

**Tenth Sunday After Pentecost**  
**July 24, 2016**  
**Marley United Methodist Church, Glen Burnie MD**

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Hosea 1.2-10  
Psalm 85  
Colossians 2.6-15  
Luke 11.1-4\*

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**And When You Pray. . .**

Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ!

Before I begin this sermon, you should know, if you don't already, that the Lord's Prayer as we usually pray it is not found anywhere in the Bible. You heard the passage from Luke this morning – it seemed to end a little abruptly but you heard all of the prayer Luke recorded. Mark does not have this story. Matthew is the closest to what we would recognize as familiar. But the closing 'For thine is the kingdom, and the power and the glory. Amen' is not found anywhere in the Scripture and is only used by Protestants – the Roman version of the prayer stops at "and deliver us from evil. Amen".

The form of the prayer we know was first published in the Anglican Book of Common Prayer in 1608. In this morning's sermon I will be speaking of the prayer as we know it, rather than as Luke reported it.

The first interesting thing in the gospel passage this morning is only noticeable when viewed against the backdrop of the entire gospel texts. Up until now Jesus has been going aside by himself to pray fairly regularly. It seems to be a normal part of his routine. But we have heard absolutely nothing about the disciples and prayer. We don't know if they prayed or not, and if they didn't, it does not appear to have caused Jesus any great concern.

Further, this the only time the disciples asked Jesus to teach them something. Oh, to be sure, they had plenty of questions about how things were going to happen and sometimes to explain what he was talking about – but this is the only time they have asked him to teach them anything. And when they did ask, it is not surprising that what they wanted to learn was how to pray.

Pastors know that if you want to offer a class and have it fill up quickly – offer one on prayer and give it a catchy title: Living Prayer, How to Have a Dynamic Prayer Life, or the Power of Prayer Unleashed, or something like that. People will run you over to sign up.

What is this hunger that fills us with such yearning for prayer? Why is it that we keep thinking prayer has to be something more than what Jesus said it is?

But, even more intriguing is Jesus' response to the disciples. Of all the things we might expect from him, he, as usual, surprises us. We'd expect to hear a lot of stuff like we preachers hand out, about setting aside a certain time and place and making it a habit to routinely go there, to clear our mind of the cares of this world, to focus on the cross, etc. etc.

But no, Jesus is having none of that--he just says, as if it is the simplest thing in the world, when you pray, pray like this; Our Father. . . And with those very first words, he opens the door to a whole new world, a new relationship which most of us, even now, can scarcely imagine. You see, up to this point, prayer was directed to the Lord God Almighty sitting high and lifted up--whose name was too holy to even say – he was to be approached in fear and trembling with sacrifices to turn away his anger and judgment.

But Jesus simply says, when you pray, pray like this: Our Father. . . because prayer is the simplest thing in the world. If you want to pray, then you already know how. Just have a little chat with your Father, tell him what's on your heart and mind.

Before I go any further, let's just take a look for a moment at what we've chosen to call this prayer. Jesus didn't give it a name. Our Roman Catholic brothers and sisters got this one right – in the Latin it is called the *pater noster* or in English the "Our Father". You've heard the reference often in jokes and in movies – in the confessional the priest tells the parishioner 'say 2 Hail Marias and 2 Our Fathers. . .'

But when we want refer to this prayer we call it The Lord's Prayer. Well, I don't think so. The Lord certainly had his prayers and some of them have been recorded for us – 'Father, if it be thy will, let this cup pass' (Lk 22.42) – that is one of the Lord's Prayers. But this prayer which begins 'Our Father' is not his--as far as we know he never prayed it. It is our prayer – it is the one he gave to us. It is the prayer we are to pray if we are to be his followers – and it is this prayer that marks us as his people.

I sometimes find it amusing the way we substitute the things of man for the things of God. Most Christians identify the Apostle's Creed as the standard of faith – the litmus test--for determining who is Christian and who is not. But you know we don't know for sure exactly when it was written – certainly centuries after the Resurrection. But this prayer, which begins 'Our Father' was given to us by Christ himself, not written by some monk interested in doctrinal purity or theological correctness.

Remembering that this is the prayer Jesus told us to pray – then there must be something in there Jesus wants us to learn. I've heard many treatments of this text that point out how its structure can be used as a pattern for us to make up our own prayers and so forth and I hope that has been helpful to some people, but frankly I think it misses the point. Jesus chose his words carefully and he didn't say 'pray something like this'--he said 'when you pray, pray like this':

Our Father: there's a lot just in those two words. Shall we begin with the first word, 'our'.

Have you noticed that the word 'our' is plural and so are the other pronouns in this prayer – give us our daily bread and deliver us from evil. Try praying this prayer in the singular – My father, who art in heaven. . .give me this day my daily bread. . .It just doesn't cut it – when you pray, pray like this. It is a prayer offered by each of us for all of us – I think that bears repeating: this is a prayer offered by each of us for all of us.

This prayer is for the church, where, when we pray, it is not a private or personal matter. When we share a prayer concern here on a Sunday morning the prayer that is offered by the Pastor says that we are all praying about that concern. The pastor doesn't pray her own prayer – she gathers up our concerns and joins her voice to ours in offering the prayer on our behalf.

Even if I pray this prayer in the privacy of my own home, it is not a solitary prayer – I have joined my voice with all the others who pray whether I can hear them or not and as I pray I pray for them as well as for myself – just as they are praying for me. What a responsibility! What a privilege? And what a comfort to know that when we call on our Father, we never pray alone!

