

This Lent series looks at the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6, line by line, through the six Sundays in Lent and Easter Sunday. It could be flexible in use (as a sermon series, youth group lessons, Bible study, devotional, or whatever), and serve as part of a larger congregational focus on prayer during the season. The theme is: "Creating Space for Prayer."

## **First Sunday in Lent    Psalm 51:1-17; Matthew 6:1-13**

### **Sermon: "Creating Space for Prayer"**

- Prayer is talking with God about what's on your heart and mind.
- Chance to listen to God. Every good relationship requires listening
- Scripture teaches us how to pray, especially Psalms, and Jesus in Matthew 6. Characters all through scripture pray to and with God for various reasons: to praise God, to confess sins, to give thanks to God, or to ask God to meet their needs.
- What does it mean to be a person of prayer?
  - Pray continually & in all circumstances (1 Thess. 5:16-18)
  - Ritual prayers: Lord's Prayer, bedtime prayers with children, prayers at meals, praying the rosary, etc.
  - Everyday prayers: 1-2 sentences, expressing whatever you're feeling at the moment. Request from God for patience, strength, courage, guidance. Giving thanks to God for blessings. Remembering our faith:
- Praying with and for others: acts of selflessness & love
- Praying to align us with God's will for us: "The discipline of the Christian disciple is not to master anything, but rather to be mastered by the Spirit" (Henri Nouwen).

## **Second Sunday in Lent    Isaiah 6:1-5; Romans 8:12-17**

### **"Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name." – Matthew 6:9**

#### **Sermon: "Naming What is Holy"**

- The Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6:5-13:
  - Structurally and theologically at the center of Sermon on the Mount
  - Early Christian literature suggests Christians were instructed to pray the Lord's Prayer 3x daily. Reflects continuation of 3x daily prayers common in Judaism: morning, mid-afternoon, sunset.
  - Jesus presented it in Aramaic (common language of people) rather than Hebrew (official synagogue liturgy language). A way of breaking down formality to encounter an intimate relationship.
- First thing we learn about prayer in the Lord's Prayer is that it is meant to be a conversation of an intimate nature.
  - Aramaic word for Father used here is "Abba" - a loving familial term meaning Father – but actually more like Papa, Dad, Daddy, maybe even Pops.

- Matthew uses “Father” for God more than any other NT writer, so familial relationship between us and God is important.
- The term “Abba” is also found in Romans 8:15.
- Hallowed be your name
  - Names in scripture aren't just labels, but representations of who a person is:
  - “Holy” emphasizes radical otherness of God. God is not of this world; God is holy.
  - Jesus’ intent with “Hallowed be your name”: “Let God’s name be sanctified.”

### **Third Sunday in Lent James 2:14-17; Genesis 22:1-14; Matthew 26:36-46**

#### **“Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” – Matthew 6:10**

##### **Sermon: “The Kingdom of God and the Will of God”**

- A plea to align our will with the will of God. What else is more counter-cultural than asking for another’s desires (i.e. God’s) take precedence over our own desires?
  - We have free will, meaning the freedom to do whatever we want. But as our parents might have taught us, what we want to do isn’t always what’s best for us to do.
  - Even Jesus struggled with surrendering to God’s will in the Garden of Gethsemane.
- A reminder that doing so ultimately allows us to pray with our actions, to be more than just hearers of the word - to be *doers*
  - *Discourses*, ancient philosopher Epictetus: filled with laments about students of philosophy who can quote their textbooks concerning self-control and reasonableness, yet whose lives exemplify neither. Sound familiar?
  - James: Faith without works is dead. Acting out our prayer, “Your kingdom come” keeps the faith alive. Call to action. Our lives should be living prayers to God.

### **Fourth Sunday in Lent Genesis 16:1-26**

#### **“Give us this day our daily bread.” – Matthew 6:11**

##### **Sermon: “Bare Necessities”**

This is a good day to celebrate the Sacrament of Holy Communion, even if it’s not in line with the typical congregation schedule.

