

Sermon – January 21, 2024  
“Pray then in this way”  
The Rev. John C. Wright



Text: Luke 18:9-14 and Matthew 6:5-14

*Pray with me: Father, let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. Come, Holy Spirit, come. Visit, fill open hearts, and anoint the sharing of these words. Jesus, fuel our continuing transformation into your image with these words and give us a renewed desire to follow you into fruitful labor in your mission right here, right now. Lord, come and astonish us with your word this day. Amen*

The Spirit of Jesus in me greets the Spirit of Jesus in you, in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Good morning and welcome to the third Sunday in Epiphany. Last week, we began to talk about prayer, and this week we continue with more of Jesus’ teaching about prayer. I will say that my phone did not ring last week with new requests for prayer for any who are ill. Let me encourage us as I did last week to pray for each other and to call for the elders to pray for us when we are ill. This past week I began reading Steve Seamands’ book “Follow the Healer” and I ran into a question that was asked of crowds by a speaker JD Walt encountered at a chapel service at Asbury Seminary chapel. The speaker asked for a show of hands for anyone whose parents prayed over them when they were sick, asking Jesus to come and heal them. Now I was blessed to grow up in a Christian home and I got sick quite a bit. I am sure that my mother and father prayed for me when I was ill, but I do not ever recall one of my parents coming into my room and praying for me to be healed. I do recall being coated head to toe in Vick’s salve and having a humidifier in my room whenever I was ill, but I cannot recall a time when a parent

came and prayed over me for healing. If we have listened to the pineapple stories about Otto Koning's experience as a missionary to Indonesia, we will have heard him share how he learned not only to pray over their sick children but to surrender them to God. The doctors were far away from where he was in the jungle and if Jesus did not heal, there would be no healing. I also recall seeing several ladies at the mission site we were working on in Mexico on a mission trip go and pray over one of my fellow travelers who had become ill. The ladies had read their Bible and knew what it said and went and prayed over those who were ill. But I could not find that experience in my own young life. So, I thought I would ask, do any of us recall having been prayed over by a parent when we were ill? Let me encourage us again to pray over each other when we are ill and to ask for the elders to come, pray over us, and anoint us with oil.

Jesus gives his disciples an abundance of guidance about prayer. Let's look at the passage from Luke first this morning as it speaks to the issue of where our hearts are to be when we pray. We are not to be like the Pharisee that Jesus speaks of and desire to be seen when we pray. If we do, being seen will be our reward. Instead, when we are together in public and the opportunity comes for prayer, as over a meal, we should check our heart first and make sure that we are seeking to give thanks to God for his provision for us and not to be seen as a pious group of people who hold themselves better than others. Our cry is to be like the tax collector asking Jesus to have mercy on us as sinners and to ask for grace to be extended to us. Don't hesitate to pray in public but do watch where our hearts are when we do. Likewise, Jesus teaches us in Matthew's Gospel that we are not to use an abundance of empty words when we pray. Keep our prayers short, to the point, and on subject. God is all knowing. Before we utter the first word of our prayer, before we are able to voice our desires, God knows our needs, yet He listens carefully to our prayers. We don't have to wake God up or point out something that God has missed; God knows our needs before we pray. We are to open the depths of our hearts to God and bring before Him the prayers of our hearts. In reality, our prayers are far more importantly to open our hearts to receive grace and to open us to change than for us to give God information He is lacking. When we pray, we are to come before God in a manner that allows our time in God's presence to be a time when we are open to the move of Holy Spirit in our hearts and our hearts being changed to what they should be before God. The more I learn about prayer, the more often I am led back to the idea of simply praying, "Help me, change me, and lead me."

When Jesus is asked to teach his disciples to pray, he gives them specific instructions about their hearts, but he also gives to them and us a prayer we call the Lord's Prayer. Many point out that a better title for this prayer would be the Disciples' Prayer, as it is given for us to use as both a model of prayer and a prayer to pray together, as we do when we gather for worship. Let's spend a few minutes this morning looking at what Jesus teaches his disciples when he gives them this prayer. We can divide the prayer into two parts. The first part is a prayer to God and the second is a prayer of petition on our behalf.

