

The Lord's Prayer

A Sermon Series

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread; and
forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors;
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom and the power
and the glory, forever. Amen.

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Christ's Portrait of God

The Lord's Prayer I -- *God as Father*

"Our Father in heaven ..." -- Matthew 6:9

would be "completely unthinkable that a prayer would end with the words 'the trial'." It was the regular practice in Judaism to conclude prayers with a "seal" and a sentence of praise. It is easy to conclude, based on the rest of the prayer, that if these words were not spoken by Jesus, they were inspired by his spirit. These words express so much of what Jesus taught, the way he lived his life and ministry, and the way he died. It is the definitive prayer of faith: *"Thine is the Kingdom and the power and the glory forever."*

We conclude our prayer with *"Kingdom, power, and glory, forever."* It is a prayer where we say that we trust God to bring good out of the wreckage that we leave behind. It is a prayer where we say that we know God comes to us bringing the power of love whose ultimate evidence came as Jesus died on the cross. It is a prayer where we all realize that God is present in the magnificence and splendor of creation. *"For thine is the Kingdom, and the power and the glory, forever."* ... but this is not human kingdom, human power and human glory.

This is a new definition of these human qualities found in the divine presence. This is as John's Gospel described: "But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God." (John 1:12) This is our prayer for hope ... and our prayer for life now and forever.

Today has been our final chapter of the Lord's Prayer. We will again sing those meaningful words. We will be moved by the rhythm, the deep tones, and the celebrative sounds and high notes of the hymn.

It is God reaching out to us and we now reach out to God. The Lord's Prayer teaches us how to ask for the great things of life. And so we end the Lord's Prayer with *"Thine is the Kingdom, and the power and the glory, forever. Amen."*

With our heads bowed in reverence, we reach out to God with all that we have and all that we shall become. This is how Jesus has taught us to pray.

This is *Christ's Portrait of God*. Amen.

Scriptures: Psalm 145:8-13; Romans 11:33-36

Over these next four Sundays, I will be exploring the meanings and directions of the Lord's Prayer. I hope that you will be with us all four Sundays. The general theme that we are using for this series is *Christ's Portrait of God*.

This short and simple prayer has been said out loud and silently thousands of times by all of us. This prayer is the best place for us to go to find how Jesus Christ pictured God. In seventy-two words Jesus literally said to his disciples, and now to us who believe, "this is who God is and how we function in relationship with God."

As the Scottish Pastor, George Reid, has written, "I like to think of the prayer, not as a magical Open Sesame to the treasure house of God, but as a picture gallery hung with masterpieces, in each of which are to be seen deep truths of God."

Let's begin by looking at church history and what we know about the Lord's Prayer. How was this prayer used in the early church? Early on the church began to realize that there are really two versions (maybe three) of the Lord's Prayer: ... one in Matthew 6 and the second in Luke 11. These two versions differ in length and content. The form of the prayer used by most of the Christian Church today is not identical to either of the two versions.

The context of Matthew's Gospel is people who have learned to pray in childhood, but whose prayer stands in danger of becoming routine. Matthew's audience and readers were mostly faithful and devout Jews seeking a renewal of their faith. The version in Luke is addressed to a far different group of people who must, for the first time, learn to pray and whose courage to pray must be fortified. Luke's readers were almost certainly non-Jews and new believers in a very threatening culture.

The scholars have discovered that the church, as early as the third century, was using the prayer in every Sunday service just before the Lord's Supper was served. But still earlier in the first century, the prayer was used as part of the profession of faith offered by new believers and candidates for Christian baptism. There is some evidence

that it became known in the early church as “the believers prayer” and was reserved for use by only those who were about to be baptized or to those already baptized. There was clearly an understanding of privilege and awesome reverence in saying the Lord’s Prayer. And so, we have an initial glimpse of the *Portrait of God* in the distinctiveness of the Lord’s Prayer.

