

Sometimes, It's No.
Luke 11:1-13
Colebrook Congregational Church
July 24, 2016 / 10th Sunday After Pentecost / Proper 12C / Ordinary 17C

I learned the Lord's Prayer the way we spoke it earlier in today's service. I did not realize that there was another way to say it until I went to summer church camp in Sharon, CT., and heard others using trespasses and even some using sins. The staff, counselors, everyone, just went with it. And then, when I went away to college, everywhere I went, it was only trespasses, and I even received looks from people for saying debts and debtors instead. It was such a comfort to come home and hear the familiar form.

Today's selection is one of the forms of the Lord's Prayer. Much of the Prayer uses a lot of Jewish imagery, but that is to be expected. The one found in Matthew is longer, and is considered the liturgical version, with a doxology added on to the end. It is the one that we recited today, saying debts and debtors. The shorter one here in Luke uses sins, so where did the one with trespasses come from? That version came from the third century, and replaced debts with trespasses because Jesus talks about trespasses in the following verses in Matthew.

The Prayer opens by invoking who we are talking to, emphasizing our personal relationship with God, even as we speak it together as a community.

The First Petition, "Hallowed be thy name," is a recognition that God's name is holy, something to inspire awe and reverence, that should not be trivialized by making God a tool for unwholesome purposes, to put someone down, or to attack others.

I am reminded of a movie called, "Saved." The main character was going through a crisis and her so-called friends kidnap her in a van and then attempt to perform an exorcism on her. She escapes the van, and the others confront her, invoking God to attack her. They argue about Christ's Love, and when the main character walks away, the antagonist screams, "I am full of Christ's Love!" and throws her Bible at the main character, who picks it up and hands it back, saying, "This is not a weapon!"

The Second Petition, “Thy kingdom come,” comes from a Jewish prayer that loses something in translation, where the word refers to both a kingdom and the kingship of God at the same time. It is eschatological in nature, looking to the future with hope.

Luke does not include the Third Petition that is found in Matthew.

The Fourth Petition, “Give us each day our daily bread.” I discovered something interesting about this part. The Greek word translated as “daily,” is *ἐπιούσιος*. This word only occurs three times in Christian literature, and each time it is as part of the Lord's Prayer. This word does not occur in any other known Ancient Greek texts. So, here's the challenge: There is no consensus of what the word means! Jesus would have spoken primarily Aramaic, and the New Testament was written in Koine Greek, a simple version of Greek, and this word is only used once. Even Greek writers, contemporary to the Gospel writers, had no idea what it really meant. In the Vulgate Latin translation, Saint Jerome actually translated it differently between Matthew and Luke.

In the past, this line was different, reflecting the translation difficulties through time. Imagine that! Here are some of the different ways that line went: “Give us each day our bread necessary for existence,” or “Give us each day our super-essential bread.” Doesn't feel right, does it?

The Fifth Petition, “And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us,” Here, we see the mix of sins and debts. In the Prayer, debts do not necessarily mean a financial obligation. And in Aramaic, the word can mean both debts and sins. The point is, we can expect God's forgiveness only as we ourselves show a forgiving spirit.

Lastly, the Sixth Petition, “And do not bring us to the time of trial.” The footnote in our Bibles give the more familiar, “us into temptation.” The Greek word has a lot of meanings, leading to many glosses of this line, using temptation, trial, testing, and experiment.

Jesus follows this lesson on how to pray with the Parable of the Persistent Friend, teaching that if perseverance achieves its end in everyday human relationships, how much more in our relationship with God.

Then Jesus gives us assurance that our prayers will be answered. Intercessory prayers are also an act of exploration. They seek out God's Will for our lives & submit to it. We may not always understand what God's Will is for us, especially in the moment. And we may not even be happy with the answer that we receive.

This was the theme of a Jim Carrey movie called, Bruce Almighty. The main character, Bruce, was a down on his luck ex-reporter who blamed God for his misfortunes.

God, played by Morgan Freeman, summoned Bruce and expresses disagreement with Bruce's assessment of God's job performance. God then gave Bruce all of God's powers to demonstrate how God was doing the job properly.

Bruce started off by using the divine power for selfish ends, to get his old job back, a promotion, upgrading his car, and so on.

