

## 7/30/23 WORSHIP SERVICE

### WELCOME – PASTOR CALEB YODER

Welcome to Alexanderwohl on this special Sunday. We welcome also those who are present on Zoom. The joke I saw recently was “a warm welcome to everyone here this morning who forgot they’re not on Zoom” to a room full of people half-asleep and in pajamas or in the process of getting dressed. Fortunately, I don’t think that’s us.

It is hard to believe that this is my last Sunday with you as your pastor.

This day came perhaps a little too quickly. It is kind of bittersweet. Good-byes are always hard.

We are grateful for the friendships and supportive relationships that we have had here at Alexanderwohl. We will miss you.

Today’s service centers around the pray that Jesus taught his disciples – a simple prayer that is familiar and overlooked, and with brevity and simplicity includes all the dimensions of peace.

### INVOCATION

Abba God,

You are the source of all that there is. Your glory is beyond the sky and beyond our comprehension.

Yet you are the God of hidden spaces. You hear our prayers spoken in private with the intimacy of a parent. You are with us, and a part of every moment as we invite you into the moments of joy and of heartbreak.

You are the source of love and redemption. May your kingdom come in our midst. May your presence grace our time of worship. Amen

### MORNING PRAYER – PASTOR LOIS HARDER

To begin and end our time of prayer this morning we’ll sing together number 685. Karen will play through it once, we’ll sing it once, I’ll offer a spoken prayer and then we’ll end with singing it once more. We’ll sing Lord, hear OUR prayer, come, and listen to US. #685...

O God, you bring us together to pray as one body, to sing together, to focus our thoughts together and to hear us and answer us. Thank you for your faithfulness to us, God. Thank you that you have created each one of us in your image. Thank you for sending Jesus to show us how you are, to show us how we can be, to teach us to pray.

God, we thank you for this time of worship and fellowship, for your love that brings us together and gives us what we need for each day. With grateful hearts, we offer you our concerns, our fears and longings and our petitions.

We see and feel the earth groaning under the weight of human neglect and mistreatment. We acknowledge and confess our own complicity in systems that are beyond our control that contribute to the earth's dis-ease and warming. We pray for openness and willingness to change on the part of people who have resources and power to make needed changes. We pray for your mercy on those who are suffering the most immediate consequences.

O God, we pray for those we know and love who are struggling with illness or discomfort. This morning we pray especially for Ronda Lee and her daughter Maty as she recovers from surgery. Thank you God that Ronda is able to be there with her now and offer her support. We pray for those in Maty's family who are sick with covid. Be present with each of them, God as this has been such a long road to recovery already – give them perseverance, encouragement and healing.

We pray your blessing God on those who are working to make preparations for Threshing Days. May their efforts be rewarded with people who come to Goessel to learn, to enjoy and to be made welcome.

It will soon be time for college students to think about moving into dorms or apartments, beginning new academic challenges and meeting lots of new people. Be present with each student, loving God. May they feel your love and support as they prepare for this new adventure. And be also with their parents and families as they anticipate adjustments and changes in their lives as well.

Loving God we pray for Caleb and Beth, Austin and Josiah. We thank you for their time here at Alexanderwohl, for the many ways they have shared their gifts with us and for the ways that our lives and stories and faith have intersected in deep and meaningful ways. We pray your blessing on them especially in the coming days and weeks as they move and experience so many new things. Be with each of them in their unique situations. Hold them in your love and courage, inspire them with your Spirit's presence and guidance, and may they feel our support and encouragement on their way. O Lord, hear our prayers...

#### PRAYER OF DEDICATION

For each gift of money, of time and of skills that is offered to honor you, we thank you God. Bless each one who gives and use each gift to bring the presence of your kingdom closer to this earth. We pray in Jesus' name. amen.

#### PRAYING FOR GOD'S KINGDOM – PASTOR CALEB

Matthew 5:5-13

The prayer that Jesus taught his disciples is one of the first prayers that I learned. I will always associate it with this wooden relief Lord's Prayer that my grandfather made with a scroll saw – he made numerous copies, and this is a picture of the one I inherited. It is part of the familiarity of the prayer, but it also always gave the prayer an exalted feel to me.

