

JULY 24, 2022 – OUR FATHER

Our gospel today comes from Luke 11: 1-13

So today we're going to talk about a prayer that just about everybody knows.

It's a prayer that many of us were taught as children. It's a prayer that is both simple, yet profound.

It's a prayer that can be prayed by a five-year-old with understanding, while at the same time, not fully understood over a lifetime.

Of course, I'm talking about the Lord's Prayer, also known as the Our Father.

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespassed against us, and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

So, amen.

There it is, just kind of rolls off the tongue, doesn't it?

And many of us, well, we recite it like a fire drill without a whole lot of thought behind it.

But let me tell you, my friend, never has so much been said in so few words.

Now, if you were with us last week, we were talking about two sisters, Martha and Mary.

And in case you missed that one, Martha was real busy. She was seeking the love of Jesus.

Meanwhile, Mary, her sister, was sitting at the feet of Jesus, seemingly doing nothing, not helping Martha, receiving the love of Jesus.

So, you had Martha trying to feed Jesus, and Mary simply feeding on Jesus, and Martha is not happy.

Jesus says to her, "Martha, Martha, "You are anxious and concerned about many things. There is need of only one thing, and Mary has chosen the better part and it will not be taken from her."

So, before we get any further on this, let me just say, and I want to make this very clear.

Jesus was not criticizing Martha.

Service is a good thing.

It is a foundational principle to the Christian life.

He is simply making the point that living in the eternal now at the feet of Jesus and **contemplation** is the better part.

And what is that better part?

Well, that's what we're going to be talking about today. The better part.

Jesus was praying in a certain place.

And when he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord teach us to pray "just as John taught his disciples to pray."

So, let's begin with a little cultural context.

Rabbis of that day would often give their disciples a particular prayer.

It's a creed of sorts.

It was a mark of distinction, something that set them apart from the others, but there's a little drama playing out behind the scenes here, just under the surface, because you see, the disciples of Jesus considered the disciples of John the Baptist, and any other prominent rabbi for that matter, they perceived them as competition.

You know that whole, my rabbi is better than your rabbi thing.

I mean, really, it's silly, but this is what we do.

We talked a little bit about this last week.

It's called ego, which stands for easing God out.

Ego is when me myself and I get together and create us and them, division.

It's the biggest hammer in Satan's toolbox, divide and conquer.

And you can see he's done a wonderful job at division when it comes to our world today.

Now, just as last week Jesus had looked beyond the silliness of Martha and this request.

Today, he's doing the same thing because last week he said, "There's need of only one thing."

Today, in much the same way, he goes to a higher place. I'm not interested in giving you a creed.

No, no, no. I'm going to give you a blueprint of how we are to both speak and hear from God, the bridge between humanity and divinity, the perfect prayer.

As I said, a prayer for beginners that grows over a lifetime, like a moving signpost that continues to guide us home.

Our Father who art in heaven.

Now, I mentioned this last week, but it is worth reviewing, how shocking it is that Jesus is referring to Yahweh as Father.

This was not done.

One did not refer to Yahweh in familial terms, because **Yahweh was not relational.**

Yahweh was to be appeased through sacrifice along with our futile attempts at righteousness, all the while remaining inaccessible, residing behind the curtain in the temple in the Holy of Holies, off limits.

So, calling Yahweh Father, or even worse, **Abba**, which means Daddy, is far too intimate to fit into the theological box of their understanding.

So that's the first thing.

Now, secondly, and it's not in our translation that we read today, but when we say the Our Father, we do not say my Father.

We say our Father, and this is intentional, because this is **not a me thing.**

This is an **us thing.**

The cross has two beams.

The vertical beam is you and God.

This is your relationship, me, and God.

The horizontal beam is you and me because you see, I find God through you, and you find God through me.

At least, hopefully.

We are called to pray in community.

Our Father, not my Father, which is why the whole, I'm really religious, but nope, no, I'm not really religious, but I'm a real spiritual guy, you know?

That makes no sense because we are not called to be wandering nomads.

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Now the Hebrew word for hallowed is holy or sacred.

It means to sanctify, to consecrate, to venerate.

Now those are religious words.

We don't hear those words too often, so let's talk about them.

Let's consider that word sacred. What does that word really mean? What is truly sacred in your life?

You know, not too long ago, I was making a house call with an elderly lady.

We were drinking tea in her living room, and I couldn't help but notice that she had all these pictures of her grandchildren all over the room, and over the mantle in the most prominent place was a large picture of herself surrounded by her grandchildren.

One could say that that room was a shrine to her grandchildren.

She had sanctified, she had consecrated her mantle with what is the most important thing to her.

One could say that her grandchildren were sacred for her, and understand,

I'm not knocking this, okay? It's a beautiful thing.

She's a very spiritual person. She has her priorities in order. Love of family.

It's certainly a reflection of love of the Trinity, but it does beg the question, what do you venerate?

What is sacred in your life? What is on your mantle?

And if you're not exactly sure of the answer to that question, you need to ask yourself another question.

What do you spend the majority of your time thinking about?

What is your focus? Is it career?

Is it possessions?

Is it relationships?

I mean, what is your focus?

Because whatever that is, that's what you worship.

Now I bring this up simply to make the point that it's very easy for us to substitute something else besides our Father to be hallowed.