The first thing we might notice is that when Jesus teaches his disciples to pray, he teaches them to pray to *our* Father. In Matthew's Gospel, this is the only time Jesus refers to God as *our* Father. Elsewhere, Jesus will use *my* Father or *the* Father. But in his teaching on prayer, Jesus opens the door for us to become part of the relationship he shares with the Father. One of the first instructions Jesus gives to us is to pray as he does. We are to pray as a brother or sister of Jesus to our Father. The door is opened wide for us to have a new relationship with God, a door opened wide through Jesus's death, resurrection, and ascension into the perfect love Jesus shares with the Father. If our own relationship with our earthly father is not or was not good, don't let that be an issue for us, a stumbling block to a right relationship with our Father. Jesus has opened the relationship of the perfect love of the Father and invites us into what he shares with his Father, now our Father. Jesus also is ready, able, and willing to heal any brokenness within us that came from an experience where our earthly fathers were not able to live as they should and may have damaged our understanding of a father relationship. Jesus invites us to pray to our Father. If we have a broken relationship with our earthly father, then ask Jesus for mercy and let him heal our brokenness from that relationship. Jesus made the way to extend the Father's love he experiences to us and if we let him, he will heal our brokenness and let us experience the Father's love.

Next, Jesus tells us to hallow the name of the Father. Now, "hallow" is not a word that I use on a daily basis. It is a Sunday word that we use when we pray the Lord's Prayer, and we might not be able to give a good definition of what it means to hallow the name of the Father. Yet, it is a word most translators use when they translate this passage. The Common English Bible uses "uphold the holiness of your name." The NASB translators footnote the word "hallowed" with the note, "treated as sacred or holy," and Eugene Peterson in The Message translation uses the phrase, "reveal who you are." We might also recall from the Ten

Commandments that we are not to make wrongful use of the name of God. We are to treat the name of the Father with great respect, with awe, wonder, and as a holy name. When we pray, “hallowed be thy name,” we should be focused on a Holy God who is now listening to our prayer. We should bow in worship as in the presence of the Holy One, and our love for the Father should flow out of our hearts as reverence to the one to whom we pray.

As we pray, “thy kingdom come,” we should understand that we are asking the Father to use us to bring the kingdom of heaven into existence on earth. We should grasp that we are asking the Father to let us be workers in the in breaking kingdom of God. We are not praying for a future time of action when Jesus returns. We are praying in the now, in this moment, in the day, so that we might be counted among those who are at work bringing about the kingdom of God, one life at a time. As we pray this prayer, we seek to surrender our will to the will of the Father. We should have the picture in our minds of Jesus praying in the garden and submitting fully to the Father’s will. We should seek to surrender our will and turn to the cross that Jesus asks us to take up and bear it fully. We seek to set aside our will and to surrender to the Father as the host of heaven completely follows the Father’s will, as Jesus completely followed and follows God’s will. We are to seek to fully surrender our will and bring the Father’s will to earth in our life. We are to be those who are found working through love to help every person conform to the Father’s will, helping others who do not know the Father learn that they also are invited into the perfect love between the Father and the Son.

Now we move into the section of the Lord’s Prayer that is characterized by petition, the first being our request for daily bread. The Greek word translated as “daily” occurs nowhere else in Greek grammar and so we seek to understand what daily bread might be. For many in our country, the need for daily bread or for bread for tomorrow is a foreign concept. For workers in the first century who did not have bread unless they had worked that day, it was a much clearer idea. For those who came out of Egypt and ate the bread of angels that came down from heaven each morning (except on the Sabbath), daily bread was a well understood provision of God. The idea is that we are to have a total reliance on God for our provision. When Jesus was on earth, he relied on God for his daily bread. If we pray this prayer in the morning, then we are asking for provision for that day, and if we pray this prayer in the evening, we are asking for provision for the coming day. The point is that we are acknowledging God as the one who knows and meets our needs. We ask that we may acknowledge our reliance on God and His gift of provision.

