

“What Exactly Are We Praying For?”

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July 10, 2016

I'll be honest with you...this sermon was a little bit more difficult to write than usual.

I'm guessing it has something to do with how politically and socially charged our country seems to be right now.

From the dividedness I see with our presidential candidates and the political parties.

To the allegations of police brutality against civilians to the attacks on the police officers in Dallas... it is very clear that our country is hurting.

As some of you know, I have the privilege of serving with our local Fire Department and the San Ramon Police department as a Chaplain. In this role, I respond to scenes where there has been unexpected tragedy. So you might think that it would be a little easier for me to have words for times such as this but sometimes there are just no words adequate for the moment people are experience deep loss and heartache.

Many times when people are hurting...when people are experiencing loss or tragedy... connecting with something familiar is what works for them best.

So—that's why more often than not, when I am with a Christian family in the wake of a loss, we turn to the Lord's Prayer for comfort when there are no other words.

So that is what we are going to do this morning. We are going to work through this simple yet powerful prayer that Jesus taught his disciples. A prayer that is rooted in love, in hope and in humility.

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed by thy name. The opening of our prayer together this morning acknowledges that God is our loving parent.

And just as a parent wants the best for his or her child, God wants the best for us. Just as a parent wants their children to make the right decisions, God wants us to make the right decisions with how we live our life.

Its kind of amazing to me...when we think of all the images Jesus could have used for God....whether it be Lord or creator or Almighty or King....he choose to use the word Father.

When Jesus teaches us to pray he wants us to begin with acknowledging that God is our loving parent.

They kingdom Come, thy will be done on Earth as it is Heaven.....

For generations there has been a notion in the church that Heaven is all about the next life to come...but recently many theologians and teachers in various Christian movements have been rethinking that model.

One of them, Rob Bell says “A Christian is not someone who expects to spend forever in heaven [above]. Instead, A Christian is someone who anticipates spending forever here, in a new heaven that comes to earth.”

And as radical as this idea might sound...when we look at this line in the Lord’s Prayer we realize we have been saying this all along...Thy Kingdom come on Earth as it is in Heaven...

Indeed, with every action, comment, conversation, we have the choice to invite heaven or hell to Earth. With every choice we make we can bring about new life or destruction.

So instead of the worrying about the Heaven to come in the next life...we need to start focusing on the Heaven that can be brought about right now.

We need to get involved. We need to speak up. We need to get serious about providing services to those affected by violence....

We need to get serious about figuring out ways we can address mental illness in our society today.

We need to not let our faith be contained to our church campus...but driven by that faith we need to go into the world and be part of the Holy Spirit’s instrument in bringing Heaven to Earth.

I am fully aware that this task is not simple...the problems before us are not easily solved...but...we have to start somewhere....we have to get the ball rolling and we

need to trust that God will provide what we need and will help us accomplish more than we ever thought possible.

Which leads us to our next line of the Lord's Prayer....

Give us this day our daily bread. There is a proverb that I really like that fits in with this: Proverbs 30: 8-9 which contains a prayer that says:

“Give me enough food to live on, neither too much nor too little. If I’m too full, I might get independent, saying ‘God? Who needs Him?’ If I’m poor, I might steal and dishonor the name of my God”

What a simple but powerful prayer....think about that one for a minute. God don't give me so much that I no longer have to rely on you.....don't give me so much that I start to think I'm a big shot...that I don't need anyone else...that I have all of the power....God don't make me too full.

But at the same time don't make me so poor that I have do things that could bring shame to the way you want me to live.....

God---Give me just enough for today.

And that's what Jesus is saying in his prayer too....Give us THIS DAY our DAILY BREAD. It's not about give us this day all we need for the rest of the year.... Just today God....we Just are asking for what we need today.

And of course we know from the rest of the passage we had read for us from Luke that God won't let us down in that prayer....

Jesus gives us this illustration about God's provision for us:

“Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for a fish, will give a snake instead of a fish? Or if the child asks for an egg, will give a scorpion? 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!”

I think the power in Jesus' stories are partly in the fact that they are so simple.... Now that I am a parent...I understand that I would do absolutely ANYTHING for my son Caleb.

The other night when he woke up in the middle of the night and was having some trouble breathing...we called the Kaiser Advice nurse...and when she recommended

that we take him to the ER, Stephanie and I set a world record for the shortest amount of time to strap a 1-year old in a car seat.

We would do anything for him that he needs....no questions asked.... And we are imperfect people.... People with limited power and control....

But if we would do anything we can for our child....how much more will our heavenly parent do for us?

So....we see its not just about brining heaven to earth in the way we live and work for justice...its also about having faith that God will provide us with all we need to get that Job done....

We must remember that we are not in this alone. We must remember to rely on God for our daily bread. And if we ask...it will be given...and if we knock the door will be opened.

Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.

The work of the Kingdom is not easy...and indeed along the way we all make mistakes...we all intentionally or unintentionally do things that harm others...its unavoidable because we are moving on to perfection as we strive to be more like Jesus but we aren't there yet...

But if we are going to accomplish any positive change in the world, it is going to have to start with forgiveness of past mistakes. In order to heal and move forward there has to be forgiveness. Without forgiveness there is no real transformation.

A few months ago, we looked at another story from Jesus that he told about forgiveness.

The story opened with a servant who owes a king a *lot* of gold. And the king wanted to collect his money. In fact, he's so determined to settle accounts, he's willing to *sell* the servant's wife and kids if he doesn't pay up.

