

And finally Jesus says don't be afraid to ask for what you need, even for what you think you need. As loving parents provide for their children, how much more will our Father in heaven give us what we truly need.

Amen!! Thanks be to God!!

The Lord's Prayer (A Celtic Version by Jim Cotter, UiW2)

**Life Giver, Pain Bearer, Love Maker
Source of all that is and that shall be
Father and Mother of us all,
Loving God, in whom is heaven**

**The hallowing of your name echo through the universe!
The way of your justice be followed by all peoples of the world!
Your heavenly will be done by all created beings!
Your reign of peace and freedom
sustain our hope and come on earth.**

**With the bread that we need today, feed us.
In the hurts we absorb from one another, forgive us.
In times of temptation and test, strengthen us.
From trials too great to endure, spare us.
From the grip of all that is evil, free us.**

**For you reign in the glory of the power that is love,
now and forever. Amen.**

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A Message from Mark!

Praying Practice

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Scripture: Luke 11: 1-13

In a nationwide poll, church people of all denominations were asked the question: "*What topic would like your minister to preach about more often?*" What do you think it is? What would your answer be? Well, in this particular poll, the winner by a landslide was "Prayer." People wanted to hear more about prayer.

That's certainly not a new request. In fact, in the New Testament gospels, the only time that the disciples ask Jesus to teach them about something is the instance we have recorded in our reading from Luke this morning.

In our text, the disciples take the initiative and come to Jesus and ask, "*Lord, teach us to pray.*" Perhaps the reason that ministers don't preach more about prayer is that none of us fully understands or comprehends exactly what prayer is all about.

Attitudes about prayer range from, on the one hand, a simplistic and mechanical view that you ask God to do something, and God does it! As if God were some sort of divine Genie-in-a-bottle at our beck and call who answers our wishes whenever we feel we have a need for something.

On the other hand, there are those who say that prayer really doesn't do anything at all, that all we're doing is talking to ourselves.

After all, they say, how dare we presume that God is going to alter or change the course of the universe simply because we ask God to.

And then there are those who see prayer a bit like a spare tyre, to be used only in an emergency. We go about our days pretty much self-sufficient, doing what we have to do to make it. But when something too big comes along that we can't handle by ourselves, then we turn to God in a panic prayer asking for help.

People have all sorts of notions about prayer. A woman from one of my former parishes wrote to me after we'd run a prayer retreat saying, *"Please publish my thanks to God for allowing my nephew to get his drivers licence even though he has very poor eyesight."* My response to that would be, *"Drivers beware!"* or *"Licence Testers, please do your job!"* That's hardly the kind of answer to prayer we want to hear about!

Prayer has got to be something more than asking God to pull a fast one for our advantage, or to give us the winning Tatts numbers, or whatever. And prayer has got to be something more than just an internal dialog we have with ourselves. When we look at Jesus' response to the disciples' question, *"Lord, teach us to pray,"* we easily recognise the familiar words and pattern of the Lord's Prayer.

If this is what Jesus taught his disciples in response to their question, *"Lord, teach us to pray,"* then we can see it both as a prayer to be prayed, and also as a model that forms the basis; the pattern for all other prayers that we pray to God. When we look at it from that perspective, the first thing that we see is that Jesus invites us to call upon the almighty, all powerful, creator of this vast universe as **"Father."**

In the Aramaic language that Jesus spoke, the word he used here is "Abba." This is the very word that little children would use in calling their father. It could very easily be translated as "daddy". And this is even more significant when we remember that Jesus is speaking out of a culture and religion that held God in such a highly exalted state that they would not even say out-loud the divine name of God, even in prayer!

The main issue of the parable is not so much his persistence in asking, but rather that he had the audacity, the boldness to go pounding on his neighbour's door in the middle of the night to ask for a special favor.

And isn't it the same for us? Stop and think about it! The boldness we demonstrate, the audacity we have to actually go to the Lord God Almighty, the King of the universe, with our sometimes petty little requests and concerns!

And yet Jesus says, *"Ask, and it will be given you. Seek, and you will find. Knock, and the door will be opened for you."*

Look at yourself, Jesus says. If your dear little son or daughter asks you for something to eat, are you going to give something which would harm them? Of course not!

