

## **Sermon for Zion, October 21, 2018**

**Hymns:** 420 – Praise, I Will Praise You Lord; 699 – All The Way My Saviour Leads Me; 35 – Listen to my prayer, Lord; 300 – Glorify Your Name

**Scripture:** 1 Chronicles 29:10-13; Luke 11:1-4 (NLT)

**Sermon Title:** “Why and How Should I Pray?” – **A 30 Day Covenant of Prayer**

### ***1 Chronicles 29:10-13 (NIV)***

*David praised the Lord in the presence of the whole assembly, saying,  
“Praise be to you, Lord, the God of our father Israel, from everlasting to everlasting. Yours, Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendor, for everything in heaven and earth is yours. Yours, Lord, is the kingdom; you are exalted as head over all. Wealth and honour come from you; you are the ruler of all things. In your hands are strength and power to exalt and give strength to all. Now, our God, we give you thanks, and praise your glorious name.”*

### ***Luke 11:1-4 (NLT)***

*Once Jesus was in a certain place praying. As he finished, one of his disciples came to him and said, “Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples.”*

*Jesus said, “This is how you should pray:*

*“Father, may your name be kept holy. May your Kingdom come soon.*

*Give us each day the food we need, and forgive us our sins,*

*as we forgive those who sin against us.*

*And don’t let us yield to temptation.”*

“Lord, teach us to pray.” It’s a strange request, when you think about it. After all, you’d think the disciples would know how to pray – good Jews all, they would have been praying from their earliest age; they would have had daily family prayers around the table, they would have had weekly prayers in Synagogue, they would have heard the majestic prayers in pilgrimages to Jerusalem, Temple prayers like the one we read from Chronicles. You’d think, if anyone would know how to pray, it would be the disciples.

Stranger still, they tell Jesus that John the Baptist taught his own disciples to pray. We don’t have any remaining examples of just what John taught them, but the implication is that John taught his disciples to pray in a way different than they had been. How, I wonder? What did he teach them? I guess we’ll never know.

But we do know what Jesus taught his disciples about prayer. We heard Luke’s outline; listen now to Matthew’s more extensive account of Jesus’ teaching regarding prayer (Matthew 6:5-15 NIV). Jesus said:

*When you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.*

So first of all, Jesus says, prayer isn't about putting on a show. Prayer isn't for showing other people how holy you are, and it isn't for showing God how long you can pray. Prayer is between you and God – prayer is like a conversation with a loving parent. It isn't about finding the right magic formula, or incantation, or combination of words. Prayer is about talking to God – to God, who knows you, who loves you, who wants nothing more than to be in relationship with you, God's child. Let me explain.

In the twelve years I've been here in PEI, I've made it a point to phone my mother in Ontario every day, often when on my way to work – calling hands-free, of course! We would chat for ten minutes or so, many times covering much the same ground – how the kids are doing, the weather, plans for the day. We would end the phone call saying, "I love you." If I would miss a day for some reason, my mother would be quite put out, and give me attitude the next time I called: "Oh, it's my son, who forgot all about his poor sick mother yesterday, even though just a simple phone call would have made all the difference in the world." If I missed two days, then she would make the effort to call me, quite distraught. So I made sure to try to call, every day, wherever in the world I happened to be.

Well, a year ago, my mother died. The phone calls, of course, stopped. And I realised something for the very first time: the phone calls weren't just for her. They were for me, too. I always assumed that in phoning my mother, it was for her benefit. When the phone calls stopped, I felt an emptiness, a lack. For weeks, I would still automatically press the "dial" button on the steering wheel, ready to make the call, only to realise there would be no one on the other end. It was in those moments that I felt her passing most acutely. Because it turns out, the calls weren't only to remind my mother she had a son. They reminded me I had a mother. Even though she was 1500 km away, the phone calls kept us close. And I needed that closeness more than I realised.

Here's the thing about prayer: prayer isn't so much about reminding God that we are here. Prayer is much more about reminding us that God is here. That God is with

us. That God is close. It is about maintaining that relationship, that intimacy – that love.

I think that's what the disciples began to understand when they overheard Jesus praying. They heard a sense of intimacy. They heard love. They didn't hear Jesus going on and on with fancy phrases and words, trying to impress others, or building a false front of piety to try to impress God. They heard someone praying, from the heart, a prayer of intimacy, a prayer of love. *"Teach us to pray like that,"* they asked Jesus. And so he did:

*This, then, is how you should pray:*

*"Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.  
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."*

*"Our Father in Heaven."* Remember, when you pray, that you are not praying to some distant, angry, unknown God; you are not praying to an unreasonable, uncaring or preoccupied earthly father; you are praying to your heavenly Father, a Father who made you, who knows you, who provides for you, who loves you. It is a prayer of intimacy. A prayer of relationship. A prayer of love. You don't have to be afraid to pray. You don't have to be good enough to pray. You don't have to find a magic combination of words. You are praying to someone who loves you, to someone you love. Remember: we are the ones initiating the prayer, but it was God who initiated the relationship. It is God who has reached out to us. Prayer is us reaching back.

*"Hallowed be your name."* God is to us a loving Father, a caring parent, but at the same time, God is God, creator of the universe, the God to whom King David prayed, *"Yours, Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendor, for everything in heaven and earth is yours."* When we pray, *"Hallowed by your name,"* we are saying, "May I live my life in the knowledge of who You are, may I live my life in such a way that brings glory to You."

When I was young, and about to engage in some public activity, my father would say to me, *"Son, don't bring shame on the Rollwage name."* I passed this saying onto my own children. One summer, when I was working in a factory owned by a friend of my father, and doing a poor job, my boss said to me, "How could your father, such a great man, have a son as incompetent as you?" I was devastated, and resolved to try harder, not for my own sake, but to bring credit to my father.