- Part of our prayers are for God to give us what we need to make it through each day: food, shelter, strength/energy, patience, peace, and so on.
- Some Israelites not willing to live day-to-day and trust in God to provide.
- The prayer, “Give us this day our daily bread,” is a reflection of what our prayers of petition or request from God ought to be: simple, and focused on needs rather than wants.

- A spiritual element to this prayer as well. Not only do we need God to provide us with the things that give us another day of life on earth, but we also need God to provide us with the one thing that gives us eternal life. As Christians, we believe that the one thing that gives us eternal life is the bread from heaven, Jesus Christ.

## **Fifth Sunday in Lent    Jeremiah 31:31-34; Matthew 18:21-35**

### **“And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.” – Matthew 6:12**

#### **Sermon: “Back in Black”**

- In our prayers and in our lives, we are called to be people of forgiveness:
  - People who have been forgiven by God
  - People who forgive others
- God forgives us.
  - Servant owed debt he could not repay. Nothing he said or did would've been able to repay the master. Nothing we say or do could repay God. We owe God beyond what we can repay. Indebted to God – “in the red.”
  - Master merciful, and God is merciful. God wipes away our debt/sin with Christ on the cross. I will show you my love for you by forgiving you of your debts. Even as you nail me to a cross, I will forgive. God brings us back into the “black”; no outstanding debts.
- We forgive others.
  - Forgiveness is risky – people may take advantage of the mercy we exhibit (like the servant did!)
  - Jesus' reply to Peter: way beyond perfect forgiveness (7 is perfect number in Bible).
  - Desmond Tutu on forgiveness:
    - Not cheap or easy
    - Not forgetting or condoning what has been done. Rather, taking what happened seriously and naming the pain it has caused.
    - Abandoning right to pay back perpetrator, which is actually liberating. South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission reported many felt sense of relief upon forgiving.
    - Not sentimental. It's good for your health to let go of bitterness, grudges, hatred.
    - Chance to make a new beginning. Hasn't God extended such chances to us? Shouldn't we commit to doing the same to those who wronged us?

## **Palm Sunday    Mark 11:1-11; Psalm 107:1-3, 17-22; Ephesians 6:10-18**

### **“And do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one.” – Matthew 6:13**

**Sermon: "To the Rescue"**

- We are asking God to help protect us when our faith faces temptations or challenges, and to save us from the powerful forces of evil in this world.
- "Hosanna!" was a cry for salvation, not a shout for joy. "Help us in our time of trial, save us from all evil!" they might as well have been saying.
- Many of those people truly believed that Jesus had come to forcefully wipe out all the people who stood in the way of their faith in God, to smite all those opposed to following Christ, on those people of other nations and faiths who were opposed to, and even persecuted, Christ-followers.
- That sometimes is what we mean when we pray this line of the prayer. "Deliver us from evil", where we define other people as enemies, and ask God to protect us (the good people, of course), from all "those" people from other countries, other ethnicities, other religions. But what makes us so special that "we" need protection from "them"? The truth is, the "us" in our prayers is all of humanity, not a subset of it.
  - "Our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh," Paul said, "but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places." This is why we're told to put on the armor of God: not for defense against other people, but for defense against the spiritual forces of evil.
  - You may notice that all of these things are gifts from God. We can obtain none of them on our own.

**Easter Sunday Acts 10:34-43; John 20:1-18**

**"For the kingdom and the power and the glory are yours forever. Amen."**

**Sermon: "More than a Footnote"**

- This final line of the prayer is not in the original text. It is, rather, a footnote. Scholars are generally in agreement that the line was not actually said by Jesus but added much later. It is just a footnote!
- But the truth it proclaims is at the center of Christian faith: we worship and pray to an everlasting and ever-living God, whose kingdom, power, and glory live forever. It is the doxology, the hymn of praise, that pulls everything in the prayer together and draws us back into praise of the living God.
- So too, the resurrection is more than a footnote. It is not simply a happy ending or an insignificant detail we can choose to believe or not. The resurrection is an event that alters all of eternity. It is the ultimate example that we worship a living God.
- Easter is a day of receiving the significant and all-encompassing gift of God's kingdom, power and glory, and to sing praise to that truth.