

# BACK TO BASICS

---

July 28, 2019

Pentecost 7

[Colossians 2:6-15](#)

[Luke 11:1-13](#)

---

(prayer)

This past Tuesday, I had the wonderful privilege of taking part in an outdoor wedding.

Any of you who saw the picture that I posted on the church's facebook page would've seen that the Alberta Rocky Mountains provided the backdrop for the Williams-Michel nuptials.



It was a warm day in Canmore. The summer sun was shining brightly over my right shoulder.

It rained two days before the wedding and the day after, but Tuesday was the perfect summer day for an outdoor wedding. The backup plans were not needed.

//

Like I do here on Sundays, I use my tablet (rather than paper notes) to try and keep me on track and on topic.

Midway through the ceremony, the wedding notes file I was using closed on its own.

I don't think that anyone noticed as I just ad-libbed for a few seconds while I pushed the necessary buttons to reopen the necessary file.

I don't think anyone noticed the inner panic that I felt when an error message popped up on the screen that *the app I wanted* would not work because the tablet was overheating.

//

I had just asked the "I do" questions and was in the midst of inviting the couple's parents to offer words of support for their children's marriage when the screen went dark.

//

Fortunately, this was not my first rodeo.

Fortunately, I had spent part of the morning going over my notes, so that I wouldn't appear to be

*Rev. T. Blaine Gregg*

merely reading the whole time.

I just closed the tablet and did the second half of the ceremony from memory, including guiding them through their wedding vows... I am grateful that they had chosen fairly standard wording. I'm not sure I got it precisely right, but it was close enough. Again, fortunately, I don't think anyone noticed: not even the groom's grandfather who is a retired Anglican bishop.

//

//

When the time came for the couple and witnesses to sign the documents, I checked my tablet again and it had cooled enough to work again. I subtly scrolled through the notes and confirmed for myself that I not missed anything. I did mess up the order a tiny bit, but that can fall under the category of *poetic license*. Hey, I might have done that even if my tablet was working.

//

I confessed to my spouse later what had happened and she assured me that *she* had no idea that I did much of the service off the top of my head. Now, she is a kind woman, but she would have been honest with me, believe me.

//

Phew.

//

It was a good lesson in humility that relying on the conveniences of modern technology can become distractions to what the focus should be.

A tablet (or paper notes, for that matter) is only a tool.

It is the message that matters!

//

//

//

Although the groom's parents (who are long-time friends of mine) put Patti and up at a very nice hotel, they and most of the wedding party (and some of their friends) brought their RVs and trailers and spent their off times just sitting around campfires, sipping moderate amounts of libations and tossing bean bags or throwing frisbees while a number of family dogs ran back and forth over the dozen or so adjoining campsites. I believe that the neighbours only complained a couple of times.

//

//

I know that weddings and receptions can be stressful events to plan. There are some minimal organizations details that usually need to be attended to.

Even so, some couples are also intensely concerned with additional details - they have reality shows on The Learning Channel about these couples.

They can have such a grand vision that (unless it is pulled off precisely as intended) can begin to overshadow the basic intention of the day: which is... to look into your partner's eyes and profess a commitment to life-long fidelity and mutual hope and love.

During premarital preparation, I always encourage couples to spend at least as much time leading up to the big day working on their marriage as they do on their wedding.

//

It was wonderfully refreshing that this week's outdoor wedding (and the small church wedding that I conducted here a few months ago) really did centre on the basics.

//

//

*Rev. T. Blaine Gregg*

//

//

It was common in the first century for religious leaders to offer guidance for the prayer life of their followers. In this way, Jesus was not necessarily unique in teaching his disciples a formulaic prayer. As we heard in Luke today, this was something John the Baptist had done as well.

//

*Lord, teach us to pray* one of the disciples asked Jesus.

//

I suspect that the prayer model Jesus offered might be familiar to some of you. It is very common (in most modern churches) to include words similar to this in virtually every Sunday church service. St. David's has done this in every single Sunday service that I have planned in the last eighteen years and ten months since I have ministered among you... a tradition that I suspect goes back as far as our collective memory can go regardless of who you minister was.

It is commonly called [The Lord's Prayer](#) or the *Prayer of Jesus*, or simply the *Our Father*. It can be found in two places in the Bible: at Luke 11:2-4 (as we heard this morning) and in Matthew 6:9-13.

