

Year C-Pentecost7-proper11-2019-The Disciples Prayer

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Luke 9:51-62

The Disciples Prayer

Luke keeps his story embodied, grounded in realism and resistant to drifting off into space. "He (Jesus) was praying in a certain place." It's not any place, non-specific and abstract, no, it is a certain place. We find ourselves drawn into the story because it could be our place and we could be the one overhearing Jesus as he prays.

"After he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, 'Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.'" It would be interesting to compare Jesus' prayer with John the Baptist's. I suspect they would be quite different. John the Baptist's prayer would be grounded in the Old Testament and filled with images of God's coming wrath as John saw it. But Jesus inaugurates a new era, a deeper revelation of God's character and a new kind of prayer.

A disciple wants to be taught how to pray in Jesus' way. Without a spare word Jesus responds, "When you pray, say:" and he goes into his teaching. The prayer he teaches them is for his disciples. It's not the prayer the disciple overheard. We don't know what Jesus prayed about when he was in private conversation with his Abba. Being so close to Jerusalem and the end I suspect it was about his coming crucifixion and resurrection. But the prayer for his disciples was different and had a different purpose. He wants to give the disciples a model to imitate as they work their own relationship with God. He wants to give them an example of the kind of prayer God hopes will come from our lips.

Always the disciples' prayer is a carrier of profound meaning. It begs us to look at ourselves. To recite it automatically misses much of what Jesus wants to teach us.

In Luke the teaching prayer has only five phrases, surprising us with its' shortness. Luke's version leaves off "your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" and "deliver us from evil."

It begins, "Father, hallowed be your name." I think that means when you pray recognize the holiness of God. When we recognize that God is God, it draws us out of our entrapment to ourselves and each other. Disciples, allow your eyes to be drawn toward your creator. Pull yourselves away from the allure of the immediate, the shiny and the less important.

We humans need someone greater than ourselves, someone bigger than us, more powerful, and outside the competitive force field of our world. If we do not sanctify God's name we will

deify someone else's, putting ourselves in their power. Or we may aggrandize our own name, putting ourselves above others and out of touch with our neighbor and reality, making us subject to whims and dangerous desires. We have to have someone above us to insure order between us but who we deify is incredible important. When this One whose name we honor is absolutely for us all, loves us all unconditionally, forgives us even when we are violent toward each other and toward his Son, we have a new model. He is so far above us and so close to us at the same time that he understands and forgives simultaneously. When we honor his name we allow him access to our lives, we give him permission to change us, and we bring him into our troubles and joys.

Just as we honor God's name, we also pray that God's kingdom will come. Not our kingdom with its armies, secret police, unfair hierarchies, and hidden patterns of preference and exclusion but his kingdom where all are included and loved. God's kingdom is that place where all have their place and there is no need to rise above our neighbor to assure our being—our own "I-am-ness". Our being has all already been given as a gift by God in whose kingdom we now reside in advance of its coming in fullness.

We pray "Your kingdom come" as "a gaze adjustment" designed to keep us focused on our Father. Our hope is in God's coming kingdom where justice prevails, revenge dissolves, and hate is absorbed in forgiving love. Some say God's coming kingdom is coming to earth transforming our world. Others see it coming but in some new form we can't imagine. Whichever happens, his coming kingdom keeps me looking up, keeps me hopeful no matter what I hear on the evening news and helps me decide how I live my life. God's coming kingdom teaches me what to value most.

"Give us each day our daily bread." Is this a prayer acknowledging dependence and encouraging trust in God? I notice the words "each day." It reminds me of the story of God's manna in the wilderness. Each day they received enough food for that day and any more than that spoiled before they could use it. Is there a danger of saving up too much, becoming falsely self-sufficient and having the excess turn to that which spoils? Would we read it differently if we were living on the edge? Would we share what we have more readily if daily we prayed, "Give us each day our daily bread"? Does it suggest that joy is found in relying more on God's provision and less on our own? Jesus' prayer asks us to examine ourselves even as we pray it.

The fourth petition has two parts that are related. "Forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us." How many of us have forgiven everyone indebted to us? I think this second phrase is aspirational. It seems that to be forgiven you have to forgive. Maybe you don't have to forgive as far as God goes but you won't feel forgiven unless you forgive. If we are holding on to anger and bitterness, our anger and bitterness acts as a barrier to our sense of forgiveness and freedom. So where are we blocked? With whom do we hold un-forgiveness?

Search it out and remember, “Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you.” That’s Jesus’ promise to his disciples.

We come to the fifth and final petition in Luke’s version of what I am calling “the Disciple’ Prayer”. “Do not bring us to the time of trial.” Could this time of trial be when we are tempted to point the finger at someone else rather than take responsibility for our own actions? Could this be the test we feel when our baser impulses want to control us and perhaps even move us toward violence? We all experience those times and they are a trial to us. A hurtful word wants to come out of our lips; an action rooted in revenge wants to control us and we are tempted to forget we are “in Christ” as it says in Colossians.

I find this section on prayer ends strangely? “If your child asks for a fish, will you give him a snake instead? If a child asks for an egg, will you give him a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”

“Give the Holy Spirit!” What! Where did this sudden mention of the Holy Spirit come from? It drops out of nowhere! Jesus appears to be saying that what the heavenly Father most wants to give us is the Holy Spirit. You don’t suppose that’s what all our asking, seeking, knocking and searching have been about? We have been searching for the Holy Spirit and didn’t know it, the Holy Spirit, that part of God that wants to live in us. Could it be that we won’t feel complete until we find ourselves nestled in the same love that Jesus and God have for each other? I think this is Jesus’ intent in teaching us to pray. He is giving us a way to move toward God even as God moves toward us. Amen.