

A Concert of Prayer  
March 22, 2015  
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. At our Wednesday evening study I heard

God is great, God is good;	Now I lay me down to sleep,
Let us thank Him for our food. &	I pray the Lord my soul to keep,
By His hands we all are fed,	If I shall die before I wake,
Give us Lord our daily bread.	I pray the Lord my soul to take.

Perhaps as a youngster you were taught to fold your hands whenever you pray OR maybe your fondest memories are of prayers like the 5-finger prayer I shared during the children's time. Maybe you looked at or touched each and every finger as you prayed for others before praying for yourself.

Some of 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.

**A**doration – adore, worship and praise God for who God is.

**C**onfession – admit your shortcomings and sins.

**T**hanksgiving - give thanks for all God has and is doing.

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

Whether any or all of these prayers or models for prayer are a part of your story, I know that the Lord's Prayer is. We have prayed it weekly in worship and been challenged to really think about what the words mean as we have experimented with many versions.

The Lord's Prayer or the Our Father is a model for prayer. While you can pray through it quickly as we do in worship, it is also a rich resource for a slower form of prayer.

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	

I invite you to set aside some time this week to pray the Lord's Prayer at a slower pace than normal. After saying each petition pause and lift up the prayers it inspires.

By now it is becoming clear that there are so many ways to pray. Another option is a concert of prayer. While some such gatherings extend for many hours, ours will be far shorter – something of a mini-concert.

As we continue in our time of transition and as we prepare for the Day of Discovery let us conclude this sermon by putting our faith into action through prayer. I will be our conductor and you will be the musicians.

Prayer #1: Unity. No matter what comes next in our shared story help us to be centered in a commitment to Christian unity within our congregation. In silence, let us pray for unity.

Prayer #2: Our strengths. I invite you to share aloud some of the many aspects of who we are as Fort Myers Congregational United Church of Christ that you value and appreciate. We give thanks for \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ . . . and \_\_\_\_\_ . . . and \_\_\_\_\_ . . .

Prayer #3: Leadership. Pray for those who have answered the call to serve in leadership positions and those considering their response. I invite you to choose one leader from our congregation and spend a few moments praying for that person in silence.

Prayer #4: Future. We are all called to partner with God as co-creators of our congregation's future. In silence let us pray for today's event – the Day of Discovery – and about our role as a part of this community of faith.

With this our concert ends, but our praying has just begun. Amen.