Because this prayer is so familiar, it is easy to overlook or miss the wisdom in its simplicity. I've found that it can be a prayer to turn to when we don't have words to pray, as well as a model for offering our thoughts and concerns to God.

I know someone who would offer to pray for me after meeting for coffee. He always arranged the words of his prayer based on the outline of Jesus' prayer.

In our current worship series, we have been emphasizing the multiple dimensions of the peace that God desires for us – this includes peace with God, peace within our hearts, peace with one another, and peace with God's creation. As we will see, you can find all of these dimensions of peace within the prayer.

In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus' prayer is presented in the context of teaching about prayer. The Jewish tradition had memorized prayers to be recited three times a day. Some religious people of Jesus' day turned prayer into an activity they would perform in public in order to impress people with their supposed righteousness. We abuse prayer when we do it for show. Jesus teaches that true prayer has its own intrinsic reward as connection to God.

"Pray to your father who is hidden or in secret." That wording is interesting to me. It's not just an instruction to pray in a private place that isn't on display, but acknowledging that God is present in these hidden spaces and sees all that happens in the recesses of our hearts.

Many people have asked over the centuries why pray when God knows what we need before we ask (as Jesus says). Yet any of the many ways that we can pray are part of having a relationship with God. We are reminded of God's presence and make ourselves present to God when we pray.

It is not that God is only present some of the time, but that prayer is those moments of the day when we make ourselves aware of God's presence.

#### JESUS' PRAYER

Jesus addresses God as "father" or most likely the Aramaic word "Abba." This was not unheard of in Jesus' day, but if you look, you will not find a prayer in the Old Testament where God is addressed as "father."

This language gives a sense of intimacy to our relationship with God. Rather than subservient groveling before a distant tyrant, this prayer expresses the confidence of relationship with a nurturing parent.

The interesting thing about Jesus' prayer – after Jesus' instruction to pray in private, is that it uses the pronoun "our/us." That plural pronoun reminds us that we are part of a broader family of sisters and brothers that relate together to God as our parent. Here we have the dimension of not only of peace with God, but also implicitly peace with one another.

The praise of the prayer (your name be kept holy), says not only that God's name is above every other name, but that we must choose to recognize that God is Other and mystery. In a sense

there's a paradox between calling God "father" (since we usually know our fathers well), and calling God "holy," which establishes God's transcendence and difference from our humanity.

The heart of the prayer is the petition for God's kingdom to be seen on earth as in heaven. Heaven is the dimension of reality in which God's will, God's loving intentions are fulfilled. This acknowledges that what we experience on earth is not in line with God's will.

God gives freedom to the universe/world. God does not micromanage or tightly control everything, and our human sin, brokenness, and harm that compounds our suffering in our earthly lives.

**"God's kingdom"** is the name for the reality of God's total restoration and healing and it names something we don't fully understand. We pray to be able to see God's kingdom.

Jesus' teaching in parable gets at the fact that God's kingdom is a little beyond our grasp. We get glimpses. The life of faith is learning to recognize the reality of God's will being done and participating in doing God's will.

The language of "on earth as it is in heaven," reminds us of the crucial dimension of working toward peace in our relationship with creation, which we have talked about in recent weeks.

**"Give us this day our daily bread"** is a petition that models asking for what we need, and not more than what we need.

The word translated "daily" is a very unusual word that no one is totally sure of the correct meaning. Depending on the Aramaic word behind this, it's possible the original meaning was "Give us today the bread we need," which underlines the same theme all the more.

This line recognizes that we are creatures with bodies. We are not pure spirits. We can have peace within ourselves by acknowledging what we need and know that our loving God wants us to have what we need.

Sometimes, however, we have to live with trust in the midst of uncertainty about tomorrow – finding contentment in today and in the provision and strength that we have today, rather than expecting as we do in our affluent culture to have all our tomorrows planned and guaranteed.

"Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors" expresses what it means to live in peace with one another.

In the Aramaic language that Jesus surely taught in, the word for "sin" and "debt" is one and the same. That helps us make sense of this line. The words for forgiveness imply "letting go" or "releasing" as a creditor might release a debt rather than demand its repayment.

