

The Lord's Prayer: Our Father
Luke 11:1-4
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Today, we're beginning our Lenten season of sermons based on the Lord's Prayer. I've been looking forward to doing this, because it is one of the best known parts of the Bible; there's not a moment when it isn't begin repeated somewhere on the planet we share. Regardless of who we are, where we come from our economic status, our sexual identity, our theological biases, we come together as one in repeating the Lord's Prayer. One of the more moving moments for me at several denominational General Assemblies would come each day when we prayed the Lord's Prayer- each in his or her own language... Koreans, Hispanics, Native Americans, Yankees and Southerners... each praying the Lord's Prayer in his or her own dialect in a symphony of praise.

Truth is- whenever we say the Lord's Prayer, we're joining in with the whole family of God before the Throne of Grace. Jesus didn't start out, "My Father... he began with Our Father...." Last Wednesday night- Ash Wednesday- I invited the people of this church to join me in making that prayer a regular part of their daily living by repeating it several times every day between now and Easter. Any time anyone of us prays that prayer- truth is... we're all praying it. With that in mind, I'd like to use the following video produced by Jeff LaPrete as our way of engaging scripture today... taken from both Matthew 6 and Luke 11: [\(show video\)](#)

Jesus' disciples had asked him to teach them how to pray- just as John the Baptist had taught his disciples. As John Stroman wrote in his book on the Lord's Prayer,

“Jesus’ response to their request was a prayer so simple that it could be memorized by children, yet at the same time, so profound that scholars have spent lifetimes exploring its message and have written volumes in an attempt to express its meaning and implications.” I’m certain that our sermon series won’t plumb the depths of the Lord’s Prayer- only our Lord could do that- but we might start by looking at what this prayer says about who we pray to. In prayer, everything turns on the nature of the God we address.

That can be risky business. A little girl in Sunday school was working very hard on a drawing. The teacher asked her what she was doing. The girl said she was drawing a picture of God. The teacher told her that no one knows what God looks like. Confidently, the girl replied, “They will when I’m done!” When Jesus encouraged his disciples to pray, “Our Father...” it was the most audacious statement imaginable... but it paints a picture of God for us to consider. When Jesus begins by suggesting that we address God as “Father,” the word he uses- “Abba” is the Aramaic equivalent of “Daddy” or “Dadda.”

Imagine- the God who fashioned the Himalayas and dug out the Pacific Ocean; the God who plants pearls in oysters and flings the Milky Way across the sky; the God who imprisoned energy in coal and whispered the secret of relativity in the ear of Einstein; the God who called Abraham from Ur of Chaldees and authored the Ten Commandments and made Saul an apostles to the Gentiles.. our *Father... Daddy!*” If that doesn’t make shivers run up your spine, then you have not properly understood. The privilege of being able to call God “our Father” is one that staggers the imagination; who could have hoped or dreamed that the God of all the universe should be our Daddy?

Of course, there are those for whom the term “Father” is a turn-off. Remember that no word, no concept, no term can fully grasp the essence of God. Our limited human language is reduced to using symbols and metaphors to describe God, and we find them sprinkled liberally throughout scripture: God, the good Shepherd; God, the King; God, the Lord. Jesus calls God “Father;” the Old Testament prophet Isaiah spoke for God by saying, “As a mother comforts her child, so I will comfort you;” both male and female imagery is used for God on the pages of scripture.

What is so remarkable about what Jesus teaches us is not the femininity or masculinity of God- but rather God’s intimacy with us. God isn’t some sort of cosmic principle, but a *Person*... a Person we are encouraged to address in a personal and intimate way. We are to crawl into God’s lap and receive God’s love, comfort, healing and strength. The parable we can always use as a cross-reference to the opening words of the Lord’s Prayer is the Parable of the Prodigal Son, with the loving father watching and waiting. As Jesus told his disciples, he tells us all: “Ask, and it will be given you; seek and you will find; knock and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.” (Luke 11:9-10) The picture of God that Jesus paints for us is that of an expectant Heavenly Father waiting to love us... no matter how dark things may be for you, or how lost we sometimes feel... the story Jesus tell is that we are long-lost children of God that we can turn around to call “our Father” and be embraced by the love of God. As the bumper sticker puts it: “Come home- your Father is waiting for you.”

The love of God is made known in this prayer, but so is the holiness of God. The love and power of God are placed side by side; “Our Father, who art in heaven...” We

can sentimentalize God into little more than a teddy-bear-buddy... but the God Jesus addresses is a God “in heaven.” One of the intriguing things is how often Jesus spoke of God and how seldom he used the word “Father” to refer to God... only six times in the Gospel of Mark, and never outside the circle of the disciples. To Jesus, the name “Abba” was so intimate- so sacred- that he could hardly bear to use it except among those who had grasped something of what it meant.

After all, God isn't some easy-going divinity with eyes shut to all our sins and faults and mistakes. This God- whom we sometimes call “Father-” is One we must approach with reverence and adoration, and awe and wonder. There is love in God, and there is also power... power enough to ignite a million billion suns, power enough to defeat a thousand pharaohs, power enough to defeat whatever dark evil lurks behind all the Hitlers, Pol-Pots, the Osama bin Ladens- combined. There is more wealth than Ft. Knox, the Dow Jones, the S&P 500, the NASDAQ, the Nikkei Index, the Hang Seng... all multiplied over and over. The power and glory of the Lord is from ever lasting to ever lasting- halleluiah!

It is that power which makes the love of God so magnificent. William Barclay lifts up an old story telling how a Roman emperor was enjoying a triumphal return. He had the privilege, which Rome gave to her great victors of marching his troops through the streets of Rome with all his captured trophies and prisoners in chains. The streets were lined with cheering people. Tall legionnaires edged the street to keep the people in their places. At one point along the triumphal route there was a little platform where the Empress and her family were sitting to watch the Emperor go by in all the pride of his triumph. As the Emperor drew near, a little boy jumped off the platform, burrowed

through the crowd, tried to dodge between the legs of a legionnaire, and run out on the road to meet the chariot. The legionnaire stooped down to stop him. “You can’t do that, boy,” he said. “Don’t you know who’s in the chariot? That’s the Emperor- you can’t run out to his chariot!” And the little boy laughed: “He may be your Emperor, but he’s my father!”

God is our heavenly Father- and we can approach the glory of God with all the confidence in the world. Imagine now that story with the emperor- after the parade- going on to die for his little boy and every single sinner found in that crowd. That’s what Jesus- who though he was in the form of God- did with a Palm Sunday parade that ended on a cross where he died for you and me... “while we were yet sinners,” scripture says- “he died for us.” That’s the most amazing thing about the awesome power of God- that he submitted that power to love us, and that should never fail to take our breath away... because that’s our heavenly Father- who art in heaven.

This year, get a bit more serious about your faith during this Lenten season. Commit yourself to a Lenten season of preparation for all that Holy Week means. My invitation to you is to pray the Lord’s Prayer over and over and over- daily- throughout the 40 days leading up to Lent. Each Sunday, we’ll be looking at a phrase or word in the Lord’s Prayer... commit yourself to a time of study and worship, and come to church so that you can better appreciate your interaction with God.

After all, given what’s all Jesus has done for you- your heavenly Father deserves nothing less, and you’ll find yourself blessed by the Holy Spirit. Let’s pray: (Lord’s Prayer...)