

## **Sermon – Pentecost 7**

### **Psalm 85, Colossians 2: 6-19, Luke 11: 1-13**

Father, hallowed be your name.

So says Jesus in our Gospel reading today when his disciples ask him to teach them to pray. What does it mean to pray? How do you pray? As I pondered these questions this week, I couldn't help but notice that this reading follows directly on from our reading last week about Martha and Mary, which in many ways was about getting distracted from our ministry, whether it be active ministry like hospitality or serving the way Martha does or the more contemplative ministry of Mary, sitting at the foot of Jesus. How many of us can get distracted from prayer? Sometimes it seems easier to do something else, other than sit down and spend that quiet time with God. We allow ourselves to be distracted. So, this week I want to take the opportunity to preach on prayer. It's one of the foundations of our faith journey, developing a relationship with God, just as Jesus did so often, and when he responds to his disciples' request to teach them to pray, the very first line of prayer is: Father, hallowed be your name. It implies that we should all be in a close relationship with God, our holy father. So let's explore prayer together, today.

Well, praying to God has a long history in the Biblical sense. I did a search on the word prayer on Biblegateway and there are over 200 references to prayer in the Old Testament and 156 references in the New Testament. In Genesis, Abraham and Isaac prayed. The Book of Job is full of prayer as Job goes through his trials and tribulations, and the various prophets all seem to pray as well. And we know that Jesus prayed. He often withdrew from the crowd and even his own disciples to pray alone, in solitude, to his father.

One of the things I love about the Lectionary, our list of readings for each week, is how they seem, so often to match each other or reflect our world and its times. And this week is no different. The Psalm we have this week is a beautiful set prayer, perhaps even foreshadowing the Lord's Prayer. It was composed to be said or sung in the temple and it's beautifully constructed. And I think it asks the questions of why do we pray? Let's have a little look at it before we move onto the Gospel reading and the Lord's Prayer.

So why do we pray? Why do you pray?

Yes, we seek connection with the divine. We yearn to be in relationship with God. God the Creator, Jesus the Saviour and the Holy Spirit, abiding in us, all around us, and forever going before us. We want to feel God, to know God. But just like any relationship, the quality of the relationship is grounded in presence, the presence we give to the person with whom we seek a relationship. How much presence do you give to God?

I also think the psalmist gives us a hint about why we pray when he, or she, asks "Will you be displeased with us forever?" and "Will you not give us life again, that your people may rejoice in you?" It seems that back then, just like now, we are part of a fallen people. We don't seem to get it right, and we muck up in our own personal lives, trampling on other people's feelings, often people whom we love. And at a broader global level, we are part of a civilization that allows the most atrocious things to happen to groups of people all around the world. We are indeed part of a broken world and we are also a broken people. Will God be displeased forever? Will God give us life again? Well, the good news is from the very first verses of the psalm these questions are answered when the psalmist says "Oh Lord, you were

gracious to your land. You forgave the iniquity of your people and covered all their sin”.

The psalmist confidently anticipates a positive, transforming response to prayer from God. God is a God who forgives. And across the rest of the psalm we hear remarkable assurance when the psalmist says “I will hear what the Lord God will speak: for he will speak peace to his people, to his faithful ones, whose hearts are turned to him.” God’s shalom will rest on his faithful ones. This psalm reflects a moment of renewal, restoration and revival that is completely the gift of God. “Mercy and truth are met together: righteousness and peace have kissed each other; Truth shall flourish out of the earth: and righteousness shall look down from heaven. The Lord will also give us all that is good: and our land shall yield its plenty.” The hope and expectation of this prayer are in anticipation of the Lord’s prayer, in which we pray for the coming of God’s kingdom on earth. These last few verses of the psalm show a fully reconciled community in a fully reconciled creation. New creation, that which we all seek and desire.

And now we come to our Gospel reading, Luke’s version of the Lord’s prayer. Prayer has already played a large role in Luke’s Gospel to this point. In fact, by Luke 11, Jesus has already been featured praying in five separate accounts, such as his baptism and his transfiguration, (Luke 3:21; 5:16; 6:12; 9:18; 9:28). So it’s not surprising that the disciples would notice this rhythm and ask Jesus to teach them how to pray.

Jesus responds in two parts. First, he gives them the prayer itself, and then he shares stories that illustrate God’s character and highlight the “why” behind our praying. These two sections are both central to understanding what Luke is teaching about how and why we pray.

Luke's version of the Lord's Prayer is spare and to the point, less liturgical and more direct than Matthew's version. It is stripped down to the most essential parts:

"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.'" (verses 2–4)

By addressing this prayer not to God or YHWH but Father, Jesus here emphasizes God's relationship with his people, not as subjects or as a faceless mass, but as children. We are God's children! Jesus then offers four requests: a request for the kingdom to come, a request for daily bread, a request for forgiveness, and a request for deliverance. In other words, in this prayer, Jesus summarizes all the things we need most when we come to God: God's presence, our needs met, forgiveness, and salvation.

And Jesus does not present this prayer as a magical formula or as the only acceptable prayer. Instead, he offers it as a framework, one that is rooted in trust and dependence on the Father. It is simple, accessible, and theologically rich. This is not just a prayer to recite. It is also a way to live before God, in trust and hope.

Jesus then shifts from how to why, telling two brief parables. In the first, a man knocks on his friend's door late at night, asking for bread. In the second, a parent gives good gifts to their child. These images draw our attention not to our technique in prayer, but to God who hears our prayers.

We see here that Jesus wants his followers to be persistent in their prayers. Like the man who knocks on his friend's door in the middle of the night asking for bread, we should keep on knocking until the door is opened to us. Luke will return to this theme in Luke 18 with the Parable of the Persistent Widow, when the widow wins justice from an unjust judge by refusing to relent from her requests.

Jesus tells his disciples to ask, to seek, and to knock, trusting that God will answer. God is better than a reluctant friend who finally opens the door just to stop the knocking. And God is even better than the best earthly parent who knows how to care for their child.

Of course, this brings us to a tension that Christians have wrestled with throughout history. Not all prayers are answered in the way we might anticipate. And we do not know when or how our prayers will be answered. Still, Luke offers reassurance. We do not pray because we know the outcome. We pray because we trust the One who hears us.

This is why Jesus calls us to keep seeking. In the very act of searching, we acknowledge that there is someone to be found—someone who loves us deeply, like a father loves a child.

This passage offers us both a gift and a challenge. It reminds us that prayer is not primarily about results, but about trust. Not about saying the right words, but about developing and staying in relationship with God who loves us. We knock because we believe someone is listening. We ask because we believe the Father loves us as children and that the good gift of the Holy Spirit is ours.

I invite you this week to follow Jesus' example and give some time to God in prayer. Knock on God's door, because God will always listen. And take time to ask that your bodily needs be met, that your sins be forgiven and that the

kingdom comes, that we indeed come to know a world reconciled with God and with each other. And even when we fail and fall short, we know that the grace of God through Jesus Christ, upholds us and makes us whole again.

Let us pray.

O Lord, you were gracious to your land:

You forgave the iniquity of your people: and covered all their sin.

You put aside all your wrath: and turned away from your fierce indignation.

Return to us again, O God our saviour: and let your anger cease from us.

Truth shall flourish out of the earth: and righteousness shall look down from heaven.

The Lord will also give us all that is good: and our land shall yield its plenty.

For righteousness shall go before him: and tread the path before his feet.

**Amen.**