

Lord's Prayer
Luke 11:1-13
Craig Atwood, HMC July 27, 2025

One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples."

He said to them, "When you pray, say: "“Father,^[a] hallowed be your name, your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us.^[c]

And lead us not into temptation.^[d]”

Then Jesus said to them, "Suppose you have a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have no food to offer him.' And suppose the one inside answers, 'Don't bother me. The door is already locked, and my children and I are in bed. I can't get up and give you anything.' I tell you, even though he will not get up and give you the bread because of friendship, yet because of your shameless audacity^[e] he will surely get up and give you as much as you need.

"So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. ¹For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.

"Which of you fathers, if your son asks for^[f] a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

INTRODUCTION

It's good to be back with you all in worship this morning. We had a lovely family vacation at Kitty Hawk. There were five adults and a one-year old, which was a lot of fun but not a lot of relaxation. We had some very dramatic thunderstorms. One particularly beautiful storm was just over the horizon. The clouds turned red with each bolt of lightening that struck the ocean. Baby Elizabeth had never really seen lightening before, and she watched with awe and wonder and fear. I think that our lessons for this morning touch on this experience of awe and wonder and fear in our relationship with God. In ancient times, humans imaged that there was a powerful god in the sky name Zeus or Jupiter or Thor, who hurled lightening to earth in his

wrath. Much of ancient religion was rooted in awe and fear of the gods, and many of the rules and regulations that people created in their religions were designed to protect folks from divine wrath or to harness the power of god for their benefit. But the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Jesus, and Paul cannot be harnessed. As C. S. Lewis said of Aslan in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, God is not safe but God is good.

There is so much meat in our Scripture lessons for today, I could preach several Sundays worth of sermons, but this morning I want us to concentrate on the gospel lesson from Luke. You probably recognized the first part of that passage because it includes a version of one of the most familiar prayers in the world: the Lord's Prayer. In many countries this prayer is called the Our Father (or in Latin, the Paternoster).

Raise your hand if you memorized the Lords Prayer when you were in confirmation or Sunday School. Now put down your hands. Raise your hand if you have trouble saying any version of the Lord's Prayer other than the King James' Bible version that you memorized. You can lower your hands.

I'm sympathetic to the problem of using a version of Scripture that is different from what you knew as a child. These days there are dozens of different translations of this prayer. It can be confusing, but it can be illuminating to use a different version because you have to pay attention to the words and their meaning. Now, raise your hand if you noticed that the prayer we heard in the Gospel of Luke is different from the one you memorized in Sunday School. Our brains have a habit of supplying missing information, so we don't always notice the differences between the prayer we use in worship and the prayer Jesus gives in Luke. The biggest difference is that the Luke version is shorter than the one we use in worship.

LUKE AND MATTHEW

The prayer that we know as the Lord's Prayer comes from the Gospel of Matthew, not the Gospel of Luke. This is an excellent reminder that different people wrote different gospels because they knew different traditions. We know that people can see and hear the same thing, yet remember it differently. We shouldn't be too bothered by the fact that Matthew and Luke do not always agree.

Luke begins his gospel by telling the reader that he had read other accounts of the life and teachings of Jesus - and that he had also heard different stories that were passed down through oral tradition. Luke said that he was writing his own "orderly" account

of Jesus' life and teachings so that people would understand the truth about Jesus. In today's lesson, Luke had heard a slightly different version of a story than Matthew.

In Matthew, the Lord's Prayer is found in the Sermon on the Mount, which in a collection of Jesus' teachings including the Beatitudes. According to Luke, on the other hand, Jesus gave the Lord's Prayer in response to a question from his disciples. One of his disciples asked him to teach them how to pray.

Luke doesn't tell us which one asked the question. Since the passage just before this was about Mary of Bethany sitting at Jesus' feet, it is possible that she was the disciple who asked the question, but we don't know. The important thing is that the disciples needed instruction in praying. Too often in church, we assume that people just naturally know how to pray, but prayer, like talking or singing, is something we learn. I suspect that many people think that prayer is just a matter of giving God a wish list of things we want - like a child's letter to Santa Claus. But God is not Amazon.com.

The prayer that Jesus gave was not just something for people to memorize and repeat week after week. It was not a magical amulet or charm to wear around your neck to ward off evil or bring good luck. Jesus offered this prayer to teach us how to pray.

Let's take a closer look at this prayer.

HALLOWED BE YOUR NAME

I'm going to start with the second word of the prayer and then we'll talk about the first word. One phrase that both Matthew and Luke use is "hallowed be your name." It's a beautiful phrase, but personally I find it odd that most modern versions of the Lord's prayer, including the one we have in our Book of Worship, removes other archaic words like "thy" and "thou" but keeps this strange word Hallowed.

It's a word that comes from medieval English, and I suspect that few of us use the word hallowed in daily conversation. It does show up in poetry and speeches that talk about hallowed ground like Lincoln did in the Gettysburg Address. One of the few places the word Hallowed shows up these days is in the word Halloween, which was originally All Hallows Eve, but Halloween is almost the opposite of what Jesus is saying about God's name being hallowed.

The phrase "Hallowed be your name" means that the name of God is sacred and should be kept sacred. It is holy and should not be profaned. To make something sacred means that you treat it with special respect and reverence. You set it aside for

special occasions. Sacred things have symbolic value and should not be mocked or dismissed. Modern America does not value the concept of sacredness or hallowed names or places. Almost everything in our society is analyzed, synthesized, monetized, utilized, commercialized, digitalized, and scrutinized. Sacred spaces are disappearing, and sacred time is scarce.

