

Proper 12, Year C

- “Lord, teach us to pray,” ask the disciples in this, Luke’s telling of how we learned the Lord’s Prayer
- And we should probably all take note, because it’s one of the few times when Jesus is asked something and gives a straight answer
- “When you pray,” he says, say this
- It’s so straightforward, in fact, that for the longest time I really struggled with praying extemporaneously – Jesus already gave us a blueprint, I thought, so why would we want to go freestyling? – You can imagine, then, why I eventually fit in so well in the Episcopal Church
- But as for the Lord’s Prayer that we hear in our Gospel, it’s worth noting that Luke’s version is different from Matthew’s, and therefore from the one we use in our liturgy and on our own, so it’s okay if it sounded a little strange when we heard it this morning
- Which is a useful illustration of a greater point about these two Gospels which are so similar – they exist and are both part of our scriptural canon because they have different stories to tell, different points of emphasis – they each paint a different picture of the same person, our God made flesh, Jesus
- And yet, they have more than just idle similarities because there are some things that are so important, so foundational, that both Luke and Matthew include them
- The Lord’s Prayer is one of those commonalities
- And even if it weren’t for the fact that Jesus gives a clear answer, or the fact that both Matthew and Luke have some form of this prayer in their Gospel accounts, we would still know this passage is important solely because of its subject matter – because it is about how to pray
- This is, I think, one of the reasons this passage seems so thoroughly realistic to me –
- I can imagine Jesus being asked this, because this is one of the more common questions clergy receive today
- It’s asked a number of different ways, maybe, but there are a lot of people who aren’t sure of just how to approach God – of just how to start that conversation, or of how exactly it’s supposed to go
- There’s some fear there, maybe? Or some trepidation? Some worry that we’ll say the wrong thing, or ask in the wrong way? Or maybe some worry that we shouldn’t be asking at all?

- So of course people would pick Jesus's brain about it when they had the chance: "Lord, teach us to pray."
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- Every week, gathered as we are around God's table, after breaking bread together and recognizing Christ just as the disciples did in the breaking of that bread, we pray this prayer
- And every week, we introduce it the same way, "As our Savior Christ has taught us, we are bold to say..."
- I love that line in our liturgy, even though I admit I didn't understand it when I first came to the Episcopal Church
- Why are we bold to say exactly what Jesus told us to say? Why are we bold to pray the most basic Christian prayer in existence, the one that carries across denominations with only some minor changes in wording here and there? What's bold about that, I used to wonder?
- I don't wonder that anymore.
- Because it is bold to stand before God, the creator of heaven and earth and all that is in them, to stand before the maker of everything we know and everything we don't – it is bold to stand before that God and call to call that God "Father"
- It is a boldness we have on account of Christ, through whom we are made daughters and sons of God at Baptism, so it is not presumptuous – but it is bold, all the same
- It is bold to pray that God's kingdom will come while knowing, as we do, that God's kingdom is so contrary to the ways of the world, the ways of our society, even the ways of our own human wills
- It is bold to ask God to give us each day our daily bread when we live in a world that says one day's bread isn't enough, can never be enough, and that we should stockpile weeks and months and years worth of bread to make it through any lean times
- It is bold to ask for God to give us each day our daily bread when we have a pretty regular tendency to think that bread is not given by God but earned by the sweat of our brows
- It is bold to ask for God's forgiveness for our sins, what our Rite I confession of sin calls "our manifold sins and wickedness" because though we are God's good creatures, part of the creation that God saw and said was so good, we have in us the capacity to be terrible – and we need forgiveness each and every day, and will without a doubt need it again soon after we pray for it in the Lord's Prayer

- And it is undoubtedly bold to connect God's forgiveness of us to our forgiveness of others – forgiveness of everyone, as Luke says, indebted to us, which could even be read literally though we tend to hope it's merely figurative
- It is bold to proclaim that we are forgiving of everyone indebted to us when we know that this isn't always the case
- In a sense, this prayer is bold because it is at least in part a proclamation not of how things are, but of how things ought to be – and by praying it, we are affirming that we will do our part to make it true
- Affirming that we will help to bring about God's kingdom
- That we will be content with a day's worth of bread
- Affirming that we need God's forgiveness, and that we will offer it to others
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- I've long since realized that the Lord's Prayer isn't the only way to pray – that it wasn't meant to be a prescription of the only words we should ever use
- But there's a reason it's a prototype Because prayer is not, as one biblical commentator puts it, simply putting a message in a bottle and hoping for the best – and by that I don't mean that there's anything wrong with asking for God's help for things that are out of our hands
- Luke makes it clear that if we ask, it will be given to us – if we search, we will find – if we knock, the door will be opened for us
- But our prayers should put words to the reality that God wishes for the world and therefore give us something to strive toward
- And by virtue of our prayers, Luke says, God will give us the Holy Spirit – the breath and power of God – to make God's dream for the world a reality
- So that that first prayer which began our Gospel reading, "Lord, teach us to pray," can turn into "Lord, teach us to be your Body... for the sake of the world."