

A Concert of Prayer
November 17, 2013
Matthew 6:5-13

Our Scripture reading is found in the Sermon on the Mount, in the sixth chapter of Matthew. It contains instructions on praying, and the prayer we often call the Lord's Prayer.

"And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward.

But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you. "When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

"Pray then in this way: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one.

May God bless the reading and hearing of these familiar words, attributed to Jesus.

Let us pray . . . Lord, teach us to pray. Help us to be open to experiencing the power of prayer. Take and use my words to empower our imaginations, awaken us to new possibilities, and embolden us in our actions. Amen.

Prayer becomes a part of people's lives in many ways. What is your story? How did you come to learn of prayer? When did you begin to pray?

Maybe you remember childhood prayers – your own or those of your children or grandchildren. Simple prayers like . . .

Now I lay me down to sleep,
I pray the Lord my soul to keep,
If I shall die before I wake,
I pray the Lord my soul to take. Amen.

OR . . . Perhaps as a youngster you were taught to fold your hands whenever you prayed.

Rather than closing your eyes, one popular children's prayer invites you to keep them wide open as you use your fingers as a guide.

Your thumb is closest to you. It reminds you to pray for those who are closest to you, including your family.

Next comes the index or pointer finger. It invites you to pray for those that help point you in the right direction.

Next comes the middle finger. Since it is the tallest of all, it directs you to pray for your leaders.

Next comes the ring finger. Since it is the weakest of all, it calls you to pray for those who are sick or in need of healing and wholeness.

Last comes the pinky finger. Since it is the smallest of all, it is a reminder to pray for yourself – to lift up your own needs.

Or maybe you have only been exposed to more grown up patterns of prayer. Perhaps you were introduced to the word ACTS model: adoration, confession, thanksgiving and supplication. Since these words have fallen out of common usage, an explanation is in order.

Adoration – adore, worship and praise God for who God is.

Confession – admit your shortcomings and sins.

Thanksgiving - give thanks for all God has and is doing.

Supplication – intercession, ask God for your need and those people and things that matter most to you.

Whether “now I lay me down to sleep,” the Five Finger Prayer, or ACTS are a part of your story or not, I know that the Lord's Prayer is.

I invite you to think of this prayer as one way you can pray throughout the day any and every day. Not only can you pray it through quickly as we did earlier in worship, but you can slow your pace and let your focus linger on each line.

If you look at the chart I placed in your bulletin you will see that the prayer begins with an introduction and ends with a conclusion. In between, in the body of the prayer, there are seven petitions. The first three focus on God. The final four focus on us.

<i>Introduction:</i> Our Father who is in heaven	
(1) hallowed be Your name	(4) give us this day our daily bread
(2) Your kingdom come,	(5) forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us
(3) Your will be done	(6) lead us not into temptation
	(7) deliver us from evil
<i>Conclusion:</i> for Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever	

Now we have an opportunity to learn about prayer by praying. Rather than recite the Lord's Prayer together, I will guide us through a prayer exercise or, if you prefer, a concert of prayer.

After a short explanation of each petition, I will invite you to pray. We will join together for close to one minute each time. Everyone is welcome to participate.

Petition#1: Hallowed be God's name.

"To hallow God's name is to set it apart in our hearts and in our minds and on our lips, to set it apart and make it holy. It is to regard the name of God as the truest, dearest, highest and holiest of all names."¹

Let us reflect on how we can hallow God's name by engaging in silent prayer.

(Silence) Amen.

Petition#2: God's kingdom/realm/reign come.

God's kingdom, God's realm is expanding and becoming more real each and every day.

We pray that God's realm might become real in our own lives.

We welcome God's reign now in a time of silent prayer.

(Silence) Amen.

¹ H. Stephen Shoemaker. *Finding Jesus in His Prayers* (Abingdon Press, 2004), p.40.

Petition#3: God's will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

"The good and gracious will of God is done even without our prayer, but we pray in this petition that it may be done among us also."²

Holy God, in our moment of silent prayer help us to envision ourselves as participants in the will of God.

(Silence) Amen.

Petition#4: Give us this day our daily bread.

Our daily bread includes bread, but is far greater. Our daily bread is everything we need to live this day.

As we pray this prayer, I need your help. Please speak aloud something you need this day to sustain your body. Let us pray.

(Responses) (Silence) Amen.

Petition#5: Forgive us our sins/debts/trespasses as we forgive those who have wronged us.

While we strive to live according to the Way of Jesus, we often fall short.

In our time of prayer, call to mind the ways you have failed to fully live the Jesus' Creed – those moments you have not fully loved God or have failed to love your neighbor. Think also of extending forgiveness to those who have done you wrong.

(Silence) Amen.

Petition#6: Lead us not into temptation.

God doesn't lead us into temptation, but our world is filled with people, products, and possibilities that seek to tempt us to live in ways that are inconsistent with the Way of Jesus.

In our time of prayer, I invite you to name those temptations that you find most difficult. Write them down on your bulletin as we pray. Ask God to guide and keep you from them or strong in their presence.

(Writing) (Silence) Amen.

² Luther's Small Catechism. <<http://www.cph.org/t-topic-catechism-prayer.aspx>>

Petition#7: Deliver us from evil.

Some scholars combine the sixth and seven petitions, which brings a nice symmetry to this prayer. I have opted to keep them separate so that we end with deliverance.

Evil is real, and it is powerful. While we may never completely understand it, we know we must name it in all of its many forms.

As we enter our final time of silent prayer together, may we seek deliverance from the evil we might do and from what evil can do to us.
(Silence) Amen.

Although not in the biblical text, the ending we typically pray is an appropriate conclusion to the Lord's Prayer and to this sermon.

Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory now and forever. Amen.