Now, let’s look at the simple structure of the Lord’s Prayer. If we use Matthew’s version as the “basic” prayer there is first the “address” followed by six petitions and then a concluding ascription of praise. The pattern or *Portrait* that is shared in the prayer teaches us to put God first. When we pray we do not start with our needs, but rather we remember the presence and the gifts of God ... and our relationship with God. The mystery of the Lord’s Prayer is that its simple structure, with six requests, followed by a closing statement of praise, still rings true today, nearly 2,000 year later.

If we follow the style of Luke’s Gospel we find that the prayer is set in a discussion with new believers. The actions and words of Jesus are prompted by a request from a follower’s inquisitive curiosity: “Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.” (Luke 11:1) That is what a rabbi did ... he gave followers a form of prayer. John the Baptist had followed that custom. The followers of Jesus were admitting that they did not know how to pray and that they needed specific instruction.

Jews in those days were expected to pray at least three times each day. The prayer they would offer to God had a series of 18 petitions and it was called the *shema*. We can be quite certain that Jesus prayed the *shema* three times each day. Jesus wanted to teach all of his followers a new prayer ... and even more, he wanted to teach them a new way of how to pray. So, he began: “Pray then like this. ...” Jesus was offering a pattern for their prayers and what we might call *A Portrait of God*.

The Lord’s Prayer gives form and pattern to the prayers of the disciples. Jesus knew that there was energy and power in a believer’s conversation through prayer with God. He wanted those who were his disciples to discover and realize the tremendous joy and reassurance that comes from praying with God. There is power in prayer and we can find answers in our prayers. Jesus offered to believers then, ... and believers now, ... that prayers have strength: “Ask, seek, knock,

Again and again she told me the story of the pain and how she kept her mind on The Lord’s Prayer. She was not a particularly spiritual person and came from a family that seldom attended church. Yet that day she needed spiritual support and found it in a prayer she had been forced to memorize in church school. She said that as she waited for help to arrive, all through the bumpy ride down the mountain in the ski patrol toboggan, ... and all the time she spent alone and away from home ... over and over again she repeated The Lord’s Prayer. She said that those words kept her going and continually reminded her that she was not alone.

The Lord’s Prayer became Missy’s prayer for faith. To us who believe in Jesus Christ, we have those moments when we have sensed that glorious hope and faith that could only be from God. We have come to believe that through Jesus Christ, God delivers us from evil. We do not see the deliverance here and now, but we have had glimpses of it. We know that in faith we will be ultimately delivered through the gift of eternal life. We can sing a hymn like Precious Lord, Take My Hand and know what it means:

Through the storm, through the night,
Lead me on to the light;
Take my hand,
Precious Lord, lead me home.

When we find ourselves in the pains and frustrations of life we discover that God delivers us. We experience events and call them coincidences and incidents of good luck. God comes to us in those new insights and feelings that seem to set everything at ease. God comes to us in that reassurance that encourages us to keep on keeping on, ... when logic would tell us to simply quit. Most of all, God delivers us from the sentence of death into eternal life. And so we say a prayer of faith: “*Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.*”

Let’s move to the final phrase: “*Thine is the Kingdom and the power and the glory forever.*” The odd thing about this final ascription of praise in the Lord’s Prayer is that it does not appear in the Bible. The reason offered in many Bibles, down in a footnote, is that the words did not appear in the early manuscripts. Yet, by the second century these concluding lines appear prominently in the Didache, which was the first manual of Christian worship and practice. One author has even suggested that it

your faith produces endurance; and let endurance have its full effect, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking in nothing.” (James 1:2-4)

A renewed and strengthened person is not so likely to be drawn into the temptations of life. How often in our lives have we said to ourselves, “I wish I had not been so tired when that family disagreement occurred. I would have handled things much differently.” The concern for our spiritual lives is very similar. When we grow tired, we become drained, we become overwhelmed with the importance of the things of everyday ...all of those concerns happen to you and me.

