

PRESENT TENSE JESUS

“Jesus Teaches Us How To Pray”

Luke 11:1-13

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While watching a You-Tube presentation
by a leading church evangelist,
he asked his audience of pastors and leaders this question:
“If someone ever asked you
to tell them about Jesus,
how would you answer?”

Let me give you a clue.

If someone you have just met
asked you to tell them about yourself,
you would probably include things and activities
that you like to do in your daily life.

Already you are conjuring up in your minds
a list of the activities that describe you.

Now, if this occasion were a seminar or workshop,
rather than a formal worship service,
I would have you share this list about yourself
with another person, and then have them
repeat the process to you.

Wouldn't that be a great way for us
to better get to know each other and
to build genuine community among us?

Back to Jesus.

Usually when we think of Jesus
and the things the Gospels tell us He did,
we picture the person of Jesus
performing healing miracles,
teaching in parables,
eating with disciples, Pharisees, and tax collectors,
engaging in personal conversations,

with these actions being interspersed
or interrupted by times of prayer.

Of course, Jesus and His life
could be seen the other way around —
As a series of private prayer times,
in between the ordinary events of His daily ministry.
Jesus Christ was a person of prayer.

Nowhere is this made clearer
than in the Gospel of Luke,
which records nearly a dozen prayer times,
including many that are exclusive to Luke.
As he tells the Gospel story of Jesus,
Luke portrays Jesus as praying His way
from Galilee to Jerusalem and the cross.
He usually mentions these prayer times in passing,
so it would be easy to overlook this theme in his Gospel.

But when we take careful notice
of all the times when Jesus went to pray,
the cumulative effect is impressive.
Luke wanted to show his readers
that prayer is essential to a believer's life and
to being a disciple.

The first example comes in connection
with Jesus' baptism by John in the Jordan River,
which marked His initiation into His public ministry.

Luke tells us that when Jesus
“had been baptized and was praying,”
the Holy Spirit descended like a dove,
and Jesus received a blessing from God (3:21-22).

Luke tells us further that when Jesus was
about to choose His twelve disciples,
“he went out to the mountain to pray,
and all night he continued in prayer to God.” (6:12).

According to Luke, Jesus prayed early and often;
on occasion, He prayed for an extended time period.

After Jesus fed the 5,000,
He was alone with God in prayer once again (9:18).
Maybe He was praying for His disciples,
because on this occasion, Peter confessed Him to be the Christ.
Eight days later, Jesus went out to pray again,
and this time, He took three of His disciples with Him.
While they were saying their prayers,
Jesus was transfigured before them in glorious splendor (9:28).
Jesus prayed again —
rejoicing in the Spirit and giving thanks to the Father —
when the seventy returned safely from their gospel missions (10:21).
It seems that whenever anything of major importance
happened in the life and ministry of Jesus,
it was surrounded and bathed in prayer.

And this morning, we meet Jesus
at the beginning of Chapter 11 of Luke's Gospel,
at prayer once again in a certain place.
With Luke's opening passage,
we are reminded of all the times
that Jesus went to pray, and of everything
we learn from this example.
We learn the necessity of regular prayer.
If Jesus took the time to talk things over with His Father,
how much more are we in need of time
away with God in prayer?
Jesus also teaches us the power of prayer.
Through prayer, Jesus received the Holy Spirit,
with wisdom for teaching and power to heal.
Through prayer, Jesus made disciples,
choosing the twelve to continue His ministry.
Through prayer, Jesus glorified God
and was glorified by Him.
Through prayer, He carried forward
the missionary work of the Gospel.
Therefore, if we want to see God work powerfully
to change people's lives through our ministries of

teaching, discipleship, mission activities,
we need to spend time with Jesus in prayer.
We will accomplish much more through prayer.

The disciples were beginning to realize this truth
by watching Jesus, and they wanted to experience it
for themselves.

So, when Jesus finished praying,
“one of His disciples said to Him,
‘Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.’”

It was a common practice in those days
for rabbis to teach their followers a specific form of prayer.

Apparently, John the Baptist had taught
a specific form of prayer for his disciples,
although it is not recorded in Scripture.

