

Sermon for Pentecost XII Year C 2025
Teach Us to Pray

Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.

Who taught you to pray?

It seems that prayer does not come naturally.

It is a practice that is learned through being part of a faith community.

I learned to pray the way I suspected many of you learned to pray—
by saying bedtime prayers—

Now I lay me down to sleep,

I pray the Lord my soul to keep,

God's love keep me through the night,

and wake me with the morning light.

Then came the God blesses—

God bless Mommy and Daddy, Jimmy and Paul,

Grandma and Grandpa . . .

It's how we taught our daughter . . . and granddaughter.

Of course, my prayer life (and yours, too,) has deepened through years
of singing the liturgy, reciting the creeds, praying the psalms

--all of which have grown through life experiences.

Such practices have given me a rich prayer language with which to
express what the Apostle Paul calls, groanings too deep for words.

I am still learning to pray and expect I will continue learning
until the day I die.

Prayer is a never-ending discipline.

So it is not surprising that Jesus' disciples ask him to teach them the
sacred discipline of prayer . . .

To take everything to the Lord in prayer.

I was reminded of this rather poignantly by our granddaughter.

Last summer, one of her neighborhood friends had a near drowning
incident in the local pool.

Her friend had to be rushed to the children's hospital.

My daughter and her family took care of her friend's younger brother.

As Maddie was walking with her mom and little Archie while waiting for news about Augie, Maddie asked her mom what they could do to help and then she said . . . I know, we can pray. She said a prayer for God to help her friend and then she pointed to the sky—“Look, look! There’s goes God!” Our three-and-a-half year old theologian in residence.

Not only did Maddie remind us that day to take everything to the Lord in prayer she also lifted up something Jesus was teaching in his prayer. Prayer includes our needs, our concerns and our aspirations and yet it is essentially about the reign of God and the working of God’s will in our world.

It’s important to keep in mind that God’s reign is never defined in terms of political, social or economic theory or ideology.

What we know of God’s reign comes from the preaching and teaching of the prophets and, especially, Jesus’ preaching and teaching.

What we know of God’s reign is that it comes when the powers that be are cast down from their thrones and the lowly are exalted.

Under the reign of God, all have enough to live and thrive without fear of violence—just take a look at what the prophet Micah says in chapter 4—*They shall all sit under their own vines and under their own fig trees, and no one shall make them afraid.*

The reign of God erases all artificial barriers based on race, class, gender, and dissolves all distinctions of nation, ethnicity, blood and soil as described in the letter we call Revelation: *There was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands.*

And from Jesus—Many who are now deemed first in the hierarchy of greatness will be last under the reign of God and those deemed “the least” will be first.

Just like prayer, the reign of God is something we need to learn about because it is counterintuitive to the ways of the world.

It is not about the deification or implementation of any particular political agenda and yet . . .

it cannot help but have profound political ramifications.

All nations, of whatever age, ethnic makeup, political organization, social order or economic system will be judged by one and only one criterion, namely, by how well or poorly they treated the least and most vulnerable among them.

To be a disciple of Jesus, is to live today under the promised reign of God, the fulfillment of which lies in God’s future.

It is to identify with “the least”

and advocate, suffer, sacrifice and pray for their wellbeing.

It is to speak the truth of God’s will for this planet to all who would exploit it, oppress its peoples, and practice violence against it.

Jesus then instructs his disciples to pray for daily bread.

It is the one physical item sought in his prayer.

Enough for today and no more.

Most of us have known mainly privilege and plenty and we may find it hard to relate to this request.

Yet, I have lived through times when financial resources were stretched, though I have never been poor.

I cannot even say that I have been truly hungry.

To be sure, I have experienced “hunger” in very limited way—expressing myself as “starving.”

But that is an insulting trivialization of the suffering experienced by millions on our planet who even now are truly starving to death.

Far from seeking daily bread, we strive, with the help of our financial advisors, to achieve “financial security.”

We celebrate our wealth as “blessings,” while remaining blind to the costs of our financial security and the lifestyle it allows us to enjoy in the face of the suffering of the poor who are without even daily bread. Above all, Jesus teaches us to ask for the necessities and nourishment of our bodies—corporately.

He didn’t say for us to pray—*Give me this day my daily bread*—
He taught us to ask on behalf of all—*Give us this day our daily bread*.

Next Jesus tells his disciples to pray for forgiveness.

But there is an interesting twist here.

Unlike Matthew’s gospel where Jesus appears to make God’s forgiveness contingent upon our forgiveness of others, here in Luke’s account, Jesus takes forgiveness of others as a foregone conclusion.

Forgiveness is humanly possible and the fact that it takes place among us, however incompletely, witnesses to the far greater capacity of God to forgive even the murder of his beloved Son.

Forgiveness, it should be understood, is not contingent upon the wrongdoer’s repentance.

Neither is it passivity in the face of abuse.

To forgive is an act of resistance to evil.

Forgiveness deprives the enemy of the power to occupy our minds and hearts.

It robs our enemy’s barbs of their power to infect us with the venom of resentment and bitterness.

Forgiveness is the refusal to be drawn into the vortex of vengeful violence that transforms us into the image of what we hate.

It sets the community of disciples apart from a world consumed by blood feuds.

Now Jesus ends the prayer on a sobering note:

Do not bring us to the time of trial.

This is a recognition that there are limits to the human capacity for persevering in good against the power of evil.

Recall the disciples’ broken vow to stand by Jesus to the end.

In my lifetime, protests and acts of civil disobedience
and principled resistance to unjust laws
have been treated with a modicum of respect
for the freedom of expression.
To be sure, there have been instances of brutality and governmental
violence—the Kent State shootings being one notable example.

Today, respect for differences and civil resistance
is not an honored fixture and we can no longer predict
how we will respond in the face of real persecution.
For me, in view of recent political events,
there is real urgency to praying *do not bring us to the time of trial*
or lead us not into temptation.
Will we have the courage to faithfully proclaim Jesus
and the reign of God for which Christ lived, died and continues to live
in the face of the violent injustice of seizing people off the street without
due process or the continued assault on LGBTQ+
and erasure of diversity?
Can we be bold and put our own life at risk to protect their wellbeing?
Since the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak,
I pray God to spare us from the time of trial or sustain us in it.

Most Christians pray the Lord's Prayer with some regularity
if not every day.
But, I wonder, do we really know what we are asking for
when we pray that God's kingdom will come?
Because a prayer is not just sending a wish up to heaven
and expecting God to perform some miracle—with no help from us.

Yes, we bring everything to the Lord in prayer . . .
We ask, we seek and we knock . . . not just for our little slice of heaven
but for the full reign of God to be manifested . . . in our lives,
in our actions and in the words we speak and the decisions we make.
God answers prayer in, with and through us—
individually and especially as a community of faith.

It is why I always ask God to help us to live the words the Lord taught us to pray.

So, what are we willing to let go of in order to take hold of the just and gentle reign of God Jesus offers us and teaches us to pray for?

Do we have a sufficient measure of the love of God's reign and the courage to live it?

Do we really want what Jesus is teaching us to pray for?

Let's take it to the Lord in prayer
and then trust, as Maddie did,
that God indeed hears us
and will pour upon us his abundant mercy
and the good things that only come through him.