When we find ourselves in that kind of spiritual state we are very vulnerable to temptation. Jesus knew that and so do we. That closing petition then becomes literally, “O Lord, preserve us from falling away.” What Jesus gave us in the prayer is the reminder and request of God: “*Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.*”

All of us need to take time for renewal and restoration of our spiritual reservoirs. That is an extremely important task for you and me. We might simply call it “our spiritual self-care.” In ten days we begin another journey through Lent and it is a wonderful time for using spiritual disciplines to renew our spiritual lives. We can read our Lenten daily devotional and have that time of personal prayer. We can make a commitment to ourselves to attend worship every Sunday. We can make that personal promise to care for our souls and that spiritual reservoir in our lives.

I have saved a story related to The Lord’s Prayer till this final installment in our series. It is the story about having available a deep spiritual reservoir. It happened 40 years ago, while I was in seminary, when I was working with the youth group in New Hampshire. It had been the tradition for that group to have an annual ski trip and I helped plan the trip and then went along. On the final day of the three day trip it was a beautiful morning and a group of the best skiers immediately went to the top of the mountain and started down.

Missy, at age 15, was the best skier of the bunch and led the pack. As she came down the steep grade with the trail turning she slid off the trail and dropped some 30 feet onto a fallen tree. She completely smashed her knee and femur bone. Several youth stayed with her while the others went for help. She had a long surgery that day and then spent the next month at the North Conway hospital.

find ... this mountain shall be moved.” (Matthew 7) When Jesus spoke about prayer he always conveyed a sense of urgency knowing it made a huge difference in his life and the lives of others. There is no scientific proof of prayer’s power, ... just as there is no scientific dis-proof. Jesus begins in this prayer with “Our Father who art in heaven ...”

He was not just giving us a name for God, ... but rather Jesus is communicating to his followers, and to us, a new relationship with God that is intimate and close. Jesus was inviting us to share with God in a special relationship. Our way of describing that relationship is to say that God wants us to understand that we are Children of God. We are not just some earthly beings temporarily putting in our time. ***We are truly Children of God.*** This child-like relationship opens the doors to a loving God: “*Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.*” (Matthew 18:3)

The term that Jesus used for “father”—*abba*—is meant to convey unique intimacy and affection. Some have suggested that it might even be translated “our dear Father.” Our common sense tells us that the best of any earthly father that we might know is not all good. In fact, we know that some are downright bad and maybe even evil. Some of you may have experienced a father in that category. You may even say to yourself, “If God is like my father, I don’t want anything to do with Him.”

What Jesus clearly discloses to us is that “our Father in Heaven” is not limited and transcends our human image of fatherhood. What Jesus meant by this term is a loving parental authority that is a totally new human experience and relationship. This title promotes the ultimate in love and care.

Jesus addressed God as father—*abba*—the same term he used in the Garden of Gethsemane. *Abba* is the Aramaic term used by a small child quite similar to our word today, Daddy. *Abba* was an everyday word, a home and family term. It was a secular term with great tenderness and kindness. *Abba*, along with *imma*, were the first sounds which a child stammered, just like our children. Jesus thus spoke with God as a son would speak with his Dad. The address in this prayer is intimate and clearly a term dear to a family.

Christ's Portrait of God – The Lord's Prayer IV

There in the first word is another key to understanding this prayer—it is *our Father*. The Lord's Prayer is not “my” prayer ... it is *Our* prayer. Our relationship with God is personal to a degree. Ultimately, that shared relationship with God is a shared experience with others. It is good for me to know that God loves me. But I am not the only one who is loved ... so are others, ... so are you.

Just as God loves me, God loves others, and God loves all of us. Just as God loves others, so I must learn to love others. God is not only my Father, ... God is our Father. We are all sisters and brothers in this royal family. We are all Children of God. I can never be that true and faithful Child of God until I am also that true and faithful sister or brother toward others.

The Lord's Prayer reminds us with its first word that God is intent, not merely on individual faithfulness, but on the Beloved Community and the family of God in Jesus Christ. This prayer would lose some of its impact if none of us ever said it alone or in the closed silence of our spiritual journey. But it is also true that Jesus wanted us to see a *Portrait of God* that was wide enough to include others. For those of you who grew up calling this prayer the “Our Father” instead of the “Lord's Prayer” you may not have been that far off. The essence of what Jesus intended in the seventy-two words of the Lord's Prayer is contained in the first two. We get a glimpse into why in the early church the use of the Lord's Prayer was not commonplace and why it was spoken with such reverence and awe.

