

Luke 11:1-13 (NRSV)

The Lord's Prayer

11 He was praying in a certain place, and after he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples." ² He said to them, "When you pray, say: Father, hallowed be your name.

Your kingdom come.

³ Give us each day our daily bread.

⁴ And forgive us our sins,

for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us.

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

Perseverance in Prayer

⁵ And he said to them, "Suppose one of you has a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; ⁶ for a friend of mine has arrived, and I have nothing to set before him.' ⁷ And he answers from within, 'Do not bother me; the door has already been locked, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.' ⁸ I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, at least because of his persistence he will get up and give him whatever he needs.

⁹ "So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. ¹⁰ For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. ¹¹ Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for a fish, will give a snake instead of a fish? ¹² Or if the child asks for an egg, will

give a scorpion? ¹³ If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”

David's prayer

I've had a month-long journey to get to this sermon. Joe gave the staff his schedule about four weeks ago, and about three weeks ago he asked me to preach for this specific Sunday. I already knew which weeks I'd be gone and I knew that this was not one of the Sundays that I would be out of town. So I said “yes” immediately.

But I hadn't really stopped to process the whole of my calendar and realize that I would be returning in a sleep-deprived state from a youth retreat. Or that I'd be using my precious free time while I was there all week to begin writing. And I certainly had no idea back when I said “yes” how God was going to be weaving these words that I just read into my life this summer.

We know these words. We really, really know them. During the 11:00 service we say “The Lord's Prayer” on a weekly basis, either at the end of the Prayers of the People or as a part of the communion liturgy. We use this in ecumenical settings, because it doesn't matter if you're Baptist or Anglican or Methodist or Catholic or non-denominational; everybody knows this one and uses it. I ran cross country in high school. And of course being at a public high school, we couldn't have an official team prayer, anything school-sanctioned or faculty-led. But we student athletes chose to pray together before every match. We'd circle up, put our

hands in, and all say The Lord's Prayer because we knew that everyone knew it. Because it doesn't matter what you believe about creeds or theology or ecclesiology; these words are in everybody's Bible. They're even in there twice. We get the longer, slightly more familiar version of it in Matthew chapter 6, and this one here in Luke.

So we know these words, right? We say them all the time, right? Do we stop and think about them?

My family moved to Elizabeth City in April of 2000. And at that time my brother was in second grade, so he was 8 years old. And he was in worship one Sunday morning and he was standing next to a First UMC member who is about 45 years older than him (and who may or may not choose to identify herself). But the church member realized about halfway through the service that all these things like the Apostle's Creed and the Lord's Prayer that she was reading out of the hymnal, my 8-year-old brother had memorized and he was just reciting them off, off the top of his head.

And of course as she thought to herself "this elementary schooler is showing me up," and she slid her hymnal back into the pocket of the pew, she realized she could do the same thing. Because like Colin, she'd been saying these words every week since she was a small child. But this was an opportunity to think about them.

My recent opportunity to start thinking about these words came as I sat down to a district meeting at the beginning of this month. I sat down in the Mission Strategy Core Team next to the Reverend Susie Fitch-Slater, who brought our opening devotional that morning. Many of you know Pastor Susie, because she has served in this district for many years, from

Stumpy Point to Edenton to Avon to Creswell to Currituck. And I got to know her because for twelve years, beginning about the time I was a senior in high school until 18 months ago when crazily enough I got to succeed her in this position, she was our District Youth Coordinator. And so I knew when I got to this meeting and she was doing the teaching that I needed to start taking notes, because she still takes me to school like she did when I was 17.

And the first thing she pointed out to us as she taught on The Lord's Prayer was that Jesus' disciples never asked him how to preach. They never asked him how to preach. He sends them out in twos. He sends out the 12. And he sends out the 70. Just before the Ascension he gives the apostles the Great Commission to go and to "make disciples" and to "teach them." His disciples don't say "how do we do that?" "Should we write a three-point sermon?" "Does it have to be a 'testimony' *per se* or is just a 'God story' okay?" They don't ask him any of that stuff. They don't ask him any questions about preaching or teaching or sharing their faith. They ask him how to pray.

One of the disciples at the beginning of this passage says "Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples." They knew John had disciples. And they knew that John taught them to pray. So they knew that's what they were getting into when they signed up. When Jesus Called them and they responded, they weren't thinking "I'm getting a seminary course in apologetics or homiletics!" They were thinking "this dude is gonna teach me to pray like he does."

