

Jordan Station United Church

July 26, 2020 – 8th Sunday after Pentecost
Pandemic #20

Learning the Lord's Prayer: Week #3

Sermon: "Near and Far"

(Revised by Rev. Anita Spiller with permission from Rev. Ryan Slifka)



Order of Service – See Below for the Full Service

Prelude: Softly & Tenderly (arranged by M. Hayes)

Welcome & Land Acknowledgement

Lighting of the Christ Candle

"As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world."

Call to Worship

Opening Prayer

Opening Music: Let Us Build a House (More Voices #1, verses 1,2,4,5)

Prayer of Illumination

Scripture: Luke 11: 1-4

Sermon: *"Near and Far"*

Sermon Hymn: Spirit of the Living God (CCLI #7035191)

Performed by Soul Says You

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Gathering for Worship

Prelude: Softly & Tenderly (arranged by M. Hayes)

Welcome & Land Acknowledgement

We begin worship today by acknowledging that the land on which we gather is the traditional and unceded territory of First Nations peoples. In particular, we recognize and thank the Anishnabe, Ojibwe/Chippewa, Haudenosaunee, and the Neutral Nation (Attawandaron) for their stewardship of these lands over millennia. We offer thanksgiving for this land which has long served as a site of meeting and exchange amongst nations.

Lighting of the Christ Candle – Join us by lighting your own candle at home

"As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world."

Call to Worship

One: This is a time of worship, a time for acknowledging that there is a Power beyond our own, that it is God who has made us and not we ourselves.

This is a time of prayer, a time for bringing ourselves, just as we are, into the presence of the Holy One.

This is a time of praise, a time for lifting our hearts and voices in grateful thanksgiving to our Master.

Opening Prayer

Let us pray . . . Merciful God:

We come together to worship, longing for tenderness
because this world can be hard.

We come longing for light
because our lives are crowded with shadows.

We come desperately needing direction.

Fill us this morning with your peace:

your spirit is our peace and our path. Amen

Opening Music: Let Us Build a House (More Voices #1, verses 1,2,4,5)

Verse 1

Let us build a house where love can dwell and all can safely live,
A place where saints and children tell how hearts learn to forgive.
Built of hopes and dreams and visions, rock of faith and vault of grace;
here the love of Christ shall end divisions:
All are welcome, all are welcome, all are welcome in this place.

Verse 2

Let us build a house where prophets speak, and words are strong and true,
where all God's children dare to seek to dream God's reign anew.
Here the cross shall stand as witness and as symbol of God's grace;

here as one we claim the faith of Jesus:
All are welcome, all are welcome, all are welcome in this place.

Verse 4

Let us build a house where hands will reach beyond the wood and stone
to heal and strengthen, serve and teach, and live the Word they've known.
Here the outcast and the stranger bear the image of God's face;
let us bring an end to fear and danger:
All are welcome, all are welcome, all are welcome in this place.

Verse 5

Let us build a house where all are named, their songs and visions heard
and loved and treasured, taught and claimed as words within the Word.
Built of tears and cries and laughter, prayers of faith and songs of grace;
let this house proclaim from floor to rafter:
All are welcome, all are welcome, all are welcome in this place.

Prayer of Illumination

Let us Pray . . . Our Great Father, shine your truth on us, as we pray to know who You are.
That we may understand Heaven and where you are, that You are our Holy One, Your
kingdom has a purpose. Not in fear, but with joy, and boldness, we learn with reverence, as
we live our lives in Your Holy name. Amen.

Scripture: Luke 11:1-4

He 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."

Sermon: "Near and Far"

Today, is a continuation of our sermon series on The Lord's Prayer. My thanks to the Rev. Ryan Slifka for this series and these sermons. Most of these words are his with my own interpretation for our context. Week one was an introduction to the series and last week we pondered the 4th line: Forgive us our sins for we forgive everyone indebted to us. Yes, you will notice that I am tackling them out of order. I believe that each line of Luke's version of the prayer can and does stand alone. I think that some folks often get stuck with the notion of forgiving ourselves and others so I wanted to tackle that one head on. Today, we start at the very beginning. A very good place to start. Specifically, the first few lines: "Our Father in Heaven, Hallowed be your Name." I'll admit I won't really go in too deeply about the "hallowed be your name" part, and will be concentrating on the "Our Father, in Heaven" bit. I'll leave each of you to pose your own questions and think about the hallowed by your name section as you journey throughout your week.