Let me conclude this first sermon then with some words from the preacher John Killinger. After having described the God in the Bible who rescued His people and then the God who created and shaped the universe and all of creation ... Killinger goes on to state the following:

If it doesn't make shivers run up and down your spine, then you have not properly understood. To think that the God of all this depth and power and resourcefulness should be our Father, the one with whom we are privileged to live in an attitude of intimacy and relationship, is enough to stagger the mind, to make it recoil through sheer insufficiency.

... Who could ever have hoped or dreamed that the God of the universe, the God of all universes, should be our father?

“... *And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.*”
-- Matthew 6:13

For the past few weeks we have looked at the Lord's Prayer and the resource these seventy-two words can be for our faith journey. Along the way there have been interesting tidbits that some of you have given me related to the prayer and its use.

There has been a *Family Circus* cartoon that had a small child saying his evening prayers: “Our Father who art in heaven, how did you know my name?” Children have interesting insights into language and they hear words in very unusual ways. Sometimes these thoughts contain remarkable truths: “Yes, when we address God, we can be assured that we are known by name.”

Today our concluding step in the Lord's Prayer leads us to the phrase: “*And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.*” This final petition brings our focus to the issue of personal temptation. Being tempted is not the same as being sinful. We understand that Jesus was tempted as we are tempted, but that he did not commit sin.

Again and again in the gospels we are told of how after exhausting experiences, Jesus would draw himself apart to restore and renew his spiritual reservoir. The most remembered story of the temptations came in the Garden of Gethsemane, that final evening before the crucifixion. The contrast that is found in the events in that garden between Jesus and the disciples is known to all of us. Jesus went off in prayer to renew his strength and relationship with God, while the disciples stayed back, eating and drinking too much, and finally falling asleep.

Let's try to understand what temptation is all about. Temptation is a spiritual and moral seduction that happens to all of us. God never invites us down the low road ... and it is not God's will that we sin. God is good and yearns to have us live according to the righteous standards that only God might set. At the same time, God allows us to be tempted ... and we have the capacity to choose between right and wrong. As the Letter of James has written: “*My brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of any kind, consider it nothing but joy, because you know that the testing of*

God's love. It is not because of what God is doing, but because of what we are doing or not doing.

What is this love from God? It is an extravagant love that forgives seventy times seven, a love that makes no sense and leaves no room for grudges or revenge. It is a love that cancels all debts, forgives all trespasses, and erases all sins. Jesus Christ has written that word on our hearts and with the simple directive ... go and forgive others.

Today may we go home thinking about the people who have wronged us in some way. I am guessing we all are carrying those kind of unforgettable and unforgiveable burdens.

Yet, today our thoughts may also go the other way ... as we think about the persons we have hurt. We all carry those heavy yokes as well.

Please ... may we accept the truth that God has forgiven us ... and we can move on with the wonders of life as we forgive others.

Scriptures: Psalms 103:1-5; Matthew 6:9-13, 25-33

After reading a number of books over the past several weeks related to the Lord's Prayer, there is one story which appears several times. Each time the story is used it always appears without proper reference and therefore I assume it is a bit of a legend. The legend has been told that St. Francis of Assisi went off to pray one night ... and prayed the whole night through using only these opening words, "***Our Father who art in heaven ...***"

May we also learn to see in these same words more and more for our lives and our life together.

Scripture: Psalm 103:1-14; Matthew 6:7-15

Christ's Portrait of God

The Lord's Prayer II

-- *A Prayer for Reverence*

"... *Hallowed by thy name. Thy kingdom come.*" -- Matthew 6:9-10

Last week we began this sermon series on the Lord's Prayer and your comments were very gratifying. Many of you said some very nice things about the sermon and a preacher needs to hear that every so often. Not too often, but once in awhile your words really help. Thanks!