In the New Revised Standard Version translation, the Lord's Prayer in Luke goes like this:

*Father, hallowed be your name.*

*Your kingdom come.*

*Give us each day our daily bread.*

*And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us.*

*And do not bring us to the time of trial.*

In the NRSV, Matthew records it this way:

*Our Father in heaven,*

*hallowed be your name.*

*Your kingdom come.*

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

*Give us this day our daily bread.*

*And forgive us our debts,*

*as we also have forgiven our debtors.*

*And do not bring us to the time of trial,*

*but rescue us from the evil one.*

I will hazard a guess that many of you are (perhaps) most familiar with the english translation that was part of the Church of England's 1662 Book of Common Prayer (which is similar - but not exact - to the 1611 King James Version of the Bible):

*Our Father, which art in heaven,*

*Hallowed be thy Name;*

*Thy kingdom come;*

*Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven:*

*Give us this day our daily bread;*

*And forgive us our trespasses,*

*as we forgive them that trespass against us;*

*And lead us not into temptation,*

*But deliver us from evil.*

//

There are variant versions of this 1662 text still in common use today that come from the US Episcopal Church's 1928 Book of Common Prayer (that parallels a version that had been used by

*Rev. T. Blaine Gregg*

english-speaking Catholics for many years before that):

*WHO art in heaven*  
instead of  
*which art in heaven*  
and  
*forgive THOSE WHO trespass against us*  
instead of  
*forgive them that trespass against us*

Sometimes you might find only one of these changes used (as is the case with the sung version at #960 in Voices United, that we sung last week).

//

Many liturgically minded protestant churches now use a modern language version of the Lord's Prayer that was adopted by the [English Language Liturgical Consultation](#) in 1988:

*Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come,  
your will be done, on earth as in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.  
Save us from the time of trial  
and deliver us from evil.*

That version is set to music at #959VU, which we sing here occasionally as well.

//

You may have noticed that I have not mentioned the doxology (*For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, For ever and ever. Amen.*) that - in protestant traditions - often conclude the Lord's Prayer - and even has been included as part of verse 13 in Matthew 6 in many biblical translations over the years.

Although some version of this doxology did begin to appear along side the Lord's Prayer by the early second century, it is almost certain **not** part of the original versions of Matthew or Luke.

//

Even though some denominations have declared particular translations as the official version for use in their churches, it is important to remember that the bible basics of the Lord's Prayer come to us from two *slightly different* texts originally written in Greek. Although those differences are hidden in the King James translation... those editors just copied Matthew's version (including the doxology) verbatim into Luke.

//

It is reasonable for us to assume that the gospel writers of Matthew and Luke based their *different* texts on forty year old living memory sources of Jesus' original oral teaching in Aramaic or Hebrew... a teaching Jesus probably shared many times, perhaps varying the wording *himself* from place to place.

//

And so, today, I invite you to set aside whatever assumptions you have about the "proper words" for the Lord's Prayer as we focus on what Luke has passed on to us... as translated in the **New Revised Standard Version** (those blue bibles in the pews).

//

//

Lord's Prayer Basics According To Luke

*Rev. T. Blaine Gregg*

Addressing God - *Father, hallowed be your name.*

The Greek text calls God: *Pater* (Πάτερ). We don't know what word Jesus used in his language, although in other instances in the gospels the Greek authors record that Jesus used the word *abba* for God (daddy, papa). This word was used by children to address their own fathers, but also as a way to express familiarity and reverence to male elders within the community. We can't be sure how formal or informal Jesus intended this greeting to be.

Even so, the next phrase in the prayer is clearly intended to express special reverence toward God.

//

The Lucan Lord's Prayer contains a series of four straight-forward petitions (or requests):

1. *Your kingdom come.*
2. *Give us each day our daily bread.*
3. *Forgive us our sins.*
4. *Do not bring us to the time of trial.*

//

ONE: *Your kingdom come.* In English, *kingdom* usually connotes an area or region that is governed. But, both in Hebrew and Greek, their parallel words for kingdom have a dual meaning: both the extent of the reign and its nature (kingdom and kingship). In other words, in this prayer, it is a recognition of both God's authority to govern and the impact of God's governing. Since this request is phrased both passively and in future tense, it implies that this is (at best) a work in progress.

Having the disciples request a coming of God's kingdom implies an expectation that the impact of God's reign will be known within the life experience of Jesus' followers. Matthew's version makes this more obvious by requesting that God's Kingdom will come (and God's Will will be done) *on earth* as it is in heaven.

This petition can reasonably be interpreted as a desire to have a meaningful connection to the familial and holy God (not only in some future heavenly kingdom, but) in this world, *during this life.*

//

//

TWO: *Give us each day our daily bread.* In virtually every agrarian society, bread is a staple of a person's daily diet. Our science may realize that the body energy that bread can create primarily comes more from a time-limited-impact carbohydrate source and is not an ample source of protein - which can build a longer term strength. And yet, even modest morsels of bread can sustain a person through the night. Ground seeds of grain mixed with water and cooked over a simple fire allows a person to be able to face the next day's opportunities.

