

Primary Reading: Luke 11:1-13

It seemed to me that the readings today all focused on one thing: Prayer... So I figured, when you don't know where to start, why not begin with a Google search. I was optimistic when up popped on my computer screen: "Results **1-10** of about **73,800,000** for **prayer**" in **0.05** seconds. But after surveying just a couple of the pages I began feeling dizzy...

I could share the dizzying journey that the Google search on prayer took me through – from the *Allaboutprayer.org* website to *Wikipedia's* not-so-concise-nor-helpful definition of "prayer," or the biggest surprise of all for me was in reading an online news article referring to "Answered Prayers" in which its claimed that a near-miracle comes from Wal-Mart, with a big hand from Coca-Cola. I hope you'll forgive me for my skepticism of finding much help on prayer from a Google search

I was, in fact, becoming more and more skeptical – not to mention getting close to an epileptic fit from all of the adds flashing along the margins of the page – when I heard my mother the reference librarian in the back of my mind (as if an answered prayer!) reminding me: "Refine, narrow your search! Focus just on the *Lord's Prayer* rather than all of *prayer*."

Sure, I thought, this will help. But again, to my chagrin this new Google search on the "Lord's Prayer" – taking nearly twice as long (0.09 seconds, in fact, rather than 0.05 seconds!?!)) – still offered me "Results **1-10** of **1,630,000**." It was then and there that I gave up on my Google search...

...And I began to wonder if it's possible that with the technological revolution in full-force here in this world of ours, we're no closer to understanding prayer than we were two thousand years ago. To turn to questions that *Allaboutprayer.org* offered to answer: What is prayer? How does prayer work (or not work)? and How do we increase our prayer life while learning to pray more effectively?

"Jesus was praying in a certain place," recounts Luke. "...and after he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, *Lord, teach us to pray*..." And like a Google search narrowly and properly defined, Jesus gives them five concise results which probably take a lifetime to live out.

“When you pray, say: *Father, hallowed be your name...*”

“Father,” we begin this prayer which millions of Christians pray. This prayer, which is in fact one of the *few things* held in common across nearly all denominations of Christians. We might ask, what does it mean to begin a prayer with the word “Father?” Perhaps at a foundational level, when we begin this way, it’s an invitation to enter into a relationship. To speak to God as if one is speaking to a parent. To speak to God as one that brought you life.

My wife Elisabeth laughs a bit at my family’s ‘technique of communication on the phone.’ I think I learned it from my father which he most likely learned growing up in a Norwegian-American Midwestern farm-ethnic. And it’s almost like a game. You see, when you phone a family member, you don’t simply say, “Hi, this is Kent, who’s this?” It’s kind of like you start up in the middle of a conversation that’s never ended, expecting your family member to recognize your voice. You say something like, “...so, you get any rain up there?” Or, “...well, how’s the weekend going?” Or, my personal favorite, “...so... what’s the good word?”

I completely agree with my wife Elisabeth, that ordinarily this would be rude and obnoxious – to make the person on the other end of a phone line guess who you are. And yet, in the context of our family’s weekly or more frequent phone conversations, grounded as it is in the relationship that I have with my father and my mother, I think it’s appropriate, even endearing. It probably wouldn’t necessarily work for every family, but I wonder if this isn’t part of what Jesus teaches about prayer. Let your life be a prayer that is like one long conversation without beginning or ending. Use words when necessary.

“and when you pray, say: *Your kingdom come...*”

I have a computer program that will do a Google-like search of the whole bible and when I looked up the Greek word *basileia*, a which is this word for “kingdom” it told me (in an impressive 0.22 seconds) that this one word shows up 216 times in 195 verses. So rather than telling you what God’s kingdom is like, listen to a few of the verses just from the Gospel of Luke in which Jesus describes this “kingdom” of which we prayer for:

✓ *Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.* (Luke 6:20)

- ✓ *What is the kingdom of God like? And to what should I compare it? It is like a mustard seed...It is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened. (Luke 13:18-21)*
- ✓ *Once Jesus was asked...when the kingdom of God was coming, and Jesus answered, “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)*
- ✓ *But Jesus called for them and said, “Let the little children come to me...for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs.” (Luke 18:16)*

“and when you pray, say: *Give us each day our daily bread...*”

I was told recently a story by some folks who went on a delegation to Nicaragua not this year, but a few years ago. Many of you know that as part of the trip to Nicaragua, the delegation of a dozen or so folks usually divide up and stay in groups of two or so at homes of people who live in these rural villages. Rice and beans is a common meal. Often it’s *the meal* for *every meal* that you’re there. But some families have a cow or a chicken and so you might get a bit of eggs or some fresh milk for breakfast.

Well, the story was told to me of one group that woke up to an empty table for breakfast (they soon discovered) because the family they stayed with were so poor they couldn’t even muster up a meal of rice and beans. After awhile of sitting at an empty breakfast table and conversing in broken Spanish, a neighbor family brought over food to share with their neighbors – both the ones who lived in the village with them and the ones who had traveled from another continent to meet them.

Let me invite you when you go home today or even as we prayer the Lord’s prayer later in this service: literally later or mentally now, open your fridge door and your cupboards... and then think about this prayer: *Give US each day OUR daily bread.* Note that Christians have never prayed this prayer “give *ME* each day *MY* daily bread.” But what does it mean to pray this in a world where people go hungry daily? We certainly pray with our words, but make no mistake that we also pray with our actions... we pray with our pocket-books, we pray with our donations to the food pantry, and we pray with a smile to anyone we pass.

“and when you pray, say: *And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us...*”

This prayer that Jesus teaches, it seems to me, gets more and more impossible as it goes along. As if daily bread being for all weren't enough, I think anyone who takes themselves seriously and takes forgiveness seriously knows how impossible it is to really "forgive everyone indebted to us."

But maybe Jesus means for us to pray the impossible, knowing that it *is impossible*. But knowing at the same time that with God 'all things are possible.' And hoping that if we pray this long enough – if we make this prayer for forgiveness for ourselves and for others *our daily bread* – it just might seep into our bones and we'll begin to live it.

“And finally, when you pray, say: *And do not bring us to the time of trial...*”

Ultimately, I wonder if God teaches us through our prayers and answers our prayers, not by miraculously taking us out of suffering and taking us out of trials, pain, brokenness, or death... but by entering into the suffering with us. Promising to join us in the pain and brokenness as one who knows pain and who knows what it means to be broken.

It's the promise that we will hear spoken over water in baptism and through daily bread at the table of communion. This is the prayer that we spend our whole lives seeking to make our daily bread, letting it seep into our bones, and live its lessons.

Last night I was driving home from Rapid City early in the evening and was feeling a bit nostalgic, so I took the winding Sheridan Lake Road instead of the highway. Well I knew from the time that one of my favorite programs, *Thistle & Shamrock*, was coming on the radio, but it was on a station out of Nebraska. Which we can pick up just fine here in Custer, but from Rapid City to Hill City, it's hard to get the station.

So as I wined up and down hills, growing closer to the signal and sometimes farther away, the scratchy static of the program over the course of the journey gradually faded into the beautiful folk music of the radio program. There were times when I thought I'd lost the signal entirely, even after Hill City, but the music stirred my heart and mind even behind the sometimes static.

May we grow in our prayer life, tuning out the scratchy static and ever more becoming in tune with the music that God, the composer of all creation gives to this world. Amen.