As sinful as we are, we know how to give good things to our children! How much more... How much more will our loving Father in heaven give the good gifts of the Holy Spirit to his dearly beloved children.

And just as a loving parent will give their child what is good and right and helpful, not necessarily everything the child wants or thinks she/he needs, how much more, how much more will our heavenly Father give the greatest gifts of all - the peace, love, and forgiveness of the Holy Spirit to all who call upon the Lord.

The disciples asked Jesus, *"Lord, teach us to pray."* So Jesus did.

First, Jesus invites us to call upon God as our Father, our Daddy. Jesus invites us to see prayer as an invitation to crawl up into God's gracious lap and feel God's loving arms around us.

Second, Jesus says Praise God's name. Remember that God alone is the Lord, the Almighty. Yes, we may be God's beloved children. But remember who's who, and keep that perspective in mind.

- **God is the Creator - I am the creature.**
- **God is the Lord and Master - I am the servant.**
- **God is the Parent - I am the child.**

Every prayer needs to include an element of praise and adoration to help us remember who God is and who we are, and to keep that all-important relationship in perspective. God is not a Genie-in-a-bottle at our beck and call. But at the same time, God, the creator and ruler of the universe, whom we praise and honor, this same God invites us into a close personal relationship.

And then finally, after we address God Father, Daddy, and realise what that means, and then worship and praise almighty God in glory and splendor, then, Jesus shows us we should not be afraid or embarrassed or reluctant to ask God for the things we think we need.

Jesus taught us to pray: Give us each day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins.... And do not bring us to the time of trial. **Did you hear that?** Jesus invites us to ask God for what we need - whether that need be physical, spiritual, or emotional. And we don't have to add, *"If it be your will."* Jesus tells us that our physical and spiritual, and emotional well being is God's will for us.

Jesus emphasises this with a parable about a man who has some surprise guests arrive at his home in the middle of the night. He has no food to serve them, so he goes next door, pounds on his neighbour's door, wakes up the whole family, and asks for some food to serve his guests.

Now, from the way we usually hear this parable, it sounds like the sleeping neighbour is a bit reluctant to get up in the middle of the night for some caring and sharing! And we hear that it's only because of absolute persistence that he finally gives in to the request. But that's not the point. You see, one of the customs of that culture was that you had a sacred obligation to help out your neighbor in need. The man with the surprise guests knew that his neighbour would help him if he asked for it. That was a given.

God is so majestic and revered and so highly regarded that they dare not even utter his name! And it is to these people, to this culture and religion, that Jesus said, *"When you pray, say 'Daddy,' 'Papa,' 'Father.'"*

Jesus is inviting us to see the Almighty God not as some high, lofty, distant, potentate who sits in heaven far and remote from our needs and pain and feelings....but rather when we pray, we are to see God as if we are a little child, curled up in our daddy's lap with his arms around us, and we feel totally safe and secure in his presence. Imagine that! Jesus teaches us to call God "Daddy!"

Now I well realise that the word **"father"** can have different meanings to different people. Not all of us were blessed with caring, loving, compassionate parents. For some of us, the word **"father"** or **"mother"** may bring up images and memories of abuse, neglect, anger, alcoholism - someone to fear, someone to hide from.

But I hope that all of us would be able to see in Jesus' prayer a good Father, a God of love, mercy, care, compassion, gentleness, forgiveness, a God with a big lap and loving arms and gentle hands - the kind of Father we wish all earthly fathers and mothers would be like.

The second part of the Lord's Prayer focuses our attention on praise and adoration. *"Hallowed be your name. Your Kingdom come."* God may be our kind, loving Father, but God is still God - the creator and the ruler of the universe. In the light of that, we need these words of prayer and praise to remind us who God is, and who we are, and to keep things in perspective.

Too often we are tempted to play God, to be like God in our own eyes. We want to make a name for ourselves - **Hallowed by my name!** We want to establish our own kingdoms - **My kingdom come!**

But in this part of the prayer we remember who God is and where we fit into the scheme of things.