

## **“Our Father”**

The First Sermon on the Lord's Prayer  
First Presbyterian Church of Kingwood  
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Dr. Jim Davis

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I wonder if you remember? It's been over two years now, but it was one of the first sermons I preached here in Kingwood and in it I talked about prayer. I called it one of the core spiritual habits of Jesus' life, and it is. I said that if we want to be disciples who follow Christ, not just part of the crowd who listen to him, then we need to try and build Jesus' spiritual habits into our lives.

Last year we took a step in that direction, trying to build Jesus' habit of reading and reflecting on Scripture into our lives through "Storyline." This year we're trying to take another step, trying to build Jesus habit of prayer into our lives through "Conversation."

But I've got to be honest. When I first talked to you about trying to build Jesus spiritual habits into our lives, I was nervous, especially when I talked about prayer. In fact I remember asking myself in preparing that sermon, "Do we know each other well enough yet as pastor and congregation for me to talk about prayer?" After all, prayer's a pretty personal topic.

But I decided I would. And I'm glad I did, for many reasons. But one of the reasons is because a few days after I spoke, I found a note for me here at the church. It wasn't signed. Someone had simply slipped it anonymously into my mailbox in the office. And I usually don't pay much attention to anonymous notes, but this one was different. It didn't contain words of criticism or commendation. All the note had written on it was a prayer.

Apparently whoever put it in my box thought someday I might preach on prayer again. And I guess they figured if I did this prayer might help me. So let me share with all of you. It's called, "A Prayer for the Day." And this is way it goes.

"Dear Lord, so far today I've done all right. I haven't lost my temper, haven't been greedy, grumpy, nasty or selfish. And I'm glad about that. But Lord, in a few minutes, I'm going to get out of bed ... and from that point on, I'll probably need a lot more help. So Lord stay with me. Amen."

Well with gratitude to my anonymous friend, I'd like to talk some more with all of you about prayer. In fact, I'm going to start a series of sermons this morning that's going to take us from this First Sunday of Lent all the way through Easter and all of the sermons in the series will focus on just one prayer; the Lord's Prayer.

Phillip Keller writes about it beautifully. He says, "There's hardly a moment when it's not being repeated somewhere. From hospital beds to children's bedrooms, from the baptismal font to the graveside, from liturgies in cathedrals to daily devotions at home. Every day, this prayer is spoken. No words are as known worldwide by Christians as well as these words."

And there's a reason for that. "The truths in this prayer radiate," Keller says, "from the very heart of Christ ... It reassures our hearts, strengthens our resolve, and leads us into personal contact with God." And all because, Luke says, one day, on a day like the one we talked about last week, Jesus was again praying in private and his disciples were with him. And this time when he finished praying, it was the disciples turn to ask him a question. "Lord," one of them asked, "teach us to pray."

Now I don't know whether you've ever wondered. But why do you suppose he asked? Certainly there were good models for prayer in the first century. The disciple even mentions one. "Lord," he says, "teach us to pray as John taught his disciples." Of course he didn't mean "teach us one of John's prayers." He meant "teach us to pray like you pray."

Why? Well as we said last week, it must have been the way Jesus prayed. There must have been something, something that convinced the disciples that Jesus' prayers were different, different than any other prayers they'd ever heard anyone pray. And they wanted to be able to talk to God the way Jesus talked to God. So they asked him to teach them how to do it. And he did.

And part of what he taught them, part of what he wants to teach us is first of all to keep our words few. No prayer Jesus ever prayed took very long to speak according to the Bible. The longest takes less than five minutes to say out loud. And that tells us something we need to understand right from the start because it implies that Jesus spent much more time listening in prayer than he did speaking.

Now maybe that's not the way we're used to praying, but according to Jesus it's the way we need to get used to praying. For the truth is every word of the Lord's

prayer is a word we need to listen to as we speak it. We need to listen to what we say so the prayer can come from our heart and not just from our memory.

On the front page of "The Weekly" this morning are some words that come from Martin Luther and they make this point much better than I can. Listen. Luther preached these words as part of his series of sermons on the Lord's Prayer.

"To this day," he told them, "I suckle at the Lord's Prayer like a child, and as an old man I eat and drink from it and never get my fill ... What a great pity that such a prayer is prattled and chattered so irreverently all over the world! How many pray the Lord's Prayer hundreds of times in the course of a year, and if they were to keep on doing so for a thousand years they would not have tasted or prayed one iota, not one dot of it!"

That's Luther! You can love his words or leave them alone! But one thing's for sure. After you read them, you'll never forget them! And he's right, isn't he? For the truth is, I have, you have, we all have prattled this prayer, haven't we? We've prayed it without hearing it, spoken it without listening to it. We've forgotten to say it slowly so that its words can change and re-shape us; our thoughts, our emotions, our decisions, our lives.

