

Prayer (filling in for Kendra)
[written in oral form]

Luke 11:1-13
Proper 12, Year C

July 28, 2019
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One should never apologize before giving a presentation, so I won't.
However, Kendra is sick and unable to do the sermon today, and I had one and a half days to prepare.
So, no apologies for this.... *light/ superficial overview on prayer.*

Besides, prayer frequency increases when a person is under pressure.
I practiced a lot while writing this.

Moreover, I think procrastinators pray more than others.
And, those who are perpetually tardy... pray a lot, too.
I'll give an example in a few moments.

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Actually, a light overview on prayer may be appropriate since most people feel like they are novices at praying.

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There are many different types of prayers. Scholars, would label them confessional, intercessory, adoration, thanksgiving and so on.

YET.... in reality, we really don't abide by those groupings. We don't pause, and think, "Ummm, I think I'll do a confessional prayer, right now."
The actual, applied categories are varied and different.

Here are some examples of the different types:

There is the "You Who" prayer.

It sounds like this: "YOU who" created the earth....." "You who" forgives us all our sins,....."
"You who"... parted the water for the Hebrews.... ... and so on.

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Another is the *Star Wars* prayer....where God seems like the "force."

It goes like this: "O Holy One"... we worship you.

"O holy one.... we ask that you be with us.

"O Holy One"....be merciful and patient.

You get the point.

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Then there is the Southern Evangelical "Jesus Just" prayer style. God is never mentioned in this type, and the name of Jesus is stretched out for emphasis.

"JEEEEZZUS..... we "just" come to you this day.

We "Just" pray to you oh, Jeeeezzus, to forgive us of our sins.... Just this time, just now,.... Just in case...

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I don't mean to be disrespectful of anyone who uses these styles; I'm simply trying to reveal that our styles are mixed and varied.

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Many of us have used the “911 Prayer” type, especially when we are in trouble or running late. This type is based on the assumption that God is either a little deaf or... likes to hear us beg.

The 911 prayer sounds like this: Oh God, Oh God, Oh God,... make that light green, and keep it Green; keep it green... please, please, please. Or,.... Oh Lord, God, Jesus, God... I beg, I plea, I ask, I’ll do anything, ... just don’t let those flashing red lights in my rear-view mirror be for me. I’ll never, ever,rarely ever, ...almost never speed again....

I think we all are familiar with that type of prayer.

Nevertheless, we generally mix styles in a single prayer.

I’ve heard some prayers of grace before a meal that not only give thanks for the food, but also ask for blessings and strength, and include grandma, too, as if it is the only time one prays.

The point is that it is hard to dissect prayers into select groupings,.... because prayer is a form of communication, but also prayer reflects who we are....what we think and feel, and ...where we are as a person.

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Most of us accept that prayer is an important method of communication with God; however, it is interesting **how** we learned to pray and the level of importance we put on prayer.

For example:

*A person who has the opportunity to shoot 15 pucks into a net for a million dollars, will practice for weeks,..... just to get some money. Yet, the value placed on prayer usually ranks way down on our list.*

Most of us learned to pray as child ....watching adults,.... and.. how often do we adults model prayer for our children?

Sure, we pick help some techniques here and there, from the Bible and from church.

Subsequently, we mostly use what simple tools we have, and.... we, pretty much, place the burden of communication on God.

We say words, assume that God knows English and we hope our message gets through.

This attitude, reminds me of the time I was watching a store clerk trying to communicate with a recent immigrant, who didn’t know English. There were some charades and hand gestures, with shrugged shoulders, and then the volume approach was used, ... which assumes that if English is spoken loud enough it will be understood. [loudly] “You NEED to give me [ ] 50 more cents.”

Vocal Intensity may not help.

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Language is a tool, and words are good for packaging ideas and thoughts, and even some feelings. But, as email clearly demonstrates, words are not enough.

Communication has many levels and nuances.

Feelings are better presented through body motion and intonation.

Moreover, I believe, Prayer is much more than words/ much more than communicating with a language.

