

Luke 11:1-13
August 8, '10

“THIRD TIME’S THE...” OR “THREE STRIKES & ...”

THERE ARE A LOT OF DIFFERENT WAYS WE CAN LOOK AT THE LORD’S PRAYER – BUT ONE OF THOSE WAYS IS NOT CASUALLY.

I WANT TO SAY THAT AT THE OUTSET BECAUSE AS WE DO SO THIS MORNING, I DON’T WANT A *BRIEF* LOOK TO BE CONFUSED WITH A *CASUAL* ONE.

THE LORD’S PRAYER, LIKE THE APOSTLES’ CREED OR THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT OR THE TEN COMMANDMENTS, WARRANTS A MUCH MORE EXTENDED – EVEN SERMON SERIES – EXAMINATION.

SO CONSIDER THIS LITTLE MORE THAN A VERY BRIEF INTRODUCTION.

IT’S TOO IMPORTANT TO US TO BE TREATED LIGHTLY & MAYBE THAT HAS BEEN PART OF MY RELUCTANCE IN DEALING WITH IT AT ALL AS WE HAVE, OVER THE PAST FEW WEEKS, BEEN EXAMINING THIS PASSAGE.

MARTIN LUTHER SAID OF THE LORD’S PRAYER THAT IT IS “A *SUMMARY OF THE WHOLE GOSPEL.*”

A MODERN-DAY COMMENTATOR EXPRESSES MUCH THE SAME THING WHEN HE WRITES, “*IF SOMEBODY SAID, ‘GIVE ME A SUMMARY OF CHRISTIAN FAITH ON THE BACK OF AN ENVELOPE,’ THE BEST THING TO DO WOULD BE TO WRITE THE LORD’S PRAYER.*”

THE LORD’S PRAYER – LIKE A SACRAMENT – IS SOMETHING GIVEN TO US BY NONE OTHER THAN JESUS HIMSELF.

WE DON’T HAVE TO SAY IT IN WORSHIP EVERY SUNDAY.

JESUS DIDN’T INSTRUCT US TO DO SO.

OUR PRESBYTERIAN BOOK OF ORDER DOESN’T TELL US TO DO THAT NOR IS A MANDATORY WEEKLY RECITATION OF THE LORD’S PRAYER INCLUDED IN OUR CHURCH BY-LAWS.

WE DON’T *HAVE* TO DO IT, BUT I’M GLAD WE DO.

ONE OF THE REASONS I’M GLAD WE USE THE LORD’S PRAYER EVERY SUNDAY IS BECAUSE IT IS CLEARLY *INTENDED* TO BE PRAYED CORPORATELY.

THERE IS SURELY VALUE IN PRAYING IT ON YOUR OWN, BUT PRIMARILY AS IT REMINDS YOU THAT YOU ARE INEXTRICABLY CONNECTED TO OTHERS OF FAITH.

ALL THE PRONOUNS OF THE LORD’S PRAYER ARE PLURAL.

SOMEONE HAS PUT IT LIKE THIS:

“*WHAT GIVES THIS PRAYER ITS POWER?*”

IT NEVER SAYS MINE BUT OUR.

WHY DOES IT GRIP ME THUS?

IT NEVER SAYS ME BUT US.

WHAT MAY ITS BEAUTY BE?

IT NEVER SAYS I BUT WE.

IT HUMBLER ME, BUT WHY?

IT NEVER SAYS MY BUT THY.”

THIS IS A PRAYER THAT CONNECTS US TO ONE ANOTHER.

MORE IMPORTANTLY, IT CONNECTS US TO GOD & IT CONNECTS US TO JESUS CHRIST.

THE VERSION FOUND IN MATTHEW’S GOSPEL IS THE ONE MOST FAMILIAR TO US.

THIS SHORTER VERSION IN LUKE CAN BE SHORTENED EVEN MORE.

IT CAN BE REDUCED TO JUST 6 WORDS TO HELP US REMEMBER ITS CONTENT.

FATHER, HALLOWED, KINGDOM, BREAD, FORGIVENESS, TRIAL.

THE FIRST THREE ARE CENTERED ON GOD & THE FINAL THREE ON US.