Remember! The request was not teach a prayer, but teach us how to pray. And the Lord's prayer will do that. It will teach us how to pray so that prayer becomes a power that re-shapes our lives if we'll take the time to really pray it and not merely say it. So let me ask you for a favor? You see everything I've just been telling you convinces me that unless I ask you to do me this favor, you won't believe me. You won't really experience the Lord's Prayer as Jesus meant for you to experience it.

So here's the favor I'd like to ask you for. Starting today, and for the next forty days of Lent until Easter Sunday morning, I'd like to ask you to find some time each day to pray the Lord's Prayer with me very slowly. And what I mean by slowly is this. I'd like to ask you not to say the whole prayer each week. I'd like to ask you just to say part of the prayer; just the part that we talk about on Sunday morning.

I'd like to ask you to say that part of the prayer with me each day during the next week, just that one part. And I'd like to ask you to listen, really listen to the words you're saying and to what comes to you as you do that. Listen to the thoughts that come into your mind. Listen to the emotions that come into your heart. Pray the Lord's Prayer with me in pieces this Lent and learn to listen to what you're saying

and what God's saying back to you and you'll be praying my friends as Jesus taught his disciples to pray.

Now as we begin, I need to tell you something. Some days praying like this will be meaningful for you. Other days it won't be. That's alright. It works that way in everyone's life, mine too. But pray like this, pray slowly anyway. For I promise you, if you do sometime during the next forty days, you'll discover something. I don't know what it will be. Something about God, or something about yourself, or something about what you're doing or what you need to do. Something will come clear to you that you hadn't understood before.

So I hope you'll do me this favor. Don't just come to church this Lent. Don't just listen to me tell you about this prayer. Discover it's power for yourself. Pray it in pieces and pray it slowly. For if you do, somewhere along the way, something will happen. This prayer will re-shape you because that's what it was meant to do.

But do come to church! For I do have a few insights I'd like to pass on to you too, lessons I've learned by praying this prayer slowly and listening. And the first lesson I want to share with you this morning is found in the first word, the word, "Father."

I wonder. Do any of you remember the pot-belly pig craze? In the 1980's all across America, people shelled out hundreds of dollars to own pot-bellied pigs. Most of them were imported from Vietnam and their breeders claimed they were smart and would grow to a weight of about forty pounds.

Well ... they were half right. The pigs were smart. They could be trained to walk on a leash, do tricks, even use a litter box. But they had a tendency to actually grow to about 150 pounds and sometimes they got pretty aggressive. So what do people do with an unwanted pig?

Fortunately a fellow named Dale Riffle came to the rescue. Someone had given Riffle one of these pigs, and he fell in love with it. Eventually he sold his suburban home, and moved with Rufus to a farm in West Virginia. Then he started taking in unwanted pigs. Before long, he was living in hog heaven, literally!

There are currently 180 residents on the farm. According to an article in U.S. News & World Report, they snooze on beds of pine shavings. They wallow in mud puddles. They soak in plastic swimming pools, listen to classical music and wait their turn for a belly rub. There's actually a waiting list of unwanted pigs trying to get a hoof in the door at the farm.

And Dale Riffle says, "I think we're all put on earth for some reason, and I guess pigs are my purpose. I love 'em." Now for anyone to think that pigs are a purpose in life is pretty amazing to me. But I'll tell you something even more amazing.

According to the Lord's Prayer, an infinite, perfect, holy God is in love with insignificant, imperfect and frequently sinful people. In fact God loves people like us so much that he wants to adopt us into family. He wants us to call him "Father."

Have you ever watched the way a father looks at a new born? Have you seen how he looks at it? When that child takes his or her first steps that father will be watching, won't he? When that child says his or her first words that father will be listening, won't he? So parents, if you can still remember how the sound of "Da Da" melted your heart, imagine, just imagine what happens to God's heart when he hears you pray, "Abba, Father in heaven; hallowed be your name."

So when you say the first line of the Lord's Prayer this week, whether you're a parent or a child, remember that we are all adopted sons and daughters of a heavenly Father. So say the first line of the Lord's Prayer slowly and picture the face of God turning towards you. Picture the eyes of God lighting up as you speak and the smile of God growing wide, because you're calling him by the name he most wants to be called, "Father."

So say the name this week. Say "Abba, Father in heaven; hallowed be thy name." Say it slowly, thoughtfully, then listen to the thoughts that come back to you and you'll be entering more deeply into the conversation called the Lord's Prayer.

Let's pray ...