Bruce then started to hear voices in his head. Then God confronted Bruce about his selfish use of God's powers. God explained that the voices were people's prayers to God from the Buffalo area, and that Bruce has to deal with them. Bruce was quickly overwhelmed by the millions of prayers, so he created a computer program to help him, automatically answering each prayer as Yes, shouting, "Now everyone's happy!"

Later on, Bruce realized that granting everyone's prayers has plunged Buffalo into chaos. Someone lost 47 lbs on the Krispy Kreme diet; stocks tripled; people became taller; someone pitched a no-hitter, the Buffalo Sabers win the Stanley Cup, with riots ensuing; and 400,000 asked to win the lottery, with each of them receiving \$17.

God told Bruce that he can now see what God goes through and that he must figure out a way to solve this situation himself. Bruce started to go through the prayers individually, and he focused on helping and doing good where he could.

While we are encouraged to ask for whatever, sometimes the answer is no. We cannot all win the lottery, and not all of our teams can win the big game. I try to remember to watch how I pray, making sure I am not asking for anything frivolous. And even if the answer to what we ask is no, we can still receive something. Sometimes God wants us to go elsewhere, sometimes there is a lesson we need to learn, and sometimes the answer is not right now. What is important is that we put our trust in God, and pray, and when we are in need, we ask, and we shall receive what we need.

Please join me in the Spirit of Prayer:

Listening God, whenever we offer You our prayers, let us remember that we do not have to twist the arm of a reluctant God to seek good things for this world, nor find ways to persuade a distant God to come near and listen to us. Let us remember that as we pray we kneel alongside Jesus Christ, in the presence of You, with the help of the Spirit, and may we go into this week to live out our prayers through our lives. Amen.

Intercessory Prayer

[PAUSE]

God of salvation, who sent Your Son to seek out and save what is lost, hear our prayers on behalf of those who are lost in our day, receiving these petitions and thanksgivings with your unending compassion.

We give You thanks for all the blessings and lessons You have shared with us. May we always approach You and our neighbors with a grateful heart full of Your Love.

Even though You Command us to love our neighbor as ourselves, we create fences around ourselves to keep neighbors outside and tell ourselves it is not our problem, yet we wish it were different. Despite our resistance, we can be assured that You redeem all people, with a love we can never lose no matter how hard we push back, no matter how often we forget, no matter how far we stray. We only need to ask and we are forgiven.

Be with those who are distraught, those who are without, those who know not peace and seek it, those who struggle with addiction, those who are in need, and those who are unwell in mind, body, or spirit. Be with the victims of violence and their loved ones. Help us to comfort them with Your abundant Love. Bless the services of all Your people, and assure them that You are pleased with their work.

We pray that You help lead us through our own trials, the sufferings and sorrows, the challenges and struggles, and back to Your Love. Fill us with hope, sustained in Your mercy, giving us guidance through Your Word, and stamina through Your Spirit.

We especially pray for:

Loving God, open our ears to hear your word and draw us closer to you, that the whole world may be one with you as you are one with us in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Luke 11:1-13

He was praying in a certain place, and after he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples." He said to them, "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." And he said to them, "Suppose one of you has a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; for a friend of mine has arrived, and I have nothing to set before him.' And he answers from within, 'Do not bother me; the door has already been locked, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.' I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, at least because of his persistence he will get up and give him whatever he needs. "So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for a fish, will give a snake instead of a fish? Or if the child asks for an egg, will give a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

Psalm 138

I give you thanks, O LORD, with my whole heart; before the gods I sing your praise; I bow down toward your holy temple and give thanks to your name for your steadfast love and your faithfulness; for you have exalted your name and your word above everything. On the day I called, you answered me, you increased my strength of soul. All the kings of the earth shall praise you, O LORD, for they have heard the words of your mouth. They shall sing of the ways of the LORD, for great is the glory of the LORD. For though the LORD is high, he regards the lowly; but the haughty he perceives from far away. Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you preserve me against the wrath of my enemies; you stretch out your hand, and your right hand delivers me. The LORD will fulfill his purpose for me; your steadfast love, O LORD, endures forever. Do not forsake the work of your hands.