

Discipleship in the Lectionary – 07/24/2022



A look at the week's lectionary through the lens of discipleship and disciple-making.

Revised Common Lectionary Year C

Sunday, July 24th

Luke 11:1-13

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The Disciples' Prayer

In Luke's Gospel, prayer occurs at every major point in Jesus' life. This week's Gospel lection includes Luke's version of the Lord's Prayer, a parable about prayer and encouragements to pray. When we seek to understand this text in its original context of Jesus' disciples asking Him to teach them to pray, what does it teach modern day disciples about prayer?

Luke 11:1-13

¹¹ Now Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples."

Several things can be concluded from this sentence. First, when Jesus was in prayer His disciples knew He was praying. They would have known by observation the importance of prayer in the life and ministry of Jesus. Second, one of His disciples asks Jesus to teach them to pray in the same way that John the Baptist taught his disciples. We know Andrew and possibly Peter were first disciples of John (John 1:35-51). They would have known firsthand how John the Baptist taught his disciples a distinctive prayer that identified them as his disciples. One of them is asking Jesus for the same - a prayer that would uniquely bind them together as a community of worship. Third, the question presupposes prayer can be taught. While this may seem a rather obvious statement, many Christians today do not invest in their prayer life by continuously learning how to pray more effectively. Since James refers to effective prayer (James 5:16), it suggests there must also be ineffective prayer.

² And he said to them, "When you pray, say: "Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come.

The second verse confirms prayer is something that can be taught and learned since Jesus does not object. Relative to the teaching of how to pray, what follows is important. He begins, "*When you pray...*" The most important aspect of learning to pray is to do it - an active process where one learns by doing. One cannot learn to pray effectively simply by reading a book on prayer or attending a Sunday school class about prayer. It requires an environment where one can apply and practice learning by praying out loud in the presence of others and hear other people's prayers. It requires intentional practice. We learn to pray by praying. Also, important here is the word "say" - "*When you pray, say...*" Jesus intended the prayer to be used as it stands. This contrasts to Matthew where it is introduced more as a model, "*Pray then like this...*" (Matthew 6:9).

Jesus begins the prayer by addressing God as Father. In both Luke's and Matthew's version (Matthew 6:9) the Greek word *Pater* is used. Mark uses the Aramaic familiar word for father, 'Abba' (Mark 14:36). Both *Pater* and 'Abba' reflect the language with which children and adults refer to their father. This is both familiar and respectful at the same time. Some people suggest this is the equivalent of "Daddy" in English. While this may be appropriate to tell young children, for an adult it runs the risk of irreverence! Thinking of God as our Father is seen elsewhere in the New Testament: Romans 8:15 and Galatians 4:6.

"... *hallowed be your name.*" Hallowed means "made holy" or "revered." The word "name" in antiquity meant far more than it does today in our context. It referred to the whole character of a person - all that was revealed about them. In this case "name" refers to all that God is and has revealed about Himself - the full majesty of God. This implies deep reverence and awe.

"*Your kingdom come.*" This is a prayer that the Kingdom will advance in the hearts of the people until Jesus returns. It is also a prayer that acknowledges the future consummation of the Kingdom realized in part by Christ's first coming. This is a prayer for God's people to be in God's place under God's rule. Those who love the King are praying eagerly for God's coming Kingdom to come. These words reflect a deep sense of yearning and loyalty. It is humbling to think that God advances His Kingdom agenda through the prayers of His people.

Up to this point the prayer reveres and worships God and prays that God will bring His Kingdom to earth. This contrasts with the prayers of many Christians that seek to get their will done in Heaven!

³ *Give us each day our daily bread,*

This next petition is for our daily provision. The continuous present tense (keep giving) and the "daily" (sometimes "for tomorrow") means we should look to God on a daily basis for our physical needs. Give us what we need for tomorrow. This petition is about needs as opposed to wants!

⁴ *and forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation."*

The prayer continues with a petition for forgiveness of sins. The fact that sinful humans forgive others is not meant to imply that the forgiveness of sins by God is merited. Rather, it is meant to imply that if sinful humans can forgive then we can approach God in His grace and mercy confident that our sins will be forgiven.

On May 22nd 2019, Pope Francis approved a change to the translation for all Catholics to better reflect the original text with, "*let us not fall into temptation.*" Jesus does not lead us into temptation, we fall into it. Here the petition is to be kept from temptation.

⁵ *And he said to them, "Which of you who has a friend will go to him at midnight and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves, ⁶for a friend of mine has arrived on a journey, and I have nothing to set before him'; ⁷and he will answer from within, 'Do not bother me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed. I cannot get up and give you anything'?" ⁸I tell you, though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his impudence he will rise and give him whatever he needs.*

Jesus tells a parable that illustrates the importance of our attitude in prayer and that God can be trusted to respond to our prayers. In a culture with laws and norms governing hospitality, the subject of the parable has nothing to set before his guest. When he seeks to borrow what he needs from a friend, the friend has already bedded his family down for the night. Jesus makes the point that what will cause the man to get up and give his friend what he needs will not be their friendship but his shamelessness (often translated as *persistence*) - he

counts on his friend's sense of duty and not wanting to fail the communal expectations. Disciples should thus be shameless or perhaps better understood as *being bold* in bringing their petitions to God - trusting He will respond.

⁹ And I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. ¹⁰ For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. ¹¹ What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; ¹² or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? ¹³ If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

Jesus then encourages His disciples to ASK (A=Ask, S=Seek, K=Knock). Whatever is received, found, or opened will be in our best interests but not necessarily what we originally wanted: "*And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose*" (Romans 8:28). God answers our prayers, even if it is not the answer we expected.

Reflections

What we have come to know as the Lord's Prayer (even though technically Jesus could not pray this prayer - what sin did He commit?) is not a religious performance, a manipulation of words nor a divine chant to repeat. The Lord's Prayer, or perhaps more accurately the Disciples' Prayer, is primarily about being in relationship rather than a recipe. It is a prayer that enables us to engage in active relationship with the living God and His Son, Jesus Christ. It is a prayer that identifies us as Jesus' disciples.

When we pray like Jesus' disciples, we pray first to seek God's face before we seek His hand. It is a worship prayer because God is worthy to be sought. We seek intimacy with the Father rather than just a shopping list of petitions. We pray with a focus on God's will being done on earth, not with a focus on getting our will done in Heaven! We seek God's glory not our own. We pray to the Father on a daily basis for our provisions versus our wants. When we pray the petition "*Your Kingdom come*" it leads to receiving the Holy Spirit and being sent as agents of the Kingdom. When we pray like Jesus taught His disciples, we do not necessarily receive the things we asked for (which is often not a bad thing!). One thing surely happens - *we become changed*. As we become transformed, so does the world around us.

