

The Lessons Appointed for Use on the Sunday closest to July 20



**Proper 12
Year C
RCL**

Colossians 2:6-15
Psalm 85
Luke 11:1-13

The Collect

The Collect

O God, the protector of all who trust in you, without whom nothing is strong, nothing is holy: Increase and multiply upon us your mercy; that, with you as our ruler and guide, we may so pass through things temporal, that we lose not the things eternal; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Colossians 2:6-15

As you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.

See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the universe, and not according to Christ. For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have come to fullness in him, who is the head of every ruler and authority. In him also you were circumcised with a spiritual circumcision, by putting off the body of the flesh in the circumcision of Christ; when you were buried with him in baptism, you were also raised with him through faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead. And

when you were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive together with him, when he forgave us all our trespasses, erasing the record that stood against us with its legal demands. He set this aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in it.

Psalm 85

Benedixisti, Domine

- 1 you have been gracious to your land, O LORD, *
you have restored the good fortune of Jacob.
- 2 You have forgiven the iniquity of your people *
and blotted out all their sins.
- 3 You have withdrawn all your fury *
and turned yourself from your wrathful indignation.
- 4 Restore us then, O God our Savior; *
let your anger depart from us.
- 5 Will you be displeased with us for ever? *
will you prolong your anger from age to age?
- 6 Will you not give us life again, *
that your people may rejoice in you?
- 7 Show us your mercy, O LORD, *
and grant us your salvation.
- 8 I will listen to what the LORD God is saying, *
for he is speaking peace to his faithful people
and to those who turn their hearts to him.

- 9 Truly, his salvation is very near to those who fear him,
*
that his glory may dwell in our land.
- 10 Mercy and truth have met together; *
righteousness and peace have kissed each other.
- 11 Truth shall spring up from the earth, *
and righteousness shall look down from heaven.
- 12 The LORD will indeed grant prosperity, *
and our land will yield its increase.
- 13 Righteousness shall go before him, *
and peace shall be a pathway for his feet.

Luke 11:1-13

Jesus was praying in a certain place, and after he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, “Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.” He said to them, “When you pray, say:

Father, hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come.
Give us each day our daily bread.
And forgive us our sins,
for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us.
And do not bring us to the time of trial.”

And he said to them, “Suppose one of you has a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say to him, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; for a friend of mine has arrived, and I have nothing to set before him.’ And he answers from within, ‘Do not bother me; the door has already been locked, and my children are with

me in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.’ I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, at least because of his persistence he will get up and give him whatever he needs.

“So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. 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!”

SERMON

Prayer is kind of the ultimate churchy word, but I wonder what we mean by it? When one of His disciples asked, “Lord teach us how to pray”, Jesus engaged immediately, so it's an important topic, but how do we understand it?

For many people, prayer is the recitation of a formal prayer, as we do with the Lord’s Prayer each Sunday.

Some think of prayer only in time of distress, so prayer is the last-resort life raft.

Some understand prayer as a petition to God to arrange things in a way they would like them to be.

A much darker form of prayer asks, indeed demands, that God visit evil upon someone. FYI, I would suggest that trying to turn God into your personal death ray will not go down a treat with Saint Peter and does not repre-

sent Christianity at its best.

These are all human ideas about prayer, but when His disciple asked, how did Jesus respond? This is year C so we're reading from Luke. You'll notice that the version in Luke is briefer than the version we use, which comes from Matthew. Right off the bat, Matthew's version begins with "Our Father"; Luke's begins with "Father". Matthew's prayer addresses God as one who is a part of the family of God. Luke's is more personal, child to Father. Christians confess that Jesus is God's son, but somewhere down in the engine room of our minds we think of our own relationship with God as more abstract. We think of God as the Father of humanity, or of the church, more in line with Matthew's version, but we have some difficulty in acknowledging Him in the way Jesus taught those asking. When He was asked, "Lord, teach us to pray", Jesus instructed his

disciples to address God, as “Father”, just as Jesus did. “Father” speaks of God as a personal Father to each of us. How does that play out?

Years ago, I overspent and needed to deposit some money that I didn’t have in my bank account. I had to go to Dad. “Dad?” I asked. “Can I have some money?” It’s that sort of relationship that Jesus is urging His disciples to own as he reminds them:

So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened.