The prayer united and identified the disciples
with their spiritual leader or teacher.

Now the disciples wanted Jesus
to do the same thing for them.

They were in awe of His prayer life,
and they wanted to know His secret
to being in closer communion with God.

Thus, they asked Jesus to teach them
how to pray as He prayed.

This request fits the movement of Luke’s Gospel.

Last week’s story of Martha and Mary
showed the importance of knowing God
through the teaching of the Son.

But there is another side to this.

We need to speak to God as well as listen to God,
and in today’s Gospel lesson, Jesus shows us how.

The disciples’ request fits their own spiritual need.

They were still learning how to follow Jesus,
and they were realizing the importance
and purpose of prayer for doing ministry.

Although they came from a praying people,

they had never seen anyone pray like Jesus.
In Jesus, they saw a unique passion for prayer,
with unusual zeal and unprecedented intimacy.
When they saw this, they wanted it for themselves.

Now this would be the appropriate point in time
to talk and teach about the Lord's Prayer.
I could address how Jesus organizes His prayer,
with two petitions for God and three for ourselves —
first by asking God to enhance His reputation
and to extend His influence and rule,
and second, by addressing our own needs,
asking God for daily provision,
daily pardon, and daily protection.
I could also point out how good it is
for Christians to use the very words of Jesus
when they pray, especially in public or family worship.
The early church father, Cyprian, was right
when he asked, "What prayer can have greater
power with the Father than that which
came from the lips of the Son?"
Martin Luther tells us that in the Lord's Prayer,
we realize God's good and gracious will for us.
The Lord's Prayer is a model, not a mantra.
The important thing is not using the exact
words that Jesus uttered, but following
the same structure and incorporating
the same themes into our prayer lives.

David Lose tell us "Working Preachers"
in his weekly blog a simple suggestion
for preaching this text for this Sunday:
Do what Jesus did.
That is, teach your people how to pray.
Let me do so this way —
Here are three observations about today's Gospel passage.
First, the Lord's Prayer is pretty simple.

Jesus' prayer covers the basics of life.
In short, prayer doesn't need to be complex to be faithful.
When I was a teenager, I started to learn to pray
by praying the collects for each Sunday
throughout the week — with one main theme.
Try it this week with the prayers and petitions
contained in your bulletin.

Second, faithful prayer is honest.
Jesus' parable invites us to imagine that,
like a man confident of his neighbor's hospitality,
we should ask for whatever we need.
That means that prayer isn't about
saying the right words or sounding eloquent or pious.
Rather, it's about saying what's
on our heart in our own words.

Third, prayer is based on trust.
Jesus promises that just as we desire to give
those we love good things,
so does God even more want to give us every good gift.
Because we trust this is true, we pray.
This is one of those difficult parts of prayer,
because the answer is not always 'yes.'
Like a good parent, God's answer might be
'maybe' and sometimes it might be 'no.'
Yet we still trust that God is listening,
and we continue to pray, because we believe
God loves us and all God's created world.

Another approach to praying also involves our
weekly bulletins — the Prayers of Intercession
and the list of People in Need of Prayer.
Instead of leaving your bulletin here or throwing it out,
use it as your weekly devotional tool.
Use the petitions from the Intercessory Prayer in your prayers
and pray for the people listed weekly.

Even another approach is one that began
with our Stephen Ministry biweekly sessions
and continues today in our monthly Council Meetings —
by sharing a joy or concern or a “high” and a “low”
from the previous week or month,
and then praying for each other.

Beloved people of God,
prayer, according to Jesus in today’s passage,
is not primarily about getting things from God,
but rather about the relationship we have with God.

After a life and ministry of prayer,
Jesus prays yet again
while hanging on the cross,
a prayer of complete surrender and trust: “Father, into Your hands I commend
my spirit.” (23:46).

In the same way,
we are invited to make all of our needs,
wants, hurts, hopes, and desires known to God.
We are invited to be vulnerable and transparent with God
in the confidence that, whatever may happen,
our relationship with God is the most precious thing we have.

While this may not give us everything we want,
it does give us what we most need.

Amen.