In terror, the servant begs and swears he'll pay back everything. There's only one problem—he *can't*. He could work for the king for the rest of his life and still not make enough. No matter what this guy says, the king knows he'll never be able to pay what he owes. So the king does something that no one expects. He *cancel*s the debt. He makes it like it never existed.

And that'd be a great story if it ended there. But it doesn't. Jesus continued:

“But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred silver coins. He grabbed him and began to choke him. ‘Pay back what you owe me!’ he demanded.

“His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, ‘Be patient with me, and I will pay it back.’

“But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt.

So this servant, who had just had his debt totally wiped out, goes and finds someone who owes him a hundred silver coins, chokes him, and throws him in prison.

Eventually the king gets word of this and throws the servant in jail to be tortured until the full amount of debt is paid...

It is easy to look at the servant in story and think, “Wow, I can't believe he had so much debt erased and still wouldn't give someone else a break.” But Jesus is saying that we do the exact same thing in our lives.

Because we start to believe that the worse someone hurts us, the more they owe us, and the more right we have to make them pay.

But when we start to add up...

- Every time we've put God in second place
- Every piece of gossip we spread
- Every hurtful thing we've done or said to those we claim to love.
- Every time we walked away from someone who needed us to stick up for them.
- Every time we let ourselves become numb to the news of more violence in our country.
- When we add up Every. Single. Mistake. Ever.

We realize we owe a great debt as well. A debt that has been forgiven and so we must go forth and do the same....we are called to forgive in Love.

Now I want to be clear that forgiving doesn't mean we should allow those systems of injustice to remain....we must still work to bring the kingdom here to Earth as it is in Heaven but along the way understanding that **PART OF THAT PROCESS** includes forgiveness.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.... This is one of those lines we can so easily gloss over when saying the Lord's Prayer without giving it much thought. But make no mistake- we are asking something very important with these words.

This is a reminder to us that while forgiveness is always there for us....as growing followers of Jesus we need to work towards not making as many of those mistakes in the first place.

When was the last time outside of the Lord's Prayer that you asked God to help you avoid temptation? When facing temptation when was the last time you turned to prayer?

There are many temptations in this world...sometimes we are tempted to do things we shouldn't...but sometimes we are tempted to NOT do things we should....

We are Tempted to be complacent....tempted to NOT take action...not put ourselves on the line when someone else is hurting.

And let's face it....that temptation to remain complacent is going to be there for people living in this community more than anywhere else....

Because have so much....a safe community....low crime....water from our faucets that isn't contaminated with lead....access to healthy grocery stores and restaurants....beautiful and clean parks, trails and schools....

We live in a community where multiple police officers will be on the scene within two minutes of someone calling 911 because of a person soliciting door to door or because an unfamiliar car is parked in their neighborhood.

We have it good. And it is so tempting to just think of our little world here is the San Ramon Valley as **THE WORLD**. But we are reminded this week as much as ever...that just isn't the case.

I think part of the answer to our prayer of avoiding temptation is found in us working together to not get complacent.... Us working together to not let the injustices we see continue. All of us working together to welcome in people to our

community and our church who make us feel uncomfortable....As you might remember from a couple weeks ago, we refer to that as accountability.

For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. This is part of the prayer called the Doxology and you may have noticed it isn't contained in Luke's or Matthew's account of the Lord's Prayer.

And that's because it was added during the early years of the Church by Christians living in the eastern half of the Roman Empire. It's kind of one of those "secret facts" you discover about the traditions of the church when you start paying close attention.

And even though it's not part of Jesus' original prayer, I find it somewhat comforting that we as a church added this "exclamation point" and affirmation to the prayer. In a way, it's not only the church affirming Jesus' words but also stepping in and becoming part of the prayer.

And that is our call today....to not only live out this beautiful prayer that Jesus taught us, but to add in our own prayers as well.

To make this faith personal...to make it not just words we recite...but words that have deep meaning for us.

I have a little homework for you when you go home today.... Take a look at the Lord's Prayer and rewrite it in our own words...still keep the meaning of the prayer...but write in a way that you normally speak. And then I encourage you to just 1 time a day for the next week pray those words... you might be surprised what you discover in them...

As we can see...there is so much more depth to the Lord's Prayer that initially meets the eye.

And I realize that we have been talking about a lot of difficult things this morning.....we have been lamenting the shape of our world...but just quickly before we wrap up I want us to remember the words attributed to Paul in the letter to the Philippians:

"Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God..."

I think it is fair for us to ask “what is there to rejoice about when we see so much racism...so much violence....so much misunderstanding in the world????”

What is there to rejoice about as long as people are targeting police officers and some police officers are targeting young African American men and women?

With all that there is to stress and worry about in the world what do we rejoice?!?!

(LONG PAUSE)

Well....I believe that we can rejoice in the fact that God calls us to so much more....we can rejoice in the fact that we have the talent, the influence, the gifts to make a positive difference in the world.

We can rejoice in the fact that the injustice is so clear that we cannot go without noticing it anymore....we rejoice that God is not happy with the way things are going and calls us to do something about it!

We rejoice that we have the opportunity to step up and move out of our own comfort zone to do whatever it takes to welcome the stranger....to love our enemies...to speak up for those on the margins and live out the prayer that Jesus taught us.

Amen and Amen.