THE FIRST WORD – AND THE FIRST WORD OF THE ENTIRE PRAYER IN LUKE – IS “FATHER.”

AS WITH THE ENTIRE PRAYER, SAYING THIS WORD CAN BECOME SO ROUTINE TO US THAT WE MISS OUT ON ITS SIGNIFICANCE.

THINK ABOUT IT.

THIS IS WHAT JESUS TOLD THE DISCIPLES TO PRAY.

JESUS IS THE SON OF GOD.

IT IS JESUS WHO IS TELLING US THAT WE, TOO, CAN ADDRESS GOD AS FATHER.

THAT TELLS US SEVERAL THINGS.

IT TELLS US THAT WE ARE ALL SIBLINGS.

IT TELLS US JESUS IS OUR BROTHER.

AND IT TELLS US THAT GOD CAN BE APPROACHED AS A CHILD APPROACHES A PARENT.

JESUS CALLS US INTO AN INTIMATE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE CREATOR OF THE UNIVERSE.

THIS IS ASTOUNDING!

THE GOD WHO PLACED THE SUN & MOON IN THE SKY & FASHIONED THE OCEANS & THE MOUNTAINS –
THE GOD WHO BROUGHT ORDER OUT OF CHAOS & ESTABLISHED DAY & NIGHT – THE GOD WHO TEACHES A BIRD
TO FLY & ENABLES A GIANT SEQUOIA TO GROW FROM A TINY SEED – THE GOD WHO IS ABOVE & BEYOND ALL TIME
& SPACE – IS AS APPROACHABLE AS OUR OWN LOVING PARENT.

THIS IS STUNNING & SHOULD SEND SHIVERS UP & DOWN YOUR SPINE.

YOU & I ARE SIBLINGS, CHRIST IS OUR BROTHER & GOD IS OUR FATHER.

THE SINGLE WORD WITH WHICH JESUS BEGINS THIS PRAYER IS BREATHTAKING!

IT IS FOLLOWED & CLOSELY CONNECTED BY THE WORD “HALLOWED.”

THERE’S A STORY OF A LITTLE BOY WHO WAS SITTING AT THE DINNER TABLE ON SUNDAY AFTER
CHURCH.

HE WAS LOST IN THOUGHT, MAKING LITTLE DOODLES IN HIS MASHED POTATOES.

SUDDENLY HE INTERJECTED A QUESTION INTO THE CONVERSATION OF THE ADULTS.

“WHY DON’T WE CALL GOD BY HIS NAME?” HE ASKED.

EVERYONE WAS STUNNED.

HIS MOTHER FINALLY ASKED, "WHAT DO YOU MEAN, BOBBY?"

VERY SERIOUSLY, BOBBY SAID, "WELL, IN CHURCH, WE ALWAYS SAY 'HALLOWED BE THY NAME' BUT THEN WE NEVER CALL HIM THAT."

IT IS AN ODD WORD FOR US, ISN'T IT?

IT SIMPLY MEANS "HOLY" AND I THINK THE CONNECTION BETWEEN THE TWO WORDS – "FATHER" & "HALLOWED" – DIRECTLY LINKED TOGETHER, ENCAPSULATES OUR UNDERSTANDING OF GOD.

THERE IS INTIMACY & THERE IS REVERENCE.

THERE IS FAMILIARITY & THERE IS RESPECT.

THERE IS OPENNESS & THERE IS HONOR.

"FATHER, HALLOWED" IS AS BRIEF A SUMMARY AS POSSIBLE OF OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD.

THE NEXT THING WE SAY IN THE LORD'S PRAYER – "THY KINGDOM COME" – SHOULD STOP US IN OUR TRACKS.

DO WE REALLY MEAN IT?

MORE OFTEN THAN NOT, OUR APPROACH IS NOT "THY KINGDOM COME" BUT "MY KINGDOM COME."

WE WANT THINGS *OUR* WAY & GOD'S KINGDOM, GOD'S WAYS & GOD'S RULE IS QUITE DIFFERENT FROM OURS.

JESUS TALKED ABOUT THE KINGDOM OF GOD MORE THAN ANYTHING ELSE & YET NOWHERE IS IT CLEARLY DEFINED – OTHER THAN "IT'S LIKE..."