Why would Jesus include the sacredness of God's name when teaching us how to pray? I think it is to remind us not to misuse prayer by invoking the name of God to justify our bitterness, our envy, our selfishness, our greed, our fear, and our cruelty. We cannot make something evil good by invoking God by whatever name we use for God. God's name is hallowed, and our prayers should reflect that sacredness.

FATHER/PATER

Jesus begins this prayer with one word: Father. Since Luke was writing in Greek, the word he used is Pater. We still use Pater in some of our English words, like paternal or patriarchy. In the ancient world, the word Pater or Father did not simply mean a male biological parent; it was used for the male head of a household or even the governor of province.

Any authority figure could be called Father, just as today Catholics call priests Father even though they do not have children. When I was a pastor in a very Catholic part of Philadelphia, I was wearing my clerical collar one day while walking with my young daughter. I overheard someone mutter, "I can't believe that a Father would have a child." Language can be funny at times.

WHO ART IN HEAVEN?

You may have noticed that in this lesson Jesus doesn't say "Our Father who art in Heaven." He just begins with the one word, Father. Most of the world's religions, including Judaism and Christianity, depict God as the Spirit in the Sky. We often look up to the heavens to see God in the stars, or we sense God in the thunder and lightning of a storm on the boundless ocean. There is nothing wrong with that, but here Jesus says nothing about God being the Father in heaven. I think Jesus was telling us that God is not a distant king sitting on a heavenly throne keeping a tally of our sins and our pious actions. God is as close to us as our own breath. We do not need to ascend to the heights or the depths to find God. God is here.

ABBA

For centuries Christians have used the Lord's Prayer, especially the word Father to depict God as an awesome and sometimes terrifying authority figure. Some churches build their whole structure on a hierarchy of patriarchs. But I think Jesus meant something quite different in this model of prayer.

Jesus didn't speak Greek. He spoke a language called Aramaic, which was the common language in that part of the world. Someone had to translate his prayer from Aramaic to Greek. The Aramaic word for "father" that Jesus probably used in this prayer is Abba. Unfortunately, for most people alive today, the word ABBA refers only to the Swedish pop band that gave us Mama Mia and Waterloo. Please do not pray to them. They can't do much for you other than give you a song.

The word Abba is used just three times in the New Testament. In the Gospel of Mark (14:6), Jesus prayed to God as Abba during his agony in the garden of Gethsemane. The Apostle Paul used the word Abba twice in his letters (Romans 8:15, Gal. 4:6), both times talking about how Christians should pray. We Moravians use the word Abba in our Easter Sunrise Service when talking about prayer. It is not accidental that every time the word Abba appears in the Bible, it is in the context of deep, heartfelt prayer.

PAPA

The most literal translation of Abba is Papa, not Father. In most languages, the words children use for their parents are the easiest sounds that a baby can make. Mama, Papa, Dada, Abba. Our granddaughter Elizabeth is just starting to connect the sounds mama and papa to her parents. In our lesson today, Jesus was teaching his disciples to start their prayers the same way we talk to the people who gave us life. The first line of the prayer could be translated "Papa, your name is holy."

I've read some Bible commentators online who are upset when Christians translate Abba as Papa or Daddy because they think this diminishes the glory and majesty of God. They complain that this is infantile language and argue that the Lord's Prayer teaches us that God is a distant patriarch who demands that we humble ourselves before him. We are not worthy to approach his throne.

I think this is an example of how often people miss the point of Jesus' teaching. The only person in the whole world that I ever called Dad was Albert Atwood. The only person I ever called Mom was Elizabeth Atwood. My granddaughter Elizabeth is just beginning to use Papa and Mama for her parents – not for me or Julie or anyone else.

It is important to recognize that when Jesus taught his disciples how to pray to God our creator, he told them to talk to God with the same term of endearment we used for our parents when we were infants, teen-agers, and adults. There is power in those words.

DADDY

I don't know how many of you have seen the superhero movie Guardian of the Galaxy 2, but it's a movie I really like, and I will confess there are scenes that always make me cry every time I watch it. I won't bore you with a plot summary, but the central theme is that the hero, Peter Quill, who was raised as an orphan by a pirate captain, finally meets his biological father. His father is an almost God-like creator and narcissist. Peter discovers that his father is a terrible being who had many of his offspring and killed Peter's mother when Peter was a child. The pirate captain, Yondou comes to save Peter from his biological father. At a key point in the story, Yondou tells Peter, "He may have been your father, but he was never your Daddy." I cry every time because Peter realizes that his Daddy, his Papa, his Abba is the one who raised him, taught him, protected him, and gave his life to save him. He was not the distant patriarch on the throne; he was the one holding Peter up when he was falling.

CONCLUSION

This is what Jesus was teaching us in this prayer. We should pray to God as Abba, Papa, Mama or whatever name we used for the parents who gave us life and cared for us. We do not pray to show reverence or to be righteous or to please God or the church. We do not pray so we can acquire wealth, power, and glory.

We pray to Abba because God is the one who created us, who loves us, who cares for us, and who wants us to be eternally happy. We pray to God because we are dearly beloved children of God who need to be wrapped in loving arms and learn that nothing can separate us from the love of God, neither life nor death, nor things present, nor things to come.