

Our Father who art in heaven

Luke 11:1-4

Feb 21, 2021

“Why do we pray?”

Martin Lloyds-Jones, who served for almost 30 years as the minister of Westminster Chapel in London answered, paraphrasing his words, “This question is like asking why eagles soar high in the sky. Eagles are created to soar high in the sky. Likewise we human beings are created to pray. We cannot live without prayer.” Lloyds-Jones added, saying, “Of all the blessings of Christian salvation none is the greater than this, that we have the access to God in prayer.”

What is prayer? A dictionary defines as “a solemn request for help or expression of thanks addressed to God” A mystic says, “praying is like breathing for souls. To be alive physically, we need to breathe. Likewise we need to pray to be alive spiritually.”

I like this following definition: “Prayer is spiritual communication between human beings and God, a two-way relationship in which we should not only talk to God but also listen to God.” Yes, praying is communicating with God.

Jesus prayed. Jesus communicated with God throughout his life. We can say that Jesus was a man of prayer.

He prayed in the early morning at dawn. Often he prayed all night long in the mountain. He prayed before calling his disciples. He prayed before feeding more than 5 thousand people with five loaves of bread and two fish. He prayed right before being transfigured on the mountain. He prayed before raising Lazarus out of tomb. He prayed at the Garden of Gethsemane before carrying the cross to Golgatha. He prayed right before breathing the last, saying, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.”

The Bible tells us that Jesus who died for us and was raised and ascended to heaven pray even now for us at the right hand of God.

“One day Jesus was praying in a certain place.” When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, “Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples.” He said to them, “When you pray, say: the prayer well known to us and many. The Lord’s prayer. Some say, it is not the Lord’s prayer, but the Disciples’ prayer, for it is our prayer to pray. It makes sense.

I would like to take a time with you during this Lent to read the prayer the Lord taught us one line by one line weekly and learn to pray from the Lord.

“Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples.” And Jesus answered, saying, “When you pray, say: 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.”

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Jesus taught us, first of all, how to address God when we pray. Father is it.

In the Old Testament, God is addressed with several different names: El or Elohim, One who is omnipotent and powerful, Elyon, One worthy of worshipping and adoring. Adonai, One who governs and controls all the things in universe, Shadai, El Shadai, One with greatness and majesty. Of course, Jehovar or Yahweh is another one frequently we encounter in the Old Testament.

His first century disciples were familiar to all these titles or names for God. But Jesus taught them to address when they pray, “Father.” This is a radical teaching.

Jesus introduced God as a personal God who is tender and caring and intimate like a father who takes care of his family. And he invited us to meet with God as God’s daughters and sons.

Do you remember Jesus’ prayer at the garden of Gethsemane? Jesus said, “Abba, Father, everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.” (Mark 14:36). Abba is Father in Aramaic, which is Jesus’ native tongue. It is like Daddy in English. We see his deeply intimate relationship with God.

Who are we? We are children of God. Thanks to the redemptive work of Christ on the cross, we have been reconciled with God and adopted as sons and daughters. Now we can go to the presence of God like a child running to his or her wonderful and caring parent.

Through my office windows, I see children running to their moms and dads once the school is over. Praying is like running to God, knowing God Father always welcomes us. So praying is, above all, a joyful time to meet with God. Praying is a wonderful time to rest with God. Praying is a peaceful time to breath with God. Praying is an awesome time to communicate with God.

One question: According to the Gospel of Matthew, the Lord’s Prayer begins, “Father in heaven.” (Matt 7:21) And the Lord’s prayer we do begins, “Our Father who art in heaven.” Is God Father who lives in heaven, far away from us?

Father In heaven does not mean God is somewhere up in the sky. The noun, “Heaven” appears in the Bible when the writers want to tell how great and wonderful God is and what glorious and marvelous things God does.

For example, look at Psalm 115:3. “Our God is in the heavens, and he does as he wishes. God does whatever he pleases. Psalm 33:13-14 reads, “The Lord looks down from heaven; he sees all humankind. From where he sits enthroned he watches all the inhabitants of the earth—”

So addressing God as Father in heaven, Jesus pointed out that God, all powerful and all knowing is a personal God, Abba, Father who loves and cares. God is Abba, Father. God is bigger than any, but not unapproachable. God is more powerful than any, but not inaccessible. God is higher than any, but not unreachable. God is not only approachable and accessible and reachable, but also loving, caring and kind.