"IT'S LIKE A MUSTARD SEED..."

"IT'S LIKE YEAST IN THE DOUGH..."

INTERESTINGLY, THOUGH, JESUS *DID* SAY, A BIT LATER ON IN LUKE, "THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS NOT COMING WITH SIGNS TO BE OBSERVED; NOR WILL THEY SAY, 'LO, HERE IT IS!' OR 'THERE!' FOR BEHOLD, THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS IN THE MIDST OF YOU."

IMAGINE THAT!

THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS ALREADY HERE – IN OUR VERY MIDST.

THE KINGDOM IS HERE – IN CHRIST.

JOHN KILLINGER SUGGESTS THAT IT'S LIKE THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A BEACHHEAD – AND IT'S ESTABLISHED IN US.

THAT'S WHY PRAYING "THY KINGDOM COME" SHOULD STOP US IN OUR TRACKS.

IT'S RADICAL & IT'S PERSONAL.

WHEN WE PRAY IT, WE'RE ASKING THAT IT COME IN US, THAT GOD USE US FOR HIS BEACHHEAD IN THE WORLD, THAT HIS KINGDOM WILL BEGIN IN US & THEN SPREAD TO OTHERS.

IF WE CAN'T – IN ALL HONESTY & GENUINENESS – PRAY "THY KINGDOM COME," MAYBE IT'S BECAUSE WE'RE SATISFIED WITH THE WAY THINGS ARE.

MAYBE WE'RE SATISFIED WITH WHAT WE HAVE & WHO WE ARE.

MAYBE WE DON'T SEE ANY REASON FOR US OR THE WORLD TO CHANGE.

IT MAY BE BECAUSE WE HAVE SO MUCH, AND ARE SO COMFORTABLE WITH THE WAY THINGS ARE THAT WE DON'T WANT ANYTHING TO CHANGE.

WE DON'T WANT TO HAVE TO SUPPORT THE POOR.

WE DON'T WANT TO FORGIVE OUR ENEMIES.

WE DON'T WANT TO RELINQUISH OUR POWER & OUR POSITION & OUR SOCIAL STANDING.

HERE WE MUST MENTION ONCE AGAIN THAT SERMON TITLE OF THE PAST TWO WEEKS – *SECULAR THEOLOGY* – “TRANSFORMING SOMETHING SACRED INTO DAILY LIFE.”

THERE IS NOTHING MORE SACRED THAN THE KINGDOM OF GOD & WHEN WE PRAY “*THY KINGDOM COME*” WE'RE PRAYING FOR THAT KINGDOM TO LIVE IN US & BE EVIDENCED IN OUR DAILY LIFE.

WE'RE PRAYING THAT WE MIGHT BE THE SERVANTS OF CHRIST WHO ARE THE EMOIDMENT OF THAT KINGDOM IN THE WORLD.

“FATHER, HALLOWED, KINGDOM.”

THE FIRST THREE WORDS IN OUR 6-WORD SYNOPSIS OF LUKE'S VERSION OF THE LORD'S PRAYER CENTER ON GOD.

THE FINAL THREE – BREAD, FORGIVENESS, TRIAL – CENTER ON US.

WHEN WE LOOK AT THE PLEA FOR BREAD, PERHAPS OUR FOCUS SHOULD BE MORE ON THE WORD “DAILY” THAN ON BREAD.

THERE'S A GREAT DEAL THAT CAN BE SAID ABOUT THE SPECIFIC WORDS THAT ARE USED IN THIS PETITION, BUT I DON'T THINK IT CAN BE DENIED THAT – FOR US – AS 21ST CENTURY AMERICANS – IT SHOULD BE A CALL, ON THE ONE HAND, FOR GOD TO MEET OUR NEEDS AND, ON THE OTHER, FOR US TO SUPPRESS OUR HUNGER – OUR HUNGER FOR “STUFF.”

LISTEN TO WHAT THE FAMOUS RUSSIAN CHRISTIAN & NOVELIST LEO TOLSTOY SAID WELL OVER A HUNDRED YEARS AGO:

“SEEK AMONG MEN, FROM BEGGAR TO MILLIONAIRE, ONE WHO IS CONTENTED WITH HIS LOT, AND YOU WILL NOT FIND ONE SUCH IN A THOUSAND.