This morning we continue our exploration into these seventy-two words which we have all said hundreds and even thousands of times in our lives. Today we are looking at words 7 through 13: "... *Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come.*"

Let's begin this morning by seeking more depth to our understanding of "name" and specifically "God's name." The ancient Hebrews were extremely cautious about using the name of God and any sacred title. They believed that the simple pronouncement of the name of God put the speaker in jeopardy of God's almighty power. To speak the name of God was like releasing the power of a thousand thunderstorms all in the single moment.

In Old Testament times the name of God, Yahweh, was spoken only once a year. The pronouncement would be done by the chief priest when he entered the inner sanctum of the Holy of Holies in the Temple. This understanding of the things that area sacred about God ... is far different from any of our experiences. In our world today, what is hallowed? ... what is exalted? ... what is holy? Not much and almost nothing is godly or even holy. We have lived through an era (and I will leave it up to you to think of the beginning date) when nothing appears to be hallowed or sacred. We live in a time when everything starts with what can I do for me and my personal needs must be satisfied right now.

When there is no reverence for God, ... there is no reverence for the Children of God and the life that God has given to us. When

Self-deserving merit. We should never believe that God forgives only in equal measure as we are willing to forgive.

If our lives are cluttered by an unforgiving spirit, there is no way we can receive freely. Jesus models what it is to have a forgiving spirit. You and I cannot really pray the Lord's Prayer if we are unwilling to forgive. Jesus teaches us to ask God to forgive us as we forgive others.

When we pray for our own sins/our trespasses/our debts we are praying for those of the whole world. It is not just a prayer between me and God ... it is a prayer between me and all of you ... between me and the whole world. The point of us forgiving others is all about our relationship with God as expressed in our daily lives.

Many of you remember the tragic news when school children were killed in Nickel Mines, Pennsylvania. On October 2, 2006, a thirty-two-year-old gunman entered a one-room Amish school ordering the boys and other adults to leave. The killer opened fire and shot the 10 remaining girls execution-style, killing five and leaving the others critically wounded. Later that awful day members of the Amish community brought words of forgiveness to the family of the perpetrator. The story of the Amish spirit of forgiveness and grace far surpassed the horrendous acts of violence that day.

In the book, *Amish Grace*, the authors write: "This story clarifies the Amish view that God's continuing forgiveness depends on their willingness to forgive. ... To the Amish, granting forgiveness to one's debtors is an act that God requires of those who seek divine forgiveness." (see p. 98)

Frederick Buechner has written in the same manner: "You have done something unspeakable, and by all rights I should have called it quits between us. However, although I make no guarantee that I will be able to forget what you've done and though we may both carry the scars for life, I refuse to let it stand between us. I still want you to be my friend." (*Wishful Thinking*, p. 28-29)

If we are never able to forgive the "unforgiveable sin" then we will never be at peace with God or the others with whom we live. We cannot pray this prayer sincerely if we are really not ready to forgive others who have wronged us. We are literally praying ... "Forgive me God, the way I am forgiving others." If we are not able to let go of all "that stuff we carry" about what others have done to us we are cutting ourselves off from

the path of the car ... and off the vehicle goes right into the snow bank. I have been there and done that! It is not a deliberate sinning, but may be a moment when we are swept away by impulses which grab control of our lives.

There is also a third word used in Luke's Gospel (11:4). Once again, remember that Jesus taught in Aramaic and the gospel writers had to translate his words into Greek. Luke chose the word for sin which originally meant "a missing of the target." Sin is the failure to be what we might have been or could have been ... it is all about living up to what we know are the expectations of God. It is the realization that we have not turned out to be as good a husband or as good a wife ... or parent ... or long-time companion ... as we would like to be. Sin means the failure to hit the bull's eye in the target.

None of us are exempt from sin. The Westminster Shorter Catechism has shared a definition: "Sin is any want of conformity to, or transgression of, ... the law of God." Sin is doing what we know is wrong and we call these sins of "commission." Is there one of us here today who has not purposely done things we know we should not have done?

Sin also is a failure to do what we know is right. We call these sins of "omission." We bear responsibilities for our failure to live up to the high standard and expectations that God has set for us.