Too often, our prayers are **one way thoughts** – packaged as words –request and supplications – to God. I think we greatly limit prayers when we confine them to thoughts and cognitive messages.

Community / corporate prayer is generally done with words, and that makes sense. Even so, prayer can be a bit like music--we feel it, we join in and it is emotional and spiritual.

I often think of prayer as "rays of love" / love energy that connects with the source of love, and then radiates out to others.

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Prayer is messaging to God, and much, much more.

And, learning to pray beyond soliloquy, can be compared to learning to swim. It is in a very different world.

Learning to swim requires we control what we take for granted as essential – **breathing**. Swimming often requires us to completely refrain from this life sustaining process. Plus, while in the water we have to develop a new way for motion, a completely new way.

I think praying is engaging in another domain – the Spiritual domain.

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In essence, we need to remind ourselves that we are connecting / communing with God.

And, God is close, yet way beyond our realm of being and understanding.

Nevertheless, our prayers can be whatever.... because any prayer is reaching out to God, and that is good.

Prayer is shifting into a different realm / the spiritual realm. And, that is just the beginning.

Henri Nouwen describes the process as being similar to opening up a clenched fist.

Listen to his words:

“Praying is no easy matter. It demands a relationship in which you allow someone other than yourself to enter into the very centre of your person, to see there what you would rather leave in darkness, and to touch there what you would rather leave untouched. Why would you really want to do that?”

[With Open Hands; Henri Nouwen]

He continues by calling the **resistance** to praying to be like fighting to open a tightly clenched fist that is holding your last coin.

Praying is overcoming that fear / need for self preservation... and trusting God, ... and that isn't easy.....

Yet, that is what we long for.

Opening up is what our soul is crying for.... as it reaches out to God.

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Today's text gives us some helpful directions.

Luke's version of the Lord's Prayer is more succinct than Matthew's, which is the one we recite.

The Prayer is a template. We can say it verbatim or use our own words.

Here it is in different words and in the first person:

My loving parent who is way beyond me, yet so holy as to be lovingly present here with me.

I surrender my will; I open my fist/ my soul to you. Your will be done.... everywhere, all the time.... I have no needs but to be with you, really. You provide for me.
I already know that I will be fine.
Moreover, your grace to me inspires and enables me to be gracious to others.
I trust your guidance / your wisdom / your way.

As I seek to follow Christ, I will not wander into destructive and unloving patterns.
Christ way / Your way of living prevails. Love and grace prevail.

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I like Matthew's ending, so I'll add that with a twist.

Always and forever, and right now. Amen.....let's do it again.

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The second part of the passage instructs about a right / healthy relationship with God.
Verses 5-8 presents the common assumption that we must be persistent to get what we need.
Determined, unrelenting demands may be necessary when calling a government agency, a telecommunication corporation or even with a friend, as noted by Jesus.

However, we don't need to nag and pester God.
We don't need to beg and repeat our requests over and over.

With that awareness, we may ponder: why even ask God?
Why even say our petition to God? God knows everything. It's not like we have to inform or enlighten God.

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The asking / the stating of our needs does two things.  
One, using words helps bring clarity to ourselves. It helps us sort out what our need truly is.

Second, it reminds us about the nature of our relationship with God.  
God is God, and we are not. Asking carries a sense of humbleness / humility, and keeps us from thinking we are entitled.

In addition, as Jesus taught, we can humbly ask with confidence, knowing that God responds in love.  
We ask to receive.  
We search to find  
We knock and new possibilities will open before us.  
God is loving and generous, especially when we petition to commune with God's Spirit.

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So, there is no need to impress people in public with lofty words.
In fact, we need not waste our time with fluff or with begging or grand, hollow promises to God.
We only need to present OUR truth..... our selves.
Prayer is connecting with God. It is spiritual. It is words and beyond words.
Prayer is NOW, and it is eternal.
And, I have a feeling..... that developing our prayer life will come in handy in this life,..... in more ways than we can understand.