

PRAYING INSTRUCTIONS
Matthew 5:1-9
First Sunday in Lent, 2017
Sunrise Presbyterian Church
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Lent begins today. Each year on the First Sunday in Lent we read about Jesus's being tempted in the Wilderness. This year, however, because we have been studying the Sermon on the Mount, and because in many years we've never taken time in worship for an extended study of the Lord's Prayer - we're going to lift up a phrase from that prayer each week in worship to help us ponder how we pray.

How do we pray? How do we talk with God? How do we listen for God? We often come with many questions about prayer - how we do it? - What difference does it make? - How can we be better at prayer? We yearn to be in relationship with God - we dream of making our world better - we desperately want to fix what is broken in our lives - and so we pray.

We pray the Lord's Prayer in worship every week. We close Session meetings at Sunrise with it - we use it in civic occasions. We often pray the prayer automatically - but how often do we pause and put the prayer back in its context in Matthew - in the middle of the Sermon on the Mount?

Matthew places the Sermon on the Mount at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, and he is keen to offer what I call a citizenship manual of the Kingdom of God for the disciples. Matthew understands that Jesus has brought God's Kingdom with him - that Jesus has called his disciples to participate in God's Kingdom - and it is important for them to know how to recognize this Kingdom when they see it - - it is vital for them to know how to participate in it. We've talked about the Beatitudes - being salt and light - taming our anger and our need to hate our enemies. Matthew wants to make certain that WE as disciples understand what it means to follow Jesus.

In the middle of all the instructions - in the middle of Jesus' warning about not worrying and not hitting back - he tells them how to pray. He actually begins by telling them and US how NOT to pray. Jesus tells them and us not to make a big spectacle of ourselves - he advises us not to be overly pious when we pray - He certainly would have us not be Church Lady from Saturday Night Live. Instead of splashing our prayer all over the internet or YouTube, he suggests we pray by ourselves - that we not pray to impress anyone - instead, Jesus implies that we pray to be in relationship with God. For Matthew "praying is an expression of trust in a God who knows our needs before we ask. Asking, then, is not a matter of

informing or manipulating the deity, but of aligning ourselves in trust and acknowledging our need.”ⁱ

Praying is a matter of aligning ourselves with God. Think about that: it is a matter of us getting in line with God - it is a matter of asking for help as we get in that line - prayer is a matter of taking on God's causes. Therefore, Jesus calls us to address God in familiar language. It's important that we aren't praying to a wrathful and vengeful God - we aren't praying to the God who will vindicate all our enemies - we are praying to "Our father" or "Our mother" -- we are praying to a God we know and are familiar with. We are praying to the God of the poor in spirit - the meek - the peacemakers - we are praying to God who **needs us** to be in relationship, also. Jesus addresses God as Father - and he calls the disciples to do as he does - he calls them and us into the same relationship with God who is the one "who loves, forgives and knows how to give good gifts to his children." We are called to be disciples of a God who loves us and treasures us and calls us to be the light of the world for other people. We must remember the goodness of God as we pray.

"Our Father, Who art in heaven - Hallowed be thy name" We pray using old forms of English we can't quite define. *To hallow* - means to honor as holy - and holy means to set apart - to hallow God is to honor God as more complete - more full - more encompassing than any of us - to hallow God is hold God in awe. Phillip Newell writes this phrase as "Your name is sacred beyond speaking." ⁱⁱ Eugene Peterson writes it as "Reveal who you are." J. B. Phillips says, "Let your name be kept holy." To hallow God is to seek to understand the fullness of the love and grace God brings. To hallow God is to look for hope and potential which can lead the disciples on their way.

Each week as I call us to join together to pray the Lord's Prayer, I use the rubric from the old Anglican order of worship - "We are bold to pray." Frederick Buechner says that "word *bold* is worth thinking about. We do well not to pray the prayer lightly. It takes guts to pray it at all."ⁱⁱⁱ I agree with Buechner - it's a bold prayer. If we put the prayer in its context in the Sermon on the Mount we begin to realize what courage we need to pray it and to follow Jesus into the world.

Following Jesus into the world is not easy or rote or lighthearted - but Jesus calls us along with the poor in spirit and the meek and the peacemakers to be citizens of his Kingdom - here on earth as it is in heaven. Let us be bold to pray and have courage to follow. Amen.

ⁱ Eugene Boring, in "Matthew" in *The New Interpreter's Bible*, VIII, p. 202.

ⁱⁱ Phillip Newell, *Ground of All Being*.

ⁱⁱⁱ Frederick Buechner, *Whistling in the Dark*, p 76.