

The Lord's Prayer - 1
26 May 13

“Our Father”

For the next several weeks the narrative lectionary readings are going to be really, really short. In fact, they'll all be just one verse long because over these weeks we'll be meditating on the Lord's Prayer, line by line. And I mean that, the meditating part. Yes, I'm a preacher, and we preachers like to explain things. We can't help it. At least I can't help it, because I am an academic guy and explaining things helps me in my spiritual development. The problem is that you can understand the Bible backwards and forwards and up and down and still NOT - GET - IT - AT - ALL. Until I hear the Bible addressing me, no, make that until I hear God speaking directly to me and my life and my situation through the Scriptures, then I don't get it.

Sort of the same with prayer. I can know all about the lord's Prayer, say it every week in church and every night before I got to bed. But if I never actually *pray* it, well, I don't know if I want to say that would be a complete waste of time, but . . . let's just say I'm missing out on a whole lot. Sort of like taking a sip of the juice but never actually eating the filet.

So here are my goals for this sermon series: 1) meditate on the prayer. Frankly I have no clue how to pull that off in a sermon. Maybe I'll include periods of silence during each sermon; maybe that ends up being too awkward or uncomfortable to be productive. I'm working on it. 1) meditate on the prayer, 2) gain a deeper sense of what we are actually asking for in this prayer--that would be the explaining part--and 3) encourage you to encourage each other to pray and meditate on this prayer each day during this sermon series.

At this point you might be thinking that I'm ready to tear into “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.” I'm not. I'm not because it just doesn't seem right to begin a sermon series on the Lord's Prayer without stopping first to reflect on what exactly is prayer.

If you were to ask a group such as this one, “What is prayer?” what kinds of answers do you think you'd get? One answer you'd probably get is that prayer is asking for stuff. That's Biblical. Jesus emphasizes it. Repeatedly. “You do not have because you do not ask,” he says. Another answer you'd probably get is that prayer is talking to God. Good answers.

One answer you might not get is that prayer is listening, waiting for God to speak. I want to emphasize that aspect of prayer. It's often overlooked. Anthony Bloom wrote a little pamphlet on prayer. In it he relates the story of when he was a young priest visiting someone who was complaining that she prayed and prayed and prayed, and God never answered her prayers. She went on and on, and finally Bloom blurted out something like, “Maybe God is answering, but you don't hear the answer because you never shut up.” indelicate. But true. True for her; true for many of us much of the time.

So here are some suggestions for listening so that the conversation with God that is prayer is not a one-sided one. Try sitting in silence, listening to the sounds around you. Or take a walk through

nature, noticing the colors, the vegetation that reaches skyward, the animals, even the bugs that do without thinking. Look at the sky, feel the wind, the sun, the warmth, the cold, the rain. Talk to God about, praise God for this world which God has created. Thank God for the blessings that have come to you this day. Then be silent. Listen. Then ask. Then be silent again.

Then maybe pray the way Jesus has taught us. Our Father. My Father, yes, but more than that. *Our* Father. I am connected to all of God's children, responsible to them, charged with caring for them. And vice versa. They are a gift to me. When we pray the way Jesus taught us, we are praying to *our* Father.

Our Father in heaven. Yes, God is in heaven, and I am not. Yes, God is Other. But this God in heaven who is Other is here, listening, listening to us, listening to me. When we pray to our Father, we are taking the rather large risk of speaking to the God who is actually present. Prayer is not done behind God's back but is done face to face. Humbling thought.

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Yes, God is holy. So, do my actions, my words, my whole state of being bring glory to God or make God's name unholy? Do my actions, my words, my whole state of being make visible the God whom we cannot see, make credible the God who is love? Or, to quote Luther, "To be sure, God's name is holy in itself, but we pray in this petition that it may also be holy for us."