

**Sermon 7-25-2010**  
**Luke 11:1-13**

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In our household,

We pray before eating dinner together.

Katherine participates in our prayer,

In the best way she knows how as a two-year-old.

It seems like Katherine doesn't quite understand the purpose of prayer.

We begin by thanking God for our food and for other things,

And then Katherine chimes in –

She begins listing things she can think of.

If we forgot to mention the cats or the fish,

Katherine will usually mention them,

And then she goes on with her little list,

And we are never sure from day to day what will be on the list.

Sometimes, she seems to think the prayer is a naming game -

we can see her looking around the room for things to name,

And sometimes the prayer becomes a list of vary random objects –

Cups,

Plates,

Table,

Window,

Bird feeder,

Pictures,

Crayons,

Choo-choo train,

Bugs.

I sometimes try to keep us focused by inserting in,

“yes, God, Thank you for all these things.”

Finally, at a moment when it seems like it's time,

One of us –

Sometimes Katherine –

Says “Amen.”

I've been told that this is an entirely age-appropriate way for Katherine to be praying right now,

All fine and good.

But sometimes,

I can't help but wonder if we're teaching her how to pray  
RIGHT.

Shoot – half the time I feel like *I* don't have a hang of this whole "praying" thing,

And I wonder if I have any business trying to teach my child –

Let alone my parishioners -

How to pray.

Some of you have been praying since before I was born

And could probably teach ME a thing or two about it!

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The question of "How do we pray"

Is just as hot a subject now as it was in Jesus' day.

Volumes have been written -

More books and articles and little pamphlets than you can count

About how to pray.

Some of these things are very helpful,

Some, not so much.

There are many, many different ways to pray,

Numerous traditions of prayer that have been passed down through the generations.

We hear about them a lot –

Lectio Divina,

Contemplative Prayer,

Centering Prayer,

Meditation,

Praying the Psalms,

The Daily Offices,

Intercessory Prayer,

Labrynth Walks,

The Rosary ....

And the list goes on and on and on.

These different ways of praying all have value.

It IS good and worthwhile to study and explore different ways of praying.

I'm glad we are part of a rich and varied tradition

that offers so many deep and wise ways of praying.

Not only do different kinds of prayer work for different people,

But even at different points in our own lives,

Depending on what's going on in our hearts and minds,

We pray differently.

Sometimes, when we get into spiritual ruts,

And our prayers start to feel dry and empty,  
Exploring and learning a new way to pray  
can breathe new, much-needed life into our prayers  
And deepen our relationship with God.

But the long list of different kinds of prayer,  
The volumes of supposedly helpful advice about it,  
can be overwhelming and confusing.

There is a real danger in emphasizing all these methods and  
techniques in prayer.

The danger is that we can easily convince ourselves  
that there is a RIGHT way and a WRONG way to pray

That certain kinds of prayer are more "spiritual" than others,

We also get the false idea that if we are struggling with prayer

Having a hard time praying

Then it is because we are doing something wrong

Or not using the right technique.

Nothing could be farther from the truth.

First of all,

let me assure you

that if you are having a hard time praying

You are NOT alone.

You might be surprised by how many other people in this room are in the same place.

It's important to remember that there is **no wrong way** to pray.

It's silly of me to worry about whether my daughter is learning how to pray right –

Perhaps she is totally unclear on who God is

And what God does,

And why we want to talk to God.

So what – that will all become clearer in due time.

The important thing is that she's praying at all.

Likewise, it's silly of me to worry about whether *I* am praying right.

I have days –

I call them “rough faith days” –

When, like my two-year-old-daughter,

I am unclear on who God is

Or what God does,

Or why I might want to talk to God.

Well, for me, too, that will become clearer in due time,

On another day when faith is not so hard.

The important thing is that I am praying at all.

There is no wrong way to pray.

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So what can we learn from Jesus' instructions to his disciples on prayer?

All kinds of things –

Believe me,

Volumes and Volumes have been written about that, too,

And I could stand up here all day and talk about it.

But don't worry,

I'm not going to do that.

Jesus was speaking to people who were struggling and confused about how to pray,

Perhaps a little overwhelmed by all the advice out there,

People who were unsure about whether their prayers were being heard.

People like you and me.

And there are a couple of nuggets of wisdom that I want to highlight from Jesus' teaching today.

One is – keep it simple.

When in doubt,

When it all feels just too overwhelming and confusing,

Well, my friends, keep it simple.

The prayer that Jesus taught his disciples is not elaborate,

It does not involve esoteric methods

Or obscure spiritual mumbo-jumbo.

Nor is it long and complicated.

It is plain, simple, direct and earnest.

Anne LaMott,

One of my favorite Christian writers,

Writes that she really only has two prayers:

“Thank You Thank You Thank You”

And “Help Help Help.”

Plain, simple, direct and earnest.

Prayer is not about trying to impress God with elaborate methods and techniques.

It is about being who you are

In relationship with the God who created you and loves you.

The other thing is,

Pray about what is actually going on in your life,

what's in your heart and mind.

Prayer is not something that is dis-connected from the nitty-gritty of our regular, day-in, day-out lives.

Quite the opposite.

Jesus teaches his disciples to pray about what is going on in their day-to-day lives

What is right at the forefront of their minds,

Their most immediate, practical concerns –

Sustenance for living,

Or bread to eat from day-to-day,

Forgiveness of sins and peace in relationships,

And not to be brought to the time of trial –

Which is a more accurate translation from the Greek than “temptation”

And was a very real concern for the early Christian community,

Who lived under the constant threat of arrest, trial, torture and execution by the Roman Empire.

This was a prayer that spoke to the daily, practical lives of the early Christian community,

Not some esoteric, other-worldly mumbo-jumbo.

In the prayer that Jesus taught,

We see that our day-to-day lives and concerns  
are indeed the stuff of spiritual life.

Keep it simple,

And pray about what is really going on in your lives.

Keep it honest,

Keep it real.

You have nothing to hide from God,

And there is nothing that is too mundane,

Too unimportant or silly to bring to God in prayer.

.....  
So what about the times it feels like God doesn't hear?

When we find ourselves praying and praying

But unclear about who is listening,

Or what the point of praying might be.

What about those times?

Well, Jesus is crystal clear on this matter.

Pray anyways.

Keep praying.

Don't give up on it.

When it feels like all you are getting is silence,

Like no-one is listening or caring,

Like God is simply not getting up from his nap and coming to your aid,

Pray anyways.

Be persistent in prayer.

God does hear.

God does love and care for us.

God does act,

And God does give us what we need.

My friends,

We have nothing to fear or worry about when it comes to prayer.

There is no wrong way to pray,

And when we don't know how to pray,

Or even where to start,

Just keep it simple ... Keep it real ...

And keep at it.