The Lord's prayer is the way Jesus teaches his followers to pray. The Lord's Prayer sets the pattern for prayer. While this is true, it's not the whole picture. The ancient church used to use a Latin phrase to describe the relationship between prayer and everyday life: "lex orandi, lex credendi." As we pray, so we believe. Or "the way of prayer is the way of

living." How we pray and who we pray to paints a picture of how we see God. And it shapes the kind of people God is calling us to be. The great English writer John Stott once said that the whole point of the prayer is to teach us what sort of God our God is. And what sort of priorities a follower of Jesus should have. To put it another way: the prayer offers us a vision of who God is. And what it means to be God's people. Who God is. And who we are to be. In other words, this is BIG. This is important.

And so, with the first line we learn what sort of God we have. When the prayer begins, "Our Father, in heaven, hallowed be your name."

God as Father. This is the word that Jesus used to describe his relationship with the divine. That God is spoken of as divine parent. The word "Father" has become difficult for some. Some have grown to see the word as a sign of a larger built-in inequality between men and women. That when God is called "father," or imaged exclusively as male it inherently reinforces sexist patterns of thinking and behavior that are already deeply ingrained. This can be, and has been the case. And this needs to be taken seriously. I believe that God is ultimately beyond our human categories of gender (our Father in heaven—which is what we'll get to). And beyond simple biology of male and female. Not to mention the fact that we miss out on a multitude of feminine images there are for God. Found in the bible itself. I believe that each one of us can choose with whom we are relationship and how we offer this prayer.

And yet, the point of the prayer is not that God is male. But that the image is one of relationship. A parental relationship. Between one who cares for, loves, guides, and protects their children. And knows them intimately. This means that God is not in some far off place or dimension beyond the clouds. But God is in an intimate relationship, is involved and active in human life and in the whole of creation. "Our Father." An immanent presence. Holy One. One who knows us at the core of our being. A mothering presence. Nurturing, and with us in our joys and in our struggles. Mothering and Fatherly. Caring, as a parent should be. And close as our own breath.

So, the choice is yours, Our Father...Our Mother and Father...Holy One...God...God of Mystery. In the end this is a personal relationship with you and the divine so let us honour each person's language and carry on without judgement of the other.

Yet, God is also figured as "in heaven." A God who is also transcendent. Ultimately beyond our full knowing and not limited by our joys or our struggles. There is some confusion as to what the scriptures mean by "heaven." Often, in a way that has been shaped by pop culture, we tend to see heaven as a sort of place off in the clouds that we go to when we die. That is not to say that God's relationship with us ends in death. We affirm, with Paul that nothing shall separate us from the love of God in Christ. Yet, in the scriptures, the heavenly realm is not simply a place where we go when we die. It is the unseen reality of God that is ultimately beyond our full sight and our full knowledge. We "see as through a glass darkly" says Paul. This means that God is there with us in our struggles, but God is not limited by our struggles. God is with us in the present moment, but beyond it. We can imagine a future beyond a dead end we or the world might face in our lives. Because God is not just bound to what we see with our eyes. To speak of God as Father is to speak of a God who is caring, and intimately close, nearby, not in some far off place. Yet, to speak of God as "in heaven" is to speak of a God who is ultimately beyond our full knowing. And our full knowledge. This is, in John Stott's words, this is "the sort of God we have."

But what does this all mean? It's all fine and good to have ideas about God. As I said before, praying in this way is not only about the God we have. It's also about what it means to follow Jesus. It is about allowing Jesus to be our bridge over troubled waters. To be God's people in all times. Our lives are lived out in response to the God we've got. It's about what it means to be the kind of person, the kind of people, who call God our divine parent. Even the first word means so much. Our. Not "my Father." Not our church's Father. But ours. We don't just have an individual relationship with God. It's not just about me and my faith. Or me and my salvation. It's communal. When we pray like this, we join with Christ as our brother, and all the others whom God has named as beloved children. It might be thought of as prayer with all the people of Jesus. But it also may be thought of as a prayer alongside of every human being and all of creation. Because all people, and indeed the whole creation, have been claimed by God's love. And invited in to relationship with God. God has filed the adoption papers, even if not all have said "yes."

Here, there is a radical equality among people. No one comes to God with any kind of special privilege. None of the categories that divide people, or give them a leg up over other people in our world count before the creator of all things. Not our race. Not our gender or our sexual orientation. Not how much or how little money we may have. Not what we've done. Or have had done to us. Whether we are from a little town called Jordan Station, the suburbs of Toronto, the streets of Baghdad, or a Cree reserve in rural Manitoba. Nobody owns God. Nobody has a leg up over the other. Because God has drawn intimately close to ALL people. Because God is the divine parent of all people. And because God has claimed us all as beloved children. This is the kind of people we are to be.