“EACH ONE SPENDS HIS STRENGTH IN PURSUIT OF WHAT IS EXACTED BY THE DOCTRINE OF THE WORLD, AND OF WHAT HE IS UNHAPPY NOT TO POSSESS, AND SCARCELY HAS HE OBTAINED ONE OBJECT OF HIS DESIRES WHEN HE STRIVES FOR ANOTHER, AND STILL ANOTHER, IN THAT INFINITE LABOR OF DESIRE WHICH DESTROYS THE LIVES OF MEN.

“HE WHO MAKES 300 RUBLES WOULD RATHER HAVE 400; HE WHO MAKES 4000 RUBLES WOULD RATHER HAVE 5000; AND HE WHO MAKES 1 MILLION RUBLES WOULD CLIMB AFTER 2 MILLION, AND SO ON TO THE TOP OF THE LADDER. “AND SO GOES THE LIFE OF MEN, THEY SACRIFICE THEIR LIVES FOR THIS SAME GOD – GREED, AND THEN THEY DIE, WITHOUT REALIZING FOR WHAT THEY HAVE LIVED!”

WHEN WE PRAY *“GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD,”* WE ARE PRAYING FOR OUR NEEDS TO BE MET & OUR DESIRES TO BE RESTRAINED.

THE FIFTH WORD IS FORGIVENESS – FORGIVENESS FOR OURSELVES & THE STRENGTH & GRACE TO FORGIVE OTHERS.

IN BOTH CASES, IT’S AN ENORMOUS BURDEN LIFTED FROM OUR SHOULDERS.

IT’S A WEIGHT TOSSED ASIDE, ENABLING US TO LIVE AS GOD INTENDS US TO LIVE.

THIS DUAL NATURE OF FORGIVENESS CAN PERHAPS BEST BE UNDERSTOOD BY THINKING OF A PARENT TEACHING A CHILD TO DO SOMETHING.

MOTHER DOES IT CAREFULLY A FEW TIMES & THEN STEPS BACK & SAYS, *“OKAY, NOW YOU SHOW ME.”*

GOD FORGIVES US & THEN STEPS BACK & SAYS, *“OKAY, NOW IT’S YOUR TURN. YOU SHOW ME HOW TO FORGIVE.”*

THERE IS ONE MORE PETITION IN THE PRAYER THAT LUKE RECORDS: *“DO NOT BRING US TO THE TIME OF TRIAL.”*

IT CORRESPONDS TO *“LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION, BUT DELIVER US FROM EVIL”* IN MATTHEW’S VERSION.

I’M AFRAID THAT WORDING LEAVES US SOMEWHAT CONFUSED & THERE ARE A VARIETY OF OPINIONS AS TO WHAT JESUS INTENDS WITH THOSE WORDS.

I THINK THE EASIEST WAY TO THINK OF IT IS *“GIVE US STRENGTH IN THE TIME OF TRIAL.”*

THE GREEK WORD THAT IS USED HERE FOR “TRIAL” IS THE SAME WORD THAT IS FOUND IN THE STORY OF THE TEMPTATION OF JESUS AT THE BEGINNING OF HIS MINISTRY.

HE FACED THREE TRIALS & THEY ALL HAD ONE THING IN COMMON – THEY WERE APPEALS TO PUT HIMSELF, AND NOT GOD, AT THE CENTER OF THE UNIVERSE.

AND ISN’T THAT WHEN WE GET INTO TROUBLE – WHEN WE LET SELF BE THE CENTER OF THINGS?

WE KNOW – EVERY ONE OF US – THAT WE WILL BE SUBJECTED TO TRIALS OR TEMPTATIONS.

THIS IS A PRAYER THAT – EVEN THOUGH WE’RE SUBJECTED TO THOSE TRIALS – WE NOT SUCCUMB TO THEM.

THE EARLY CHRISTIANS OFTEN FACED PERSECUTION & DEATH FOR THEIR FAITH.

THESE WERE THEIR FORMS OF TRIAL.

BUT FOR US, THE TRIALS WE FACE ARE MUCH LESS DRAMATIC & YET NO LESS DANGEROUS.