Forgiveness is both the language and the lifestyle of the Kingdom of God. The Biblical description of God's intended Kingdom is a world free from hostility. The lion and lamb lie down together and there is perfect peace. Even though forgiveness is the language of the Kingdom of God, you and I must practice forgiveness as a part of this life. That's why Jesus taught us to pray, "Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors." (Matthew 6:12) Jesus offers to radicalize our lives into a whole new way of doing business as we hear, and then repeat over and over again, the importance of being forgiven and giving forgiveness.

Oh, we church people often picture ourselves as better people than others and we are decent people. And that is true or we would have left the church a long time ago. But we know deep in our hearts that we have not always done all that we could do. When it is to our advantage we often proclaim what is true, instead of what we know to be the will of God. We know even further that we cannot purchase or earn our forgiveness by forgiving others. Our forgiveness from Jesus Christ is not based on our

there is no reverence for God, ... there is no reverence for the human beings or the world where we live. The earth and all human are a gift on loan from God. When our lives lose that feeling of the sacred ... and there is no sense of reverence ... there is nothing that is hallowed. It is as if we are all Rodney Dangerfield and going around saying "I don't get no respect." And so often I don't give respect ... even respect for God.

When I said earlier "you pick the beginning date" for losing sight of what is sacred and reverent, I was setting you up. If you chose in your own mind ... when your husband or your wife did something very evil, or when the Democrats took office, or when the Republicans were in power, or when rock n'roll music became popular, or when Communism took control in our world, or when such and such a thing happened in history ... you have missed the story behind the ministry of Jesus.

Jesus understood that there was a major problem of what was sacred and holy in his world and that was twenty centuries ago. He was aware of the lack of the sacred in his day and he could see it all around him in his small world. The very context of the Lord's Prayer in Matthew's Gospel is a warning against offering empty prayers and insulting the presence of God.

Jesus sought to bring a new understanding of honor and reverence for the name and presence of God. And so when asked: "*Lord, how should we pray?*" *Jesus responded: "When you pray, say: Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come."* (Luke 11:2) He was extending a priority for people's lives. He was offering a new sense of order and perspective. He was explaining what God truly intended for this world. With passion and conviction as the Son of God, Jesus was saying "... *Hallowed be thy name.*"

These few words in Christ's Portrait of God was a ***Prayer for Reverence***. A ***Prayer for Reverence*** for his followers today and it is a ***Prayer for Reverence*** wherever life takes us ... this week and in all our days. It is a ***Prayer for Reverence*** when we look at ourselves, when we look at others, and when we look at the natural world that God has given to us. It is ... Christ's Portrait of God.

Where do we find the sacred and the holy in our world? Where in our life do we acknowledge a sense of reverence? This past week we had a former presidential candidate acknowledge that he had

fathered a child outside of his marriage. But is there also not a question of reverence when we continue to abandon the 48 million Americans who have no health care?

Today, that is where we find ourselves! We so often reserve our emotions and feelings of the sacred for those who are our heroes ... or maybe those whom we love. Our thoughts move toward sports heroes, movie stars, or maybe politicians and maybe even those models in our lives for what is good and decent.

Yet, Jesus is saying “... *Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come.*” He was addressing God who had called Abraham to be the father of a great people. This was God who addressed Moses from the burning bush. This was God who had delivered the Jews from bondage in Egypt. This was God that was now sending the Messiah to bring salvation and hope to the world. This was God who has spoken to Augustine, Luther, and Calvin. This is the same God who spread the work of God’s love to the ends of the earth.

This is the Gospel—good news—and where Jesus uses pictures of banquets, parties and wine drinking to describe heaven. This is something we should not miss. Sometimes we seem to think that telling people about Jesus is a bit like advising them to go to the dentist. But it is the Kingdom that makes demands ... and not about what we eat or drink, but about living a life of goodness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. It is not about fancy talk, but living by God’s power in the Kingdom that is to be hallowed. The Church is called to live out kingdom values in the world. It is all about feeding poor people, befriending lonely men and women, visiting prisoners, working for a better, fairer, cleaner future for Jesus’ sake. “*Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven*” –there is nowhere from which the kingdom is to be excluded.