As we live our lives day to day, if we do so in the consciousness of who God is – the God we call our God – surely we will try to live in such a way as to not bring shame on God’s name, but to live up to the high title of “Christian.” Many of us think, and correctly so, that “*Hallowed be your name*” means “not taking the Lord’s name in vain.” And that’s true; but surely it also means living in such a way that our words *and* our actions reflect respect for the name, for the person, of our God.

“*Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.*” Our greatest hope – our greatest desire – is that our world will finally know justice, will finally know peace, when words such as “abuse,” “hatred,” “oppression,” “murder,” “genocide,” will be unknown; a world where, as the Prophet Micah sang (Micah 4):

*They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore. Everyone will sit under their own vine and under their own fig tree, and no one will make them afraid, for the Lord Almighty has spoken.*

That is the day for which we pray, and the principles by which we, as the children of God, seek to live in the here and now. That is what we pray. That is how we live, “*on earth as it is in heaven.*”

“*Give us today our daily bread.*” Or, “May we have what we need to make it through this day.” Food, water, companionship, healing, purpose, ability, consolation, forgiveness, strength; may we have what we need to make it through this day, and may we realise that everything we have comes from you, our Heavenly Father. And so may we live in gratitude for the sustenance God provides, content with and grateful for the needs of the day.

“*And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.*” When we hear “debt,” we think money. When Jesus says “debt,” he’s thinking beyond finances. He’s thinking of those things we do which harm or demean others or ourselves; things which bring hurt to the loving heart of God. Other translations say “trespasses.” Newer translations say, “sins.” Offenses. Wrongs. God, in incalculable mercy and grace, has enabled us to be forgiven, through the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Christ. We can have a fresh start. We can put our past sins, offenses, wrongs behind us. The slate between us and God can be and is wiped clean, as we come to God in repentance, in sorrow for our sins, in determination to live as the children of God.

But our forgiveness is incomplete if we fail to extend forgiveness to others. Jesus is serious about this; Matthew concludes the Lord’s Prayer with these words of Jesus:

*“For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.”* Forgiving others is not a prerequisite for our own forgiveness; but the refusal to forgive others prevents us from experiencing the benefit and freedom of our own forgiveness. How can our hearts be filled with God’s love, if they are filled with hatred or resentment of another? How can we experience the release of forgiveness, if we refuse to let go of the grudges and resentments we harbour against others? Refusing to forgive, says Jesus, is refusing to be forgiven. It is preventing forgiveness. *“Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.”*

*“And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.”* Don’t understand this as asking God not to lead you into a trap – the Scriptures make clear, repeatedly, that God is not the one who tempts - but instead understand it as a sincere request to not find ourselves in situations which lead us into sin or despair. I find St. Paul’s paraphrase of this very helpful; he put it like this (1 Corinthians 10:13): *The temptations in your life are no different from what others experience. And God is faithful. He will not allow the temptation to be more than you can stand. When you are tempted, he will show you a way out so that you can endure.* When my path – my actions, my decisions – are leading me into situations where I am in danger of succumbing to sin or despair, help me, O Lord, to change my path – help me to overcome.

In short, the Lord’s Prayer reminds us of who God is, and who we are in relation to God; it reminds us of our hope that God will set things right, and that we can live in a way that reflects God’s justice and goodness in the here and now; that our most basic needs are met by God; that we are offered forgiveness, and challenged to forgive; and that no matter the situation in which we find ourselves, God will help us to overcome.

The disciples embraced the Lord’s Prayer, so much so that the earliest document outlining Christian practice, “The Didache,” or “Teaching of the Apostles,” written during New Testament times, tells us to pray it three times a day – morning, noon and night – following ancient Jewish prayer custom.

What we want to avoid, though, is mere thoughtless repetition, against which Jesus explicitly warns in his introduction to the prayer. I suggest instead using the Lord’s Prayer as a framework, for our own prayers. I think we can incorporate the Lord’s Prayer meaningfully in our own lives by using each line (or “petition”) of the prayer as a guide. Like this:

**Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name**

*Begin by thanking God for the gift of a new day.*

*Think of how you will live your life today as a child of God.*

*How will I hallow God's name today?*

**Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.**

*Say a prayer for the needs of the world.*

*Ask God to help you act in ways that would be in accordance with God's will.*

**Give us today our daily bread.**

*Thank God for the most basic of needs which will be met today.*

*Pray that God will help meet those deep needs you might have which are unfulfilled.*

*Pray for the basic needs of others – and how God can help you to help meet them.*

**Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.**

*Think of those things in your life which require forgiveness. Ask God's forgiveness, and determine to change your behaviour.*

*Think of people from whom you need to seek forgiveness.*

*Think of people against whom you have resentment or carry a grudge. Pray that God will help you forgive them.*

**Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil.**

*Pray that God will help you avoid situations where you tend to succumb to sin. Ask for strength to overcome.*

**For the kingdom the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever.**

*A good time to remind yourself that God, not you, is in charge! Place yourself in God's care.*

You can use this framework of prayer in the morning as you approach the day, and at night, as you reflect upon the day. Perhaps repeating the Lord's Prayer in the middle of the day will prove a helpful reminder of this larger, more reflective form.

I'm going to commit to praying this expanded form of The Lord's Prayer, morning and evening, for the next thirty days. And I challenge you to do the same! We've included in the bulletin a sheet with both the morning and evening forms of this prayer. It will be on our website, too, if you need more copies, or if you want to download it to your tablet or phone. Will you join me in this **"30 Day Covenant of Prayer?"** I am confident that as we do, Jesus, just as he taught the disciples, will teach us to pray as well. And in so doing, will bring us closer to the heart of God. Amen.