To request *bread enough for today* is a desire to maintain what we have and it is a statement of hope and trust that God's presence is on-going.

The request to give us daily bread harkens back to Moses and Israel's time in the Sinai wilderness, where they lived one day at a time sustained by the promise of daily bread.

Each day, we can be grateful to have enough to greet the next day.

It is not always easy to be so short term focused. It can lead us to worry that (some day soon, we may not have what we need). It is a fair concern. It is human nature to look ahead and plan as best we can. To not be master's of our own destiny is not easy.

This part of the prayer is an expression of humility. *I pray to be able to trust in your on-going providence, God.*

To pray for daily bread, each day, is to recognize a need to trust beyond ourselves.

*Rev. T. Blaine Gregg*

//

//

THREE: *Forgive us our sins.* The Lord's Prayer accepts the seemingly contradictory position that God is both distant and yet accessible. "Sin" in the hebrew tradition recognizes that in spite of having a Torah, a law, as guidance, that people will not always be in perfect relationship with God and others. And so, the law was written with remedies for this lack of perfection. In some cases, there were rituals to perform, there were priestly blessings to obtain, there were offerings to make. Sometimes, the remedy was simply time.

In the tradition known well by Jesus and his disciples, sin is not a bottomless pit. It is an expected condition of life out of balance for which there was a path to reconciliation.

Luke (and Matthew both) use the metaphor of indebtedness as a way of explaining the forgiving nature of God. As his disciples prayed for forgiveness, Jesus wanted them to imagine being in debt to another person and what it would feel like to be told that you don't have to pay. Actually, Jesus invites them to think of being the one who lets the debt go and imagining God as having that kind of generous heart.

The prayer is really asking God to set aside the Torah remedies: the means by which we control our own forgiveness. In this petition Jesus seems to be instructing against a *vending machine god* theology - where we can force God to give us what we want by inserting the right payment.

Jesus asks his disciples to pray with the attitude that they could read about in Isaiah 55:

*Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat!  
Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost.*

Jesus is teaching that forgiveness is an unearned reward. It is grace.

The debt of sin is gone, not because it was repaid, but because it was written off.

In the decades after Jesus, early Christian leaders (like the author of Colossians) would take this to a new level, claiming that the old ways of ritualistic atoning for sins were gone forever in Jesus and that God's grace was all that mattered.

//

//

FOUR: *Do not bring us to the time of trial.*

The Greek word at the heart of this part of the prayer can have a variety of translations in different contexts: *peirasmos* (πειρασμός) is can mean *temptation, testing, trial, experiment*. Sure, there are subtle variations in the meaning of the various interpretive choices, but the general thrust is the same.

Even as the disciples prayed that their God would not hold their past against them, they were also invited to seek God's guidance moving forward.

In the wider context of the whole prayer, we can see a pattern: as we are enveloped with the providence of daily bread and the promise of forgiveness, we may find that we will naturally approach this life (and the people we encounter) with more gracious hearts and humility. And yet Jesus knows that (even the most steadfast of) his disciples will be worried about their ability to resist distractions and temptations going forward.

*Help us avoid the times when we might fall away from our better natures.*

//

//

//

Luke follows up this gift of a model prayer with an invitation of Jesus to not give up on God, if they don't experience everything they hope and wish for immediately. Jesus tell stories of persistently seeking what is needed and necessary.

*Rev. T. Blaine Gregg*

We have to be careful not interpret these parables so literally as to paint God as callous and indifferent only willing to be gracious because we are annoying. As I noted, Jesus already had seemed to be preaching against that vending machine model of God.

In the final parable of today's reading, Jesus notes that even the most incompetent of parents would not put poisonous animals on the dinner table, so his disciples should trust in the gracious providence of their *father in heaven* always.

//  
//  
//

Like Jesus' first followers we are invited to embrace to living love and grace of the one who created us.

//

In all of the complexity of our lives within this almost incomprehensible universe we inhabit, let us pray that we will never lose sight of these basic hopes:

- God cares us more deeply than the best of human parents.
- God is looking out for our best interests even when we choose regretful paths. Even in the darkest valleys, we are not alone.
- God always welcomes us back with forgiving arms. We cannot lose God's love.

//  
//

The Lord's Prayer is a basic and powerful teaching of Jesus. We are not obligated to recite a particular set of precise words, but to embrace their meaning.

//

If you come to this congregation semi-regularly, you will have the opportunity to participate in the prayer every Sunday. You will not use the same words every week: because you are invited to let the intent of this grand old prayer be new for you each time.

//  
//

Prayer has never been about finding the perfect words, but about opening ourselves up to perfect grace that is beyond description.

//

Let us pray:

Holy God, Good-Parent, reign in our lives. Feed us, forgive us, guide us. Amen.

#194MV "Bread of Life"