This is the same God who comes into my life and your lives to say “I love you and you are forgiven.” “... Hallowed be thy name” gives us a sense of order and perspective. When the world suggests chaos and calamity there is God ... in awe, wonder, and reverence saying “You are my people.” When all that is in our life seems useless and degrading there in the midst of it ... God ... who is present with us, living with us, and sharing love and forgiveness. We all have

Presbyterians, on the other hand, use “debts and debtors”, the words used in the Westminster Confession of Faith of 1643, which used the King James Version of the Bible from 1611. Or to put it another way ... “The Scots were merchants, and the English, were landowners. To sin against a Scot meant that you hadn’t paid your debts. ... The English, being landowners, believed that the chief sin was trespassing on their property.” (William Carl, *The Lord’s Prayer for Today*, p. 59) We Presbyterians tend to define ourselves by a balance sheet.

What does this all mean for our understanding of forgiveness? That is the question behind the Matthew’s parable of the unforgiving servant. Remember how it goes? A prominent official owes a huge sum of money to his king, an amount so great that he could not possibly repay it. So, the king orders that the man and family be sold into slavery and all of his possessions confiscated. The official begs for mercy, the king takes pity and forgives the debt.

The official leaves and runs into a friend who owes him a tiny sum, and immediately demands repayment. Despite his pleas for more time to pay, the official grabs him by the throat and throws him into prison. Distressed at this gross injustice, the other officials report this to the king who takes decisive action, handing the first man over to be tortured. The parable compels us to see that if one expects mercy and forgiveness, one has to offer mercy and forgiveness.

Actually, Jesus used three different Greek words for sin. The first of these words was the word for “debts.” It is the word used by Matthew as he transcribes the oral teachings of Jesus given in Aramaic. This word “debt” means failure to pay that which is due. Can any of us claim that he or she has perfectly fulfilled one’s duty to humankind and to God? There is no such perfection in this life and we know that.

The second word used by Jesus was two verses later. “*For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.*” (Matthew 6:14-15) The word “trespass” carries the idea of illegally stepping over a boundary line.

It implies a process where our lives go out of control just as a car in a winter storm would go out of control on an icy road. I have been thinking about all those people up in Flagstaff driving down the side roads on the snow covered ice and just touching the brakes when a deer runs into

Christ's Portrait of God: The Lord's Prayer III

*"Give us this day our daily bread; And forgive us our debts,
As we also have forgiven our debtors."* – Matthew 6:11-12

Today our sermon series on The Lord's Prayer moves into week three with next Sunday being the final installment.

There is a story shared about The Lord's Prayer that some of you may have heard. Two young men were talking about religion. One says to the other, "You don't know nothing. How does the Lord's Prayer begin?" That's easy, came the reply: "Now I lay me down to sleep ...". "Aha – I told you so! Everybody knows the Lord's Prayer begins 'God is great, God is good, now we thank him for our food.'"

No, when I look out on a Sunday morning, I know I am looking at many people who have felt the inner security and power of a prayer they learned early in life and say over and over again in latter years.

Let us continue as we move through the prayer that has added such deep meaning for us. We come to those simple, but difficult petitions in the prayer: "... give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors." If we pray at no other time during the day, we are likely to pray at mealtime as we receive bread. Even if (like our two friends) we do not know much about religion, we know it has something to do with being thankful and knowing forgiveness. We know how very difficult it is to forgive as we are forgiven.