Next, we come to forgiveness. I think of this as the heart of the Lord's Prayer. It is upon this point alone that Jesus provides additional teaching after he gives his disciples the prayer. Notice that forgiveness is not focused on the removal of a debt but is focused on debtors or trespassers. Jesus is not teaching about loan forgiveness but restoration of relationships. The heart of forgiveness is that through Jesus's actions on the cross we are forgiven and, in response, we are to forgive others. Our response for what we have been forgiven is to live lives clearly marked by our forgiveness of others. We are to speak the language of forgiveness into the cries for vindication in the world. Because we are forgiven people, we too are to forgive. In one of the preparation times for a trip into prison to share the love of Christ there, one of the women in the group shared with us that not forgiving is like drinking poison and expecting the other person to die. For some reason her statement spoke to me and it has always stayed with me. My own reluctance to forgive separates me from the forgiveness I so desperately need and have been freely given. Why do I seek to withhold from others what I have been given? My lack of extending forgiveness to others separates me from the Father and so Jesus teaches us to pray, asking for forgiveness as we forgive others.

Testing is normal for those who seek to live as Christ asks us to live in the world. As we seek to follow Jesus, we will find ourselves at odds with the world. Those moments of testing or trials can become temptations and so Jesus teaches us to pray that we will not be led into temptation in our times of testing and, if we are, that we will be delivered from the evil one. We are asking the Father for a way out of the testing and the strength to take that way out. And we should realize that in testing there will be times when we are to stay in the midst of our testing and instead receive strength from the Father to endure it so that we might give glory to God. Jesus teaches his disciples to pray over the trials that will come into our lives.

As Jesus completes his teaching on prayer, he returns to the topic of forgiveness. Jesus teaches us that if we do not forgive, we will not be forgiven. Our response to our salvation is to forgive others. If the fruit of forgiveness is not found in our lives, we are outside of the Father's will. We may struggle to trust those we forgive, but we are to be those who forgive others as we have been forgiven. Because Jesus gives forgiveness extra focus, we also need to pay attention to how we are forgiving others. We need to seek to understand what Jesus teaches and demonstrates for us about forgiveness so that we might be better conformed to his image. Our hearts are to be places where the forgiveness the Father has for us is extended to others.

The Lord's Prayer is a prayer that can be used corporately, prayed together as we do weekly, or it can be a model of prayer to guide our own individual times of prayer. When we pray the Lord's Prayer, our struggle can be that it becomes casual, rote, and not from our hearts. We are not seeking to simply say the words, but to let them come from our hearts, to open our hearts to receive grace, and to be changed. We are seeking to allow the Lord's Prayer to come forth from deep within us as our cry to our Father. As we pray the Lord's Prayer, we seek to revere the Father and to enter into the love shared between the Father and the Son. We should seek through prayer to ask humbly for our daily provisions and to trust our Father for our daily needs. As we pray, we are to seek to become people who, as we are forgiven, forgive others. Pray the Lord's Prayer with others. There is a group of people across the world who have their alarms set for noon and pray the Lord's Prayer together in this way daily. Pray the Lord's Prayer with the members of this fellowship and other fellowships we may be blessed to gather with for prayer. Pray the Lord's Prayer in a secret place from our hearts before our Father. And not only pray the prayer, but be changed so that we might live out the prayer, seeking to hallow our Father, worship our Father, trust our Father for our provisions, surrender to our Father's will in our lives, become those who forgive others that we might be forgiven, and listen for Holy Spirit guidance when we find ourselves in the midst of testing. Would you assume a posture of prayer before our Father and pray with me now from the depths of our hearts the prayer Jesus taught his disciples to pray?

**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 trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil; For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen**

#### BENEDICTION

The Spirit of the Lord is upon us because he has anointed us to bring good news to the poor. He has sent us to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

Go forth as those forgiven to follow Jesus into his mission to all people.