We can go to the presence of God at any time and at any situation. We can lay down all the concerns and anxiety in the presence of God as a child of God. We can share any joys and thanksgiving with God. There we hear God saying, “I love you. I am proud of you. You are my joy.” There in prayer, we hear Father saying, “I understand you. Do not sin any longer.” when we confess our sins. There at the time with Father, we find God showing us what to do and even how to do when we ask His help. Yes, sometime, we hear Father chastising us when we do not do good and do harms. Yes, like a mother, Father in heaven comforts and cries with us. God generously gives things we need, wisdom and understanding. Praying is a time of renewal, a time of healing, and a precious time of being empowered by Father in heaven.

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I found something interesting. Matthew and Luke tell us that the prayer Jesus taught begins with Father or Father in heaven, respectively. But there is something missing. Don’t we begin the Lord’s prayer with “**Our** Father who art in heaven”? Where is the word, “Our”?

We can find the Lord’s prayer in three different texts in our hymnal: Ecumenical Text, Text from the ritual of the former Methodist church and text from the ritual of the former evangelical united brethren church. Slightly different from one another: Ecumenical text use sins instead of trespasses and your kingdom and your will instead of thy kingdom God and thy will.

But all of three texts share the same beginning. “Our Father” I do not know why the pronoun “Our” is not included in the Gospel of Matthew and Luke and how the pronoun “Our” has been added in three texts. But we do know the Lord’s prayer is meant to be a public prayer, not a prayer offered by an individual. “Give us our bread. Forgive us our trespasses. Lead us not into temptation.” It makes sense that pronoun Our in front of Father is added.

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Here is another radical and revolutionary teaching we encounter. Father, Father in heaven is our Father, our Father in heaven.

No one person can claim God as his or her own Father. Neither any nations nor any races claim God as their own God. God is for all and for all the people on earth. God is our Father who loves all the people on earth. God so loved the world he sent his only begotten son to us.

When I was in Korea, I sang a Korean national anthem almost every week in school. "God bless Korea" Now I immigrated to America 44 years ago and became a US citizen. I join to sing, "God bless America." Surely if I emigrated to England, I would hear and sing, "God bless England."

But we, disciples of Jesus Christ must not forget that God is God of all nations and all people and God is with and for all the nations and people in this world. "God bless all" We, disciples of Jesus Christ is people of God who go beyond the line of nationality and races and skin colors and sexual orientations, because God we believe and know is God for all the people on earth.

This teaching awakens us to know one important truth. That is, since God is our Father for all the people on earth, we are sisters and brothers to each other. All the people on earth are our sisters and brothers. Surely we all do not have the same last name, but we have God, the same Father. We all do not have speak the same language, but we have God, the same Father who knows our names. So we are meant to take care of each other and look after one another. Is there discriminating? Bullying? Hating? Fighting? Ignoring? Degrading? Demonizing? Our Father in heaven must be saddened.

I am glad and grateful that Franklyn has introduced Five Fingers of Prayer to our children and all of us. I think this prayer reminds us of who we are and who to pray for in the presence of God, our Father.

Let's review it.

Our thumb is nearest to us. So we begin our prayers by praying for those sisters and brothers closest to us: family members and friends.

The next finger is the pointing finger. We pray for those sisters and brothers far away from us, whom we cannot see face to face but can point with the pointing finger. Sisters and brothers in Africa, Antarctica, Australia, North and South America, and Asia.

The next finger is the tallest finger. It reminds us of our sisters and brothers in leadership position. We pray for church leaders, all the political leaders and leaders in business and industry and school and hospital and etc.

The fourth finger is our ring finger, the weakest finger. We pray for those sisters and brothers who are weak, in trouble, in pain, in poverty, in loneliness or homeless. They need our prayers day and night. You cannot pray too much for them.

Last comes the little finger; the smallest finger of all. This is where we should place ourselves in relation to God and others.

Closing:

Today is the First Sunday in Lent.

During Lent, we want to follow Jesus all the way to the cross. We want to be like him and do like him. Let us pray like Jesus.

Let us go into the presence of God, our Father who welcomes us always with open heart. Let us pray for all the people on earth, our sisters and brothers without ceasing.

May God the Father welcome and touch you with His abundant grace and mercy and renew you in body, mind and spirit.

Amen. Amen.