THE TRIALS YOU FACE JUST SLOWLY SNEAK UP ON YOU & BEFORE YOU KNOW IT, YOU’VE SIMPLY DRIFTED AWAY FROM A SERIOUS COMMITMENT TO CHRIST.

YOU DIDN’T PLAN IT THAT WAY.

IT JUST HAPPENED.

NOTHING BIG...JUST A SLOW, DEADLY DRIFTING AWAY.

YOU FORGET THAT JESUS SAID TO PRAY TO AVOID IT.

SUCCUMBING TO THOSE TRIALS & TEMPTATIONS IS AS DEADLY AS ANY PLAGUE OR EPIDEMIC.
IT'S WORSE THAN THE MOST DEVASTATING EARTHQUAKE, TORNADO OR HURRICANE.
YOU SEE, JESUS DOESN'T JUST TACK THIS PETITION ON AT THE END AS AN AFTERTHOUGHT.
IT'S AS IMPORTANT AS EVERY OTHER ASPECT OF THE LORD'S PRAYER.
IN ESSENCE, JESUS SAYS, "*YOU'VE ACKNOWLEDGED THAT GOD IS YOUR FATHER AND PRAYED FOR HIS KINGDOM TO COME.*"

"YOU HAVE PRAYED FOR DAILY PROVISIONS & FORGIVENESS.

"NOW PRAY THAT YOU WILL HOLD ONTO YOUR FAITH & NEVER LOSE IT."

THE BIBLICAL SCHOLAR & MISSIONARY, KEN BAILEY, WHO HAS SPENT A GOOD PART OF HIS LIFE IN THE MIDDLE EAST (AND WHO ALSO HAPPENS TO BE DAVID BAILEY'S FATHER), TELLS OF AN EXPERIENCE HE HAD WHILE LECTURING IN A CHURCH IN THE FORMER SOVIET UNION.

MOST OF THOSE ATTENDING WERE BETWEEN 25 & 35 YEARS OF AGE.

THIS MEANT THAT ALL OF THEIR EDUCATION HAD BEEN IN THE COMMUNIST STATE SYSTEM, WHICH WAS DETERMINED TO INDOCTRINATE THEM IN ATHEISM.

BAILEY ASKED ONE OF THE YOUNG WOMEN A SERIES OF QUESTIONS TO DETERMINE HOW SHE HAD COME TO FAITH.

"WAS THERE A CHURCH IN YOUR VILLAGE?"

"NO, THE COMMUNISTS CLOSED ALL OF THEM."

"DID SOME SAINTLY GRANDMOTHER INSTRUCT YOU IN THE WAYS OF GOD?"

"NO. ALL THE MEMBERS OF MY FAMILY WERE ATHEISTS."

"DID YOU HAVE SECRET HOME BIBLE STUDIES, OR WAS THERE AN UNDERGROUND CHURCH IN YOUR AREA?"

"NO, NONE OF THAT."

"SO WHAT HAPPENED?"

THIS IS WHAT THAT YOUNG WOMAN TOLD KEN BAILEY:

'AT FUNERALS WE WERE ALLOWED TO RECITE THE LORD'S PRAYER. AS A YOUNG CHILD I HEARD THOSE STRANGE WORDS AND HAD NO IDEA WHO WE WERE TALKING TO, WHAT THE WORDS MEANT, WHERE THEY CAME FROM OR WHY WE WERE RECITING THEM.

"WHEN FREEDOM CAME AT LAST, I HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO SEARCH FOR THEIR MEANING.

"WHEN YOU ARE IN TOTAL DARKNESS, THE TINIEST POINT OF LIGHT IS VERY BRIGHT. FOR ME THE LORD'S PRAYER WAS THAT POINT OF LIGHT. BY THE TIME I FOUND ITS MEANING I WAS A CHRISTIAN."

THE LORD'S PRAYER IS, INDEED, A BRIGHT POINT OF LIGHT IN OUR FAITH – SOMETHING TO BE TREASURED, CHERISHED & SHARED OVER & OVER AGAIN WITH ONE ANOTHER. AMEN.

*The Reverend Dr. Dennis R. Davenport
Eastminster Presbyterian Church
Evansville, Indiana*