

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost
Proper 12
Year C

Genesis 18:20-32
Psalm 138
Colossians 2:6-19
Luke 11:1-13

“Lord, teach us to pray.” This seems such a simple request. But, like most passages in the gospels, there is much to be learned here.

Prayer was fundamental in Jesus’ relationship with the Father. Throughout the gospels, and especially in Luke, we read about Jesus trying to get away to a quiet place to pray. Often, this was in the middle of the night. And here, at the beginning of our reading today, Jesus is praying.

In several places, including in this verse, we read of John or the Pharisees teaching their disciples to pray. This seems to be a common activity for spiritual leaders - teach their disciples to pray. Thus, Jesus’ disciples were no different. They wanted Jesus to teach them. In the verses that follow, Jesus uses three different methods of teaching. Anyone who has studied pedagogy, how to teach, knows students have different ways of learning so using different techniques is important.

Jesus begins with a sample prayer. This, along with Psalm 23, are two of the most well-known passages in all of scripture. The prayer Jesus teaches His disciples, the Lord’s Prayer, appears in both Luke’s Gospel and Matthew’s Gospel. However, there is a lot of differences between these two versions of this prayer. Obviously, the prayer was used in worship in many Christian communities as it still is today. These various traditions differed slightly during the years between when Jesus taught it to the disciples and when the evangelists wrote their gospels. Luke’s version is shorter.

Luke begins with a simple statement - “Father”. Throughout the history of the Jewish people, no one spoke of God in such a familiar way. They would not even say the divine name, so to speak in this manner was unheard of. However, Jesus spoke of His relationship with God the Father frequently and wanted His disciples to have this same familial relationship with God. Since the disciples knew to whom Jesus was referring, Luke did not feel the need to follow Matthew’s example and locate God in heaven. Instead, Luke goes directly to the next statement, “hallowed be your name,” a reminder that God is beyond us, holy, to be worshipped.

There are many thoughts about the next phrase, “Give us each day our daily bread.” One of the first thoughts takes us back to the Exodus. God supplied manna each day for the Israelites. If they tried to gather extra or hoard it, it would rot. They had to collect it each day. Another idea is that this shows our dependency on God. God will provide our necessities if we only ask. We need only to take it one day at a time. If we trust God, we know God will be there to supply us our needs tomorrow as well. Our prayer is to be daily to maintain our relationship with God.

We are a forgiven people. Along with everyone else in the world, we are sinners. Thus, we need to continually ask God to forgive us our sins. Again, we show our trust in God, knowing that we can return time after time to seek God's forgiveness. However, there is the flip side of the coin - "for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us." If we cannot forgive others, how can we expect God to forgive us? Our ability to forgive shows that we stand in the stream of God's forgiveness. If we are too hard-hearted to forgive and cannot forgive, we forget what God has done for us.

The final phrase of this version of the prayer is one of the most difficult to understand. While some may believe it is asking for God to not put us on trial, and others say it is asking God to not bring us into temptation, I don't believe God does either of those things. I believe this is an acknowledgement that we are weak and need God to take care of us. Another way of looking at this is to ask God to save us from trials and tribulations.

Jesus concludes this time of education for His disciples by giving them a pair of sayings about prayer. The parable about the neighbor asking for bread in the middle of the night gives us the assurance that God will answer our prayers. While not as blatant as the next section, this parable ends with the man supplying his neighbor's request. Perseverance does pay off. The final section is more explicit. If you ask, God will give you what you need. If you search, God will direct you in your quest. If you knock, God will open doors for you.

In all of this lesson, we see God as caring for us. If we know how to give good gifts to our children, how much more will God give us what we ask for? In our relationship with God, we are to remember that God wants the best for us. As we pray, our efforts need to be focused on praising God for all we have, knowing that God will supply our needs - if we but ask.