This now leads to our second practical petition: "*forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.*" Why do we say "debts" and not "trespasses" or "sins", as is said by other sisters and brothers in the wider church family? You know the answer, "We Presbyterians are more concerned with our DEBTS, meaning financial debts, than our sins!" No, the real reason is that the "trespass" version of the Lord's Prayer is based on the English *Book of Common Prayer* from 1662 and following the early Tyndale version of the Bible from 1525. The *Book of Common Prayer* was and still is today the basic worship manual for the Anglican and Episcopal churches.

within us that sense and calling to say "Yes" to God ... with honor, respect and love. We have seen and understand *Christ's Portrait of God is a Prayer for Reverence.*

As William Carl has written: "We don't begin with our holiness, but with God's becoming holy to us and in us. So how do we hallow God's name? By allowing God to work through our lives and by seeing life itself, not as just one darn thing after another and then you die, but as God's precious and holy gift to us every single day." (*The Lord's Prayer*, p. 19)

Now, what if on a Sunday as we were all saying the Lord's Prayer some one stood up in the back of the church with a deep resounding voice and said (and please don't get any ideas, because it would scare me to death) "Stop! You don't really mean it!" If we were sincere in our prayer for God's kingdom to come and his will be done, it would mean changes in the way we live.

The Lord's Prayer is meant to be a major re-orientation in our lives away from ourselves and toward God. Some of us might go to the bank and withdraw money that we are saving and give it to fight hunger and poverty in our city. Some of us might spend the next week going to see our enemies and asking their forgiveness. Some of us might want to totally rearrange our schedules to include much more time for daily devotions. While still others, might begin a ministry going door-to-door in Sun City with an invitation to attend Faith Church. Yes, this is *Christ's Portrait of God* ... and it is scary.

Do we really believe all that kingdom stuff? Secularism is rampant in our society and we have become grossly materialistic with our new cars, nice vacations, etc., etc. The kingdom of God that Jesus said was at hand ... yet, we do not anticipate its coming tomorrow or next week? In fact, we are not all that different from the people who heard this prayer back in the first century.

Hearing and seeing all that was happening in his world Jesus said, "*The kingdom of God is not coming with things that can be observed; nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or 'There it is!' For, in fact, the kingdom of God is among you.*" (Luke 17:20-21) Even John the Baptist doubted Jesus' message. Remember he sent some of his people to Jesus to ask questions. How did Jesus respond to this

inquiry from John's disciples? "*Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me.*" (Matthew 11:4-6)

The kingdom of God is both here and is coming, ... in Jesus Christ. It is already present in us and in this community of faith we call Faith Presbyterian Church. It is present and continually coming in the lives of the faithful of this congregation. When we pray "thy kingdom come" we are asking that God use us as an example for the world, ... that his will begin in us and then spread to others. If we can pray those simple words, the message for me and you can be life-changing and so rewarding. These simple words are meant to direct us to God's kingdom and to that foretaste and exquisite glimpse of what God intends for our lives and the life of our world.

In these recent days have we not seen from Haiti so many working in the aid of others ... the rescue workers, the medical teams coming from around the world, and now orphans being adopted by families in the United States? Let us give thanks for the compassion of all those who seek to serve the Kingdom of God through the tragedy of an earthquake.

In *The Screwtape Letters*, C. S. Lewis portrayed the devil as that figure that appeared when finding a person moving under the sense of God and questioning the condition of the soul, ... and at that moment suggesting that it was "just about time he had some lunch." The devil would get him out-of-doors, for there he could easily persuade him that passing traffic and newspaper headlines are the reality. Yet when we pray "Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come." the world out there is not the reality that God intends ... for me, ... for you, the world out there is not the reality God intends for our loved ones, ... for all of God's creations. There is something more and we have seen a glimpse of that kingdom that is coming.

The *Lord's Prayer is a Prayer for Reverence*, because we know there is so much more in store for us. It is a *Prayer for Reverence*, because we have a promise that will never die. It is a *Prayer for*

Reverence, because I am receiving the Good News for my life, ... because you are receiving the Good News for your life, ... and because there is Good News for all of our world.

When we come to these words in the prayer we say so automatically, may we be drawn back and hear its personal message for our lives as a moment for decision. It is a moment when we are asked to enter into God's presence, to be who we are, people of Christ forever. God is asking us to move out into the world and live knowing the kingdom is within us.

"Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come." and we say ... "Yes, Lord, may your kingdom come and let it begin with me."

Scriptures: Isaiah 6:1-7; Luke 11:1-13