The trick is to give yourself permission to see yourself in that sort of a relationship with God. Lesson one: God is your Father, but with a difference for the next phrase,

hallowed be your name

speaks of God's otherness, His Holiness. To put it as one of my teachers once did, "God ain't your fishin' buddy". God is so holy that His very name is too holy to be spoken. Recall that God's name isn't "God".

"God" is a title, not a name. These two statements -- that we are to address God as Father, and that we are, all the same, not worthy to even speak His name -- represent a mystery of the faith. This all-sufficient, eternal, unchangeable, incomprehensible God loves you because of nothing you did, and despite the times you depart from his instructions. It's breath-taking!

Now, we get to the meat of the prayer.

Your kingdom come

Jesus is praying that the world should turn from its fallen ways and enter a relationship which recognizes God's sovereignty. The life of Jesus was one of perfect adherence to the will of the Father so that his "want"

was in perfect alignment with God's "will". That's the sort of world we are praying for. A prayer that God's kingdom should come is a prayer that the world should turn from its delusion of power to an acknowledgment of God's kingship.

Next comes:

Give us each day our daily bread

We might rephrase that as "Sustain us each day with the resources we need to permit us to accomplish the tasks you seek to do in us and through us". There is real power there. You wouldn't go to Dad and say, "Dad? I need some money so I can go out and do stuff you won't approve of", or "Dad? I need some money so I can go out and buy unnecessary things to make me feel better temporarily". Rather, Jesus prays, "Sustain me each day with the resources I need to permit me to accomplish the tasks you seek to do in me and through

me”.

Of course, the trick here is discerning what God would undertake to do in us and through us. Doing so requires more listening than speaking. That is why Jesus instructs His disciples of the need of persistent prayer. We need to allow God to get a word in edgewise if we are to learn what God would undertake to do in us and through us. That sort of prayer is called “contemplative prayer”. Contemplative prayer is a gift through which we experience God's presence within us, closer than breathing, closer than thinking, closer than consciousness itself. It is prayer in which we make no petition to God, in which we don't express gratitude to God, but simply seek to commune with Him. This is another place in which Luke's simpler account of the Lord's Prayer offers us a new thought. In Matthew's account, it is “Our Father who art in heaven”. In Luke's

there's no mention of God being separate from us in heaven somewhere. Luke's version allows us to contemplate our relationship to God as His child. There is enormous worth in relating to a God here-and-now, rather than a God out there somewhere. There is enormous worth in realizing that there is something which God seeks to do in us and through us if we can just be still long enough to hear what it is. God's kingdom will come when we, His children, bring our wants into harmony with God's will.

Here are two things to remember: you do not discern God's will perfectly because you are not perfect, and God knows that. He knows you will mess up but even so, He wishes something positive from you.

And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us.

God cuts you slack, so you should do likewise with

your brothers and sisters. As I've reminded you several times, we're all Bozos on this bus. Get over yourself and give a brother a hand.

The final petition is:

And do not bring us to the time of trial.

What are we asking when we pray, "And lead us not into temptation" in Matthew's version, or "And do not bring us to the time of trial" in Luke's version? Weren't Abraham and Job tempted? Did not Jesus undergo temptation during His time in the wilderness?

God knows us better than we know ourselves. What we are asking is that we not be placed in a position where our weaknesses lead us to be faithless to God's will. God will provide for us the resources each day which we need to go about His business. God knows that we are fragile vessels, and this petition acknowledges that. We are weak. We are fallible. We get dis-

tracted. We hide our worst motives from ourselves. Our final petition is that we never be placed in a circumstance so extreme that our faith in God is crushed.

Some prayer, huh? Father, I know I'm not worthy to even speak your name, but you chose me for a purpose. Instruct me on what you would have me do to bring the world into realization of your sovereignty. Give me resources each day to match my task. Overlook my failings, and teach me to overlook those of my brothers'. Finally, Father, you who know me best, be aware of my weakness and do not set me a task which would so distract me that I forget the love which placed me here.

AMEN

BENEDICTION

Jesus loves the little children
All the children of the world,
Red and yellow, black and white
They are precious in His sight...

The Lord bless you and keep you;
the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you;
the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.

Optional parts of the readings are set off in square brackets.

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