This is a primary aspect of life in God's kingdom. I like to think that Jesus' prayer addresses both forgiveness of personal offenses or wrongs as well as actual monetary debt. We know that forgiveness is a journey and doesn't happen overnight. Reconciliation is even more a journey and is ultimately God's work. We do harm when we ask someone who is traumatized to reconcile or quickly forgive.

Yet “letting go” is part of anyone’s journey toward healing. We let go for our own sake as much as for the sake of the other.

#### ON STAYING COOL-HEADED IN TIMES OF TRIAL

While the traditional wording is “lead us not into temptation,” the meaning could include trials, testing, or adversity of any kind, including temptation to act out of selfishness.

Often times we make poorer choices or fall short of our best selves when under stress.

There’s a story I want to tell that I haven’t had a chance to.

At Christmas time in 2014, my family visited me in Ecuador. This included my parents, sisters, brother-in-law, and my grandfather. We borrowed a van from a church member in order to do sight-seeing.

It fortunately held out until the final day. We were a couple of hours away from Quito, driving up a hill when the drive belt broke. We were at the side of a busy four-lane road.

I didn’t know that it is illegal to leave your vehicle unattended at the side of the road in Ecuador, or that there is a public towing service.

I couldn’t get a hold of the owner of the van right away. In the moment of stress, all I could think of was to flag down a bus so that the family could head toward Quito and we could get somewhere where we could get help. The owner of the van was a little irate that we had left the van, and said we could get a tow service at the nearest toll booth.

So I got my family to the next toll booth. It turned out the closest one to the van would have been in the opposite direction.

Long story short, all my family members, none of whom speak Spanish stayed at this toll area, while I took another bus back in the direction of the van to meet a private tow-service at the van.

With the van loaded on the back of the tow-truck, the next challenge was how to get my family back to Quito when I’m the only one that speaks Spanish.

The solution was that they all rode in the van on top of the bed of the tow truck, while I rode in the cab with the tow-truck driver, all the ways on the winding roads back to Quito.

That turned a few heads, for sure!

Needless to say, this was a stressful situation in which it was difficult to keep my cool. But not every stressful situation works out in the end and turns into a funny story. We also face situations of great loss, great pain, or great wounds.

We expect life to be difficult, and specifically the life of faith to be difficult. We don’t interpret every test as deliberately placed there by God, but Jesus’ prayer encourages the trust that God will give us what we need for each day and is present to us in the struggles and challenges that we do face.

The Spirit of God continues to work for our healing in the wake of our many wounds.

#### CONCLUSION

Friends, I recognize that a lot has happened in the years that we have been at Alexanderwohl. I have grown as a person and as a pastor. The congregation has changed. We've experienced the challenges of Covid, and missed seeing familiar faces. We are now a smaller group than before.

We also have welcomed some new faces, and embraced new energy. We have reflected on our shared faith and who we are called to be. Many of you have shown deep commitment to this congregation and a willingness to give of your time and gifts.

There will be challenges ahead with the transition of pastoral leadership.

My prayer for Alexanderwohl is that God would daily provide the energy, time, strength, and wisdom to be the church in this community in order to both share the goodness of supporting relationships with one another that encourage mutual transformation, as well as bearing the light of Christ as you bless and respond to the needs of the surrounding community. May you be gracious with one another and with yourselves. Risk saying whatever is close to your heart.

There may be changes ahead. Change can be hard, and it never invalidates the goodness of what came before. Yet we must always be open to new gifts, new wine that God is offering. Sometimes that means letting go – just as we noted earlier that forgiveness is a form of letting go.

Thank you for embracing me as a relatively young and inexperienced pastor, for allowing me to be myself, make mistakes, and offer my relative strengths.

We are also deeply grateful for the relationships and friendships that we have formed here. You have left as lasting an imprint on us as I'm sure we have on you.

Our time in Kansas corresponds pretty nearly with our son Austin's lifespan. He has changed a lot since being a newborn baby to being an energetic and inquisitive 6½ year old. So we all have changed a lot.

And yet God's love and faithfulness and the core of our faith remain the same.

May God continue to bless this congregation in the years to come as God has done over the many years past.

#### BENEDICTION

Go in the love of the Holy One.

May God grant you what you need for each day,  
sustain you through trials,  
and may you be empowered to live into God's wondrous reign.