

Matthew 6:9-13

⁹“Pray then in this way: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.¹⁰Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.¹¹Give us this day our daily bread. ¹²And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. ¹³And do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one.

As we continue our Summer Sermon Series: Disciples Together: The Weird and Wonderful Practices of Church, we come to a practice that people are not often hesitant or ashamed to ask others to do, even on their behalf, even over social media, one that only moments ago we, as a church, did together, and that's pray. Many of us will keep those requests on our hearts and minds and will continue to pray them throughout the week. Praying is something we do as a community as well as individually.

In our text today, Jesus is teaching the disciples how to pray. Now the notion of the disciples not knowing how to pray may strike you as odd, but as with everything in life, we don't know how to do something until we're taught. Some of us were taught at a very early age how to pray. And chances are it was the same prayer over and over each night. We were learning how to pray, learning the rhythm of prayer, learning how to connect with God and communicate with God. As Bonhoeffer put it, “Prayer does not mean simply to pour out one's heart. It means rather to find the way to God and to speak with

God.” It seems simple, it is simple. Yet praying can be a very intimidating time.

I’ve shared with you before that I didn’t grow up going to church, I began going when I was in high school and I remember several things being intimidating. Flipping through my bible not knowing where the scripture for the day was located was intimidating. Not knowing how much communion bread to take was intimidating. And when the pastor asked for someone to pray and everyone looked around hoping they wouldn’t be called on, the mere possibility was intimidating. Just like the disciples, it wasn’t something I had ever been taught.

The more I learned about prayer, the more I realized there were no set rules. People prayed in large groups, small groups and all by themselves. Prayers were said out loud, in silence, and even written in journals. Some people kneel, others stand. Some close their eyes, others open them. Some bow their heads down, others raise their heads up. Some fold their hands together, others lift their hands to the sky. Prayers were said before meals and trips, during services and weddings, before tests and competitions as well as after. Some people prayed solely for others, others solely for themselves. Some said they were talking with God, others said they were listening for God. Indeed this is a weird and wonderful practice.

On your bulletin cover this morning, you’ll notice a familiar photo of prayer. The picture entitled “Grace” was taken in 1918 by Eric Enstrom. Enstrom was a photographer in Minnesota who **wanted to**

take a picture that would show people that even though they had to do without many things because of the war they still had much to be thankful for. As it happened a peddler trying to sell food scrapers knocked on his door. He looked at the gentleman, who he thought was saintly with no hard lines on his face and asked him if he would pose for a picture. On a small table, Enstrom placed a family book, some spectacles, a bowl of gruel, a loaf of bread, and a knife on the table. Then he had the peddler, Charles Wilden, pose in an manner of prayer... praying with folded hands to his brow before partaking of a meager meal. To bow his head in prayer seemed to be characteristic of the elderly visitor, Enstrom recalled, for he struck the pose very easily and naturally. As soon as the negative was developed, Enstrom was sure he had something special... a picture that seemed to say, "This man doesn't have much of earthly goods, but he has more than most people because he has a thankful heart."

I find that fascinating. Both that this photo is thought out in such detail, even in 1918, and that this picture of someone praying has given hope and perspective to so many.

Prayers seen today in the media represent a different story. We see athletes kneel in the endzone, never knowing exactly if their prayers are those solely for themselves or if they're simply praising God's beauty in everything they do. And movies love playing off the insecurity of praying in public. There are dozens of hilariously funny movie clips about people praying in public. Greg, from the movie *Meet the Parents*, is meeting his girlfriend's parents for the first time

when he's asked to give grace before the meal. He doesn't know what to say and ends up quoting the song Day by Day, these three things I pray...before quickly concluding the Amen. And we all laugh at clips like that because we know that feeling of fear and embarrassment. There's truth to it. We're all afraid of what others might hear in our prayers.

I'm convinced that we are our most honest selves when we're praying. There is no room for bologna when you're talking with God. God knows you. God knows your heart. So when you are in prayer, it's a true reflection of who you really are. And that vulnerability can be scary. We might not be ready for others to know our true selves or hear our thought process or be able to figure out how our relationship with God is doing based on our conversation. And yes, you'll find your prayer life is directly affected and influenced by what is going on around you as well as your relationship with God. If you are upset with God, your prayers will be reflective of that. If you are scared of God, your prayers will be reflective. If you are at peace with God, happy with God, or feel distant from God, it's all reflected in your prayers. Prayers are personal. Not just asking someone to pray for you, but allowing others to hear your prayers. It's like we're eavesdropping on your phone call. A weird and wonderful thing, prayers are.

It was the experience of watching and listening to others as they prayed, that I learned how to pray. Here, in our text, Jesus is teaching the disciples how to pray by praying himself. As Jesus is praying, the

disciples are watching, they're listening, they're learning. They hear Jesus engaging in the everyday. And they're learning that wherever they are, whatever they're going through, God will meet them and be with them as they talk, as they listen, as they sing, whatever form of prayer they take.

So why do we pray? Why is prayer something we, as Disciples, do together? It's how we stay in relationship with God. It's how we get to know God and how God gets to know us. Just like any other relationship, there has to be communication. Prayer is our communication. The more we pray, the closer we are to God. The more we pray as a community, the closer we are as a community. There will be rough patches, yes, just as there are in any relationship. But communication is how we get to know each other better. And as disciples it's one way we care for each other and show our love for each other.

One of the best ways for us to learn things, is by doing them ourselves. After Jesus taught the disciples how to pray, they practiced. They worked on praying, on their relationship with God. Acts 1:14, tells us that after Jesus left, all these, the disciples, were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as Jesus' brothers.

Prayer is a great spiritual practice. It's one way we grow spiritually. It brings us closer to God, to others, and it helps us know ourselves better. I can always tell how I truly feel about something when I pray

about it. It might be that I'm still unsure or uncomfortable with whatever it may be, but I can see that in my prayers, in the words I use and the way I approach the subject where my heart is. And I can tell when my focus is all on myself, and not on others. Prayer is a great spiritual practice.

There are many different styles of prayer, and throughout your life you may find different formats helps you better than others. I pray you have confidence to open yourself up to try to styles. And that whatever you are doing, wherever you are in your relationship, your prayers lead you to the table to be in full communication with God, where you always have a place where you are always loved. Let us sing a prayer that leads us there this morning. Number 305 , Lord, Listen to the your children praying.