He is our Father, not my father, not your father, not the United Methodist's father, or the Lutheran's father, or well, you get the point. It is not for us to decide who is in or out of the kingdom of God, who is qualified to be our brothers and sisters in Christ – He is our Father which makes us brother and sisters whether we like it or not – I didn't pick the siblings that grew up with me, did you pick yours? And we didn't pick each other to gather here today – we are each here at God's invitation and we are keeping his divine appointment. Sunday morning 9:00, put it on your calendar – you've got an appointment. And there is a reason he has put you and me here with the other folks in this room – because we need each other – together we are the church.

And he is our Father, not the Lord God Almighty sitting high and lifted up somewhere – he is our Father. And Jesus says, when you pray, pray like this: our Father – Wow! What a radical concept that the Lord God Almighty sitting high and lifted up can be spoken to so simply, so directly and so intimately! How amazing that when we call upon him, we claim a family relationship with him, which we expect him to honor – and he always has. To my knowledge no other religion has that kind of relationship with their god – only we Christians have been given that privilege. Our Father. . .

Who art in heaven – just in case we get confused about who we are praying to, he is in heaven, he is not of this earth, he is not in Hell, he is not embodied in any book or statue, nor can he be confined to a cathedral or any other place--we pray to the God who is in heaven.

Hallowed be thy name – hallowed is an interesting archaic word that, unfortunately has little use these days. God's name is to be hallowed, I've heard this explained as holy, but I think it is more than that. To say his name is holy is to say something about the qualities of his name, but it doesn't say anything about how we feel about it, or what we do about it. But to say his name is to be hallowed is to say that we intend to do something to hallow it: we honor, worship, and hold his name as sacred to us.

There are things that are hallowed by me – but to tell you what they are may perhaps become too personal. I can say that Marnie and I live together and we have made a home together and that home is hallowed by us – neither of us would do anything to disgrace it, to dishonor it, to ignore it – we tend to it, we take care of it; we hallow our home. May I ask, what does your lifestyle out there in the world say about how his name is being hallowed?

You know, to this day, Jews hallow the name of God by never saying it--they will not say it, lest it be defiled by their human lips. In the Hebrew

scriptures the name of God is expressed with 4 Hebrew characters known by scholars as the Tetragrammaton – since there are no vowels the pronunciation is unknown but it is sometimes transliterated by we Christians as Yahweh, or in the Latin Jehovah--when they come across that word in the religious texts they will read *Adonai*, meaning ‘Lord’ -- which is not what is written. They hallow God’s name by not speaking it. How well do we actually do what we say we do in the prayer? Hallowed be thy name – how y’all doing with that?

Thy kingdom come – everything in the Bible tells us that when his Kingdom comes it will be the end of the world as we know it. Many places in the Bible--from Jesus’ lips through some of the letters to the Revelation, the Bible has made an effort to describe what a terrible day that will be. Yet, the prayer of the church, when it has its priorities straight, is “even so, despite all that, Maranatha, Come Lord Jesus” – thy kingdom come. How much thought do we give to what we are asking for?

Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven – Wow!! Be assured that in heaven God’s will is done – he is, after all both God and the King of Heaven. And the last time someone in heaven decided they weren’t going to do God’s will, God kicked them out. His name was Satan and his followers went with him. What would be different in your life if God’s will was being done in the here and now? Or perhaps I should be asking all of us, including me, this question: if we know the difference, why aren’t we doing his will now?

Give us this day our daily bread – it is good to remind ourselves that the job we have, the money we receive, the food we buy with it are all gifts from God. And it is when we forget that or relegate it to Sunday School lessons, or church talk, that we are in peril of putting something else in God’s place. If we do not look to God for our daily bread and trust him to provide it, we will be looking elsewhere and trusting something else, and that, my friends, is idolatry – one of the first steps on the road to Hell.

Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. What is a trespass? The dictionary defines trespass as “an unlawful act causing injury to a person, property or rights of another” “a wrongful entry upon the property of another”, “an encroachment or intrusion”, “an offense, sin or wrong”.

I don't think too many of us have to deal with being the victim of a wrongful entry or an assault, although it could happen, but how often does someone encroach or intrude on our space or offend our sensibilities, or our honor or wrong us in some way? Unless you live in a different world than I do, that kind of trespass happens almost daily. We ask God--now listen to this--we ask God to forgive us as willingly and to the same extent that we forgive others when they do that to us. Let me repeat that-- we ask God to forgive us as willingly and to the same extent that we forgive others when they do that to us. And if that doesn't give you pause, I suggest you need to think about it some more.

Lead us not into temptation. Well, that kind of assumes we're following him and trusting him. My experience has been that most of us have no trouble finding temptation all by ourselves – and, as a friend of mine used to say, when faced with temptation, it is not our will power that is lacking, it is our won't power that needs strengthening. The only way to stay on the straight and narrow is to trust and follow God, who has shown himself to us in Christ Jesus – he will not lead us into temptation. When you find temptation, I dare suggest you are looking for the wrong things in the wrong places.

But deliver us from evil – indeed that is something only he can do. And it is right that we should remember that. All of our efforts to secure and protect our families, our futures and our persons ultimately come to naught because it is only 'Our Father' who can deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever.

Amen and Amen