’s will?

If it is appropriate to pray “do not bring us into testing,” then that surely doesn’t mean every test is willed by God.

The examples in the teaching Jesus gives in the following verse all seem to encourage persistence.

Keep asking. Don’t give up. “Seek and you will find” language isn’t a genie in the bottle approach to prayer. Luke doesn’t promise just any result, but the gift of the Spirit.

Sometimes the result of persistent prayer will be a change in us, not the answer we were originally looking for. What we receive is finally an ability to see God’s grace in reality as it is, more clarity of God’s will within our lives, and inner strength through the Spirit within us.

Asking God for what we need is not simply a useless exercise, supposing God would know before we ask. It is a way to cooperate with God in what God is doing.

CONCLUSION

We can learn how to pray together, and there is so much more that could be said on this topic. Some of you have regular rhythms of spiritual disciplines, while many of us struggle to find a way to be consistent, or we may feel the barrage of distracting thoughts prevents us from praying “correctly.”

It is a learning process, and there are a variety of valid ways to build in practices that connect us with God, nature, our inner selves, or the people most important to us.

For today, our focus is simply on the simple words of the prayer Jesus taught.

If you set aside a few brief spaces in your day – morning, noon, and evening, for example, go through the lines of Jesus’ prayer slowly.

You won’t feel anything at first. With time, you might hear new meaning in the words. Maybe something in your heart will come to mind in connection with the phrases of the prayer – someone you need to forgive.

Something you carry shame about for which you need forgiveness.

Perspective on something challenging you are going through.

A reminder that you have what you need for today.

A longing for God’s kingdom to come to light in the midst of a broken situation.

A sense that God is close and that you belong in this world.

As I prepared for this, I encountered the idea that maybe prayer isn't initiated by us. It's initiated by God, who is always present. Prayer happens when we respond to that constant invitation.

Somehow that's a comforting idea, just as I find it helpful to think of prayer as "showing up" to God and simply to reality that is bigger than ourselves.

TRANSITION TO CONFESSION AND ASSURANCE

Father, hallowed be your name.

Your kingdom come.

Give us each day our daily bread.

And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us.

And do not bring us to the time of trial."

During the time of **silence**, recall the lines of Jesus' prayer; is there one line of the prayer that makes you pause? Stay with those words. Ask God for the grace to let those words truly be your prayer and for the insight into why you are needing this right now.