And this is why we do a lot of the things we do as the people of Jesus. This is why we give to local mission projects that help children, youth, hungry families and isolated Migrant workers. We do this because we believe that we are not alone, that we live in God's world. This is why in the days before the pandemic that we offer the peace of Christ at the end of every service. Because in God's eyes there's no difference between a member and a new comer, someone who's got their life together or someone whose life is in shambles. And this is why Christians since the beginning have believed in the sacred worth of every human life. Because this is how Jesus taught us to pray. And as we pray, so we are. And to become more like Jesus every single day.

So, dear friends. Brothers and sisters of Christ. And in Christ, I hope that the next time you say this prayer you will remember who you are praying to and who you are praying with. The God who we pray to is a God who is with us in the here and now. Yet everywhere and always, always beyond our wildest imaginations. To pray like this is to enter into relationship with the God who has claimed us as our divine parent. Making us not only beloved children of that parent, but brothers and sisters with each other. And all people through space and time. One that erases the distinctions, things that we use to divide us from each other. And one that invites us in to a whole new way of living. To pray as Jesus prays, and to follow Jesus into the world, is to live in this kind of relationship. Not just with God. But with our fellow creatures and with our planet. As full equals. God may be ultimately beyond our knowing. But this is who our tradition says God is. And who we are created, and called, to be. Here and now. Thanks be to God. AMEN.

Sermon Hymn: Spirit of the Living God (CCLI #7035191, CCLI License #830169)
(Performed by Soul Says You)

Verse 1
Spirit of the living God
Spirit of the living God
We only want to hear Your voice

We're hanging on ev'ry word
Spirit of the living God
Spirit of the living God
We want to know You more and more
We're hanging on ev'ry word
Come to speak to us Lord

Verse 1

Spirit of the living God
Spirit of the living God
We only want to hear Your voice
We're hanging on ev'ry word
Spirit of the living God
Spirit of the living God
We want to know You more and more
We're hanging on ev'ry word

Chorus

'Cause when You speak and when You move
When You do what only You can do
It changes us, it changes what we see and what we seek
When You come in the room
When You do what only You can do
It changes us, it changes what we see and what we seek
You're changing ev'rything

Verse 2

Spirit of the living God
Spirit of the living God
We're leaning in to all You are
Ev'rything else can wait
Spirit of the living God
Spirit of the living God
Come now and breathe upon our hearts
Come now and have Your way

Chorus

'Cause when You speak and when You move
When You do what only You can do
It changes us, it changes what we see and what we seek
When You come in the room
When You do what only You can do
It changes us, it changes what we see and what we seek
You're changing ev'rything

Bridge 1

When You move, You move all our fears
When You move, You move us to tears
When You move, You move all our fears
When You move, You move us to tears

Bridge 2

When You fall, we fall on our knees
When You fall, we fall at Your feet
And when You fall, we fall on our knees
And when You fall, we fall at Your feet, yeah

Chorus
'Cause when You speak and when You move
When You do what only You can do
It changes us, it changes what we see and what we seek
When You come in the room
When You do what only You can do
It changes us, it changes what we see and what we seek
You're changing ev'rything

Spirit of the living God
Spirit of the living God
We only want to hear Your voice
We're hanging on ev'ry word

Prayers of the People

Holy God, whose ways are not our ways,
and whose thoughts are not our thoughts,
we thank you that your Holy Spirit intercedes for us
with sighs too deep for words.
Heal hearts made heavy by our loss.
Through our tears,
assure us again that eye has not seen,
nor ear heard, nor human mind imagined,
what you have prepared for those who love you;
through Jesus Christ, the first born from the dead. Amen
(Funeral Prayer from Book of Worship, United Church of Christ)

Announcements

August – We encourage you to explore other communities of faith throughout the month of August while our staff takes a time of Sabbath. See you (virtually) in September!

Offering: 4 ways to give

- 1 – Donate Online: www.JordanStationUnitedChurch.org
- 2 – Drop off a cheque in our mailbox at the Church. (side entrance on Bridgeport)
- 3 – Mail a cheque. Consider weekly post-dated cheques.
- 4 – Join PAR – email Wayne (waynegibson2@hotmail.com) for details.

Closing Music: Go Now In Peace (by Natalie Sleeth)

Go now in peace
Go now in peace
May the love of God surround you
Everywhere, everywhere you may go.

Benediction:

May the Lord bless you and keep you.
May the Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you.
May the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.
("The Priestly Blessings" from Numbers 6:23-27)



Postlude: Down to the River to Pray (arranged by M. Hayes)