

Grace Covenant Presbyterian Church
The 5th Sunday in Lent, March 29, 2020
“When Words Fail” Sermon by Rev. Sue Trigger
Matthew 6: 7-14

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“When you pray, don’t pour out a flood of empty words, as the Gentiles do. They think that by saying many words they’ll be heard. Don’t be like them, because your Father knows what you need before you ask. Pray like this:

Our Father who is in heaven,

uphold the holiness of your name.

Bring in your kingdom

so that your will is done on earth as it’s done in heaven.

Give us the bread we need for today.

Forgive us for the ways we have wronged you,

just as we also forgive those who have wronged us.

And don’t lead us into temptation,

but rescue us from the evil one.

Just a few weeks ago, our children were in their Sunday school classes learning about the Lord’s Prayer. If you’re watching today, you may be looking at the booklet I sent you. I hope you’re having fun coloring the pages and thinking about the prayer. We teach it in Sunday school and Awakening to Worship because Jesus taught it to his disciples and because it is a prayer that we say together in worship. It is one of the first ways our children can participate in the words we say in worship.

But learning The Lord’s Prayer is challenging. When my younger brother was learning the prayer he would say, “Our Father, who art in heaven, how would you be my name?” My mom remembers me having trouble saying “Father” when I first learned the prayer, and so it came out “Our Fadder.” I mashed up some of the funny ways children have learned the prayer and all together, it sounds like this,

“Our Fadder, who art in heaven, Howard be thy name. Harold be my name. How didja know my name? Thy kingdom come, they Willoughby done, on earth as it is Uncle Kevin. Give us this day our jelly bread. Give us this steak and daily bread. **And forgive us our trash baskets as we forgive those who put trash in our baskets.** Lead a snot into temptation, but deliver us from email.”

Today, there are online church services happening all over the country that will include The Lord’s Prayer. When people are going through difficult times they tend to turn to two Scripture readings, the 23rd Psalm and The Lord’s Prayer. These two passages express comfort and hope and are easily memorized. Saying them can be especially comforting in times like these.

Jesus taught the prayer in the middle of the Sermon on the Mount. He knew that it would be a timeless prayer. It begins by reminding us of the Kingdom of God – a place where there is no more pain, no more sin and suffering, no more death. We long for this place don’t we? “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” When we pray for God’s kingdom to come, we envision an inclusive community. A place where our common humanity and shared values are celebrated and divisions no longer exist. Wouldn’t that be wonderful? And so we pray for it, just as Jesus said.

But Jesus also understood the reality of life on earth and so he prayed, “Give us this day our daily bread.” Right now, the impact of social distancing is having a severe impact on the economy. Millions of Americans have had their hours cut. Some have been laid off or even lost their jobs as businesses shut down; and some have closed for good. People will struggle to pay their rent and others will struggle to put food on the table for their families. “Give us this day our daily bread.” It is a prayer that many will pray today, and the good news is that disciples all around the country are working together to do just that. We don’t pray this prayer expecting God to send manna from heaven as much as we pray that those who are able will provide for those in need.

Thanks to the generosity of members of Grace Covenant, we have some resources we can use to help those who lost their jobs and are struggling to have food to eat. The Session has designated a fund that we can use to lend a financial hand. Our partnership with KCK Hot lunch

and Uplift is helping to feed the homeless. Those who have are giving so that those who are struggling will have daily bread.

Jesus prayed for our debts. Some use the word sins or trespasses. As Presbyterians, we most often pray for our debts. That seems especially relevant when our economy is grinding with the strain of a global virus. With so many struggling – forgiveness of debt would be a blessing. Forgiveness for what has broken a friendship or a family would be a blessing. Imagine, when this virus has passed, starting fresh with friends and family. Imagine restoring our house payments, car payments, or school payments without punishment. Thankfully, many creditors are making that possible. “Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.”

Last week the news was filled with images of Florida beaches packed with people frolicking in the sun and surf. Indignant young people were interviewed and expressed their belief that they couldn’t get the virus, so why should they give up living life to the fullest? Ignorance and temptation blinded them from understanding the impact of their actions. Giving into temptation contributed to the spread of the deadly virus. Days after returning home, it was reported that some of the partiers were becoming ill. One courageous young man publicly admitted how wrong he had been. “Lead us not into temptation, and deliver us from evil.”

The Lord’s Prayer ends with a declaration, “For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever.” A statement that proclaims “this is the way it should be.” Perhaps that is another reason why this prayer is so important for us. There was an elderly woman who was dying from complications of an illness. When she received the news that there was nothing more they could do she asked me to come and visit her. When I arrived she asked me to pray with her. She didn’t want me to pray for her. She didn’t want me to listen to her pray. She wanted me to pray *with* her. She explained that since she had received her diagnosis her words failed her. She couldn’t think of anything new to say to God that was any better than The Lord’s Prayer. And so we held hands and prayed The Lord’s Prayer together. When we finished she was at peace, confident that all that we had prayed would be - just as it should be. Just as Jesus had promised it would be.

In times when we are struggling, when the world seems to be changing faster than we can keep up with, when we are unsure of the future and afraid of what might be, Jesus gave us a prayer of hope, comfort, and promise; a prayer that helps us envision how it should be, a prayer of how it can be when we do our part, a prayer of how it will be. In those moments when words fail, I encourage you to turn to God and pray the prayer Jesus taught us to pray saying...(*The Lord's Prayer Video*)