I'm just saying.

So, from the very first line of this perfect prayer, we are forced to examine where our focus lies.

Is it our Father, or is it something else?

And I'm not pointing fingers here. I mean, I struggle with this myself.

I can easily launch into the Lord's Prayer while still in Martha mode and the Father is not my focus.

Yet here we have Jesus, and he is challenging us to do exactly this.

Find our focus, and how do we do that? Well, he tells.

Hallowed be the name.

What is that?

Find your gratitude. That's what that is. Why?

Because you can't even begin to pray until you locate your gratitude.

And we have so many things to be thankful for.

Food in the refrigerator, clothes on our back, a bed to sleep in.

What more do we need?

What more could we possibly want?

Everything else is gravy.

This is where we start.

What is our focus?

What hangs on our mantle?

What are we worshiping?

Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

What we're saying here is we are inviting God's kingdom to manifest itself in us.

What we're saying is, come to me, Father.

Create in me a new heart.

Thy will be done are not words to be taken lightly.

Those words came out of the garden of Gethsemane. "Remember not my will, Lord, but thy will be done." This is a seed upon which the

Christian life flowers.

In other words, I'm turning my will and my life over to your care.

You know, in 1932, there was a man named

Reinhold Niebuhr, and he wrote a prayer.

It's called the **Serenity Prayer**.

It's a prayer that has been adopted by **Alcoholics Anonymous**.

And it is a prayer that has helped millions of people who suffer from addiction find sobriety.

"God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things that I can, and the wisdom to know the difference."

Wow, I tell you what.

That is a profound prayer.

Living one day at a time, enjoying one moment at a time, accepting hardship as a pathway to peace,

taking this fallen world as it is, and not as I think it should be, trusting all along that in the end, God's

got this.

God's going to make it right.

And how do I do that?

Not my will, Lord, but thy will be done.

Give us this day our daily bread.

Now as a kid growing up, I always thought that

"Well, he's talking about food, because we all got to eat."

But as I said, this prayer changes as you grow in the spiritual life.
And as I got older, I realized, well, you know, it's more than food.
It's really our material needs.
But then I grew older, and after having learned about Jesus all my life, I finally met him.
And when I did, this line changed again, because I came to understand that Jesus refers to himself as bread of life.
So, give us this day our daily bread means, give me Jesus every day.
Why? Because that's what I need.
Now, of course I'm often confused as to what I think I need.
That's been going on since I was a small child.
Case in point, Christmas.
I remember as a child, I was led to believe that what I really needed was a green plastic dinosaur.
That's what I needed.
I had seen one on TV and this is what I felt I needed.
Of course, I was not aware at the time that there is a multi-billion-dollar industry behind that desire.
But regardless, I knew that this is what I needed.
Meanwhile, my father knew that I needed to go to the pediatrician's office and get my shots.
And when he informed me of this, I said, "Well actually, Dad, what I really need is a green plastic dinosaur," which as you might imagine, fell on deaf ears, which is often what happens when we pray.
Because sometimes it feels like God does not hear our prayers, but that's not the case.
He hears them.
It's just that **the answer is no**.
Why? Because you don't need a green plastic dinosaur.
What you need are your shots.
Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.
My friends, we could do three shows on nothing but this line, easily.
We are forgiven as we forgive.
And you know, it's always struck me.
It's kind of odd that the very thing that we are all so desperately in need of receiving, we ourselves have so difficult a time giving to each other.
Yet here it is, black and white.
Forgive us our trespasses/sins/debts as we forgive those who trespass against us.
Jesus is making it abundantly clear that that burning resentment that you carry in your heart today towards somebody, and I can just hear, "Well, Father, see, "you just don't know you don't, you don't know what they did. You don't know."
And you're right, I don't. I don't, but I know this.

Jesus is making it very clear.

You know that thing, whatever it is, could be the very thing that keeps you out of heaven.
So, I want you to really open up your mind really wide and let me dump this in.
It's just three words. Are you ready?

Let it go.

Not for them.

For you.

It could be the most freeing thing you ever do. Lead us not into temptation.

Now this is kind of interesting because the Greek word that is used here for temptation can also mean to test, and let's face it, those are entirely different things.

Temptation and test.

And while most of us in the Western world will say temptation, lead us not into temptation, a Gospel text says test.

Do not allow us to fall into temptation, which is actually what they already say in the Spanish version of the Lord's Prayer.

Which makes sense because the Book of James makes it clear that God tempts no man.

And of course, that is true.

It is not Jesus who leads us into hell.

We do a fine job of that ourselves.

It's called self-will.

We build our house of hell one brick at a time, with one bad decision after another.

The walls go up.

The roof is completed.

We plant gardens of habitual sin.

And then we sit inside our own creation and cry out, "Oh God, oh God. "Why have you abandoned me?"

Because while it might be true that we pray for thy will to be done, we go out and do our own will.

Or while it might be true, we pray, deliver us from evil, all the while we are accepting the bricks of sin the evil one is handing us.

We build the cells of our own imprisonment and sit in it.

And like that old Eagles song says, "So oftentimes it happens that we live our lives in chains and we never even know we have the key."

But you do.

Jesus has given you that key today. Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom comes. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us, and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

Come, Lord Jesus.

Fill the hearts of your faithful. Enkindle in us the fire of your love.