Since Pastor Susie transitioned out of the District Youth Coordinator role, she is now our District Prayer Coordinator. And that morning she took us around the hexagon, showing us the mechanics of praying the Lord's Prayer. Which I imagine a lot of preachers are doing this

morning. But I'm not kidding when I say that I look up to Pastor Susie, and I want to pray the way she does. And so much more than the analysis we did that day- which, don't get me wrong, I loved, because I am absolutely a church nerd- what stuck with me is one of her habits that she's developed. She has an alarm set on her phone. It goes off at noon every day, and when it does, she says the Lord's Prayer. No matter what's going on that day. Even on Sundays. If she's still preaching when that alarm goes off, she says "Hold on. Let's do this!" and the whole congregation says it with her. But more than just a habit, she's developed intention. A rhythm and an emphasis she puts on the words that's different that how we pray when we're saying this as a group. A rhythm and an emphasis that makes her say it like a prayer rather than just something she's memorized. *Our* father, who art in Heaven. Hallowed be *thy* name. *Thy* kingdom come. *Thy* will be done. And so the five of us prayed that familiar prayer in an unfamiliar way, but we prayed it like we meant it. It wasn't until after I got home from that meeting that I looked up the lectionary passage for the week I would be preaching and discovered it was the Lord's Prayer.

So how else do we pray like we mean it?

I told you guys I was at ACS this past week. I was at Methodist University in Fayetteville with 40 or so adults and about 150 students from around the Conference. It's a little smaller than Breakaway, because this one is just for high schoolers. So we were gathered with those who had just completed grades 9-12 this year. And they come and worship together, they do mission projects and the business of conference youth ministry, they have growth groups where they process what they've been hearing and doing.

So in that time I got to learn, and relearn and relearn some of those ways to mean it when we pray. To pray with focus. To pray with persistence, and to pray ourselves into ministry.

We also have interest groups a couple of nights. Interest groups which they choose on everything from photography to social justice issues to living your faith in college. And I got to teach an Interest Group this week at a Conference Youth retreat, and my group was called Praying in Color, something that I in turn learned from my amazing friend Laura Jennings Estevez who worked with me in Ecuador. I spent 90 minutes with 15 teenagers on Tuesday and a different 15 teenagers on Wednesday this past week. And it was humbling to realize that they signed up for this group. On purpose. They all came to me with that same request I went to Susie and to Laura with. The same one that Jesus' disciple had: "teach me how to pray." And those thirty teenagers who were looking for a new way to connect with God spent most of that 90 minutes in silence. Not the Sound of Silence like the melody I just sang. The actual sound of silence, which is a pretty foreign concept in the realm of working with teenagers.

We spent the beginning of our time together getting prepped to pray. We read scripture and then we made some tangible signs of our recognition of God's presence in our midst. Here in the sanctuary we light candles at the beginning of worship. I brought the electronic ones so we wouldn't set off Methodist University's fire alarms. But we lit candles. We did like Moses and we took off our shoes. And other than a one-sentence prompt every two minutes, not a word was spoken while we wrote or drew or doodled our prayers. When we reached the end, many of them had no idea how much time had passed, because they were so unaccustomed to spending such a solid chunk of time in prayer. The candles, the shoelessness, the movement

of a sharpie or a colored pencil in their hand gave them just enough for their brain to do on “auto-pilot” that they could say that name, that petition to God over and over again and focus in on that prayer. We were in a place without any other distractions that they needed to push out of their minds. And we were using a different outlet than the formal, spoken words to which we’re accustomed. And so we were able to pray with Focus.

But we were also in a place of honesty. ACS is known as the week when the students of the NC Annual Conference elect their leadership for the upcoming school year. But it’s a place where students let their voices be heard in other ways. They write resolutions on the things they care about. And because we tend to be talking a lot about social justice issues during the week of ACS, our speakers tend to talk about those as well. Our worship leaders this year were Ben Adams and Ben Roberts, two seminarians, one studying in Atlanta and the other one in D.C., but both from our Conference, and both former youth officers of our conference in fact. And they hit us hard. They didn’t hold back. From Sunday night when they staff arrived, through the first day of students being on campus, through the end of camp they asked us honest, tough questions. Because as we were arriving a week ago, the news had just broken another shooting death in our country. And many of us were grieving over this. Again. And the news had just broken that the Western Jurisdiction had elected the first openly gay Bishop of the United Methodist Church. And there were people across the Connection and inside and outside the Church and people who were at ACS this week who were mourning that decision and there were those who were celebrating that decision. There wasn’t unity in the Body. So it was tough.

And Ben Roberts asked us as a staff on Sunday night and they asked the students on Tuesday morning “What breaks your heart?” What breaks your heart?

[talk about hope]

[Ben Adams quote]

Yearlong journey to fruition at ACS

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May you pray with hope. May you pray through heartbreak. May you pray in color. And may you pray yourself to action within God’s will. Amen.