

**Christ Presbyterian Church
Edina, Minnesota
September 13 & 14, 2014
John Crosby
This Day: Be Amazed
Luke 11:1-4**

I was going to say *little* Riley but she's not so little any more. Riley learned to pray here like many of our kids did. Whether it was the Children's Sermon or being on your lap, many of our kids started to learn to pray here like the big people pray. Last night Jeff's mom came and said that when Jeff was three and he heard us do the Lord's Prayer, he would emphatically say it loudly and he would say "and deliver us from eagles" because that made sense to him. That's how Riley learned.

When you pray, it's like learning a new language. When you and the nations in heaven are learning to talk to each other, it's like learning a new language and we all learn languages easier when we're kids, don't we? I think of my friend Alex here. Alex is in preschool and his mom was telling me about his first week of preschool. She said Alex's older brother Cameron goes to a Spanish immersion school and last year he would be asked at the dinner table, "Talk to us in Spanish. What did you learn?" and Alex would say, "I speak Spanish, too" and he would speak what sounded like gibberish. "Oh, that's so good, son." This year Cameron is in his second year speaking Spanish and they turned to Alex, "Alex, did you learn any Spanish this year?" and Alex is still speaking gibberish but now with a Spanish accent. It's a wonderful thing, all that money being spent!

We laugh and smile because it's cute when the kids are trying to learn, but what's it like when the adults who are supposed to be able to speak the language of heaven are asked? If I had said to you, "Deb's got a sore throat. Would you mind doing the prayer of the morning?" you would head for the doors. It's hard for us. It's a sad thing that we don't speak the language of heaven really well or understand it when we're listening, but it's not just you and I; it's famous people, too.

My wife Laura and I both grew up in Chicago and came to know one of the guys who was chaplain for the Bears when the Bears were in the Super Bowl. He talks about the wild Chicago Bears back then. He said that before the game, Coach Ditka would always give them a pep talk. Ditka is a person of faith and he would either lead a prayer or ask somebody in the room to pray, and one day he goes, "Fridge, why don't you do the Lord's Prayer." You remember Refrigerator Perry, 340 pounds. Fridge gets to his feet very slowly and just bursts into sweat. The chaplain is sitting there watching, "C'mon, you can do this. You can do this, Fridge." And from behind him, the quarterback Jim McMahon leans over and whispers to the chaplain, "Hey, fifty bucks says he doesn't know the Lord's Prayer." The chaplain wants to support Perry so he says, "You're on!" Ditka says, "C'mon, Fridge, c'mon." Finally Fridge goes, "Uh, now I lay me down to sleep. I pray the Lord my soul to keep." And the chaplain is going, "Ohhhhh." He starts

to turn to McMahon and all of a sudden, McMahon pushes a \$50 bill to him, "I could have sworn he wouldn't know that prayer!"

We laugh because it's all of us, right? All of us would feel like we're on the spot. "How is your prayer life?" "Well, I don't know. Who's asking?" But if I were to say prayer is the language we use to speak to heaven and for heaven to speak to us, how many of you would say you are as fluent in the language of heaven as you are in English? How many of you would say you struggle with some aspect of prayer? Look at those hands and the rest of you, you are lying dogs! This is hard for *me*. For *all* of us. This is a language that we learn, but if you come to church for any reason at all, get this, it ought to be with the expectation that if you keep coming to church, you will learn enough about God to learn how to talk to God. So it's not *Now I lay me down to sleep*. It's not *Bless us, oh Lord, and these Thy gifts which we are about to receive from Thy bounty*. It's not *Hail Mary, full of grace. The Lord is with thee*. It's not *Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy Name*. It's not that. It's talking and listening to God. You ought to expect that when you come here, you would learn to listen for God's voice and learn to talk to him.

That's what we want to do this fall. It's the most important thing that we do. If more and more over time, you don't sense that there is a God, that you can talk to Him and that God talks to you, find a church where that happens. Please! Because all the good works we do don't matter if that God thing isn't at the heart of it, and if it *is* at the heart of it, then everything else will come into place.

I thought of that last spring and decided that each year, each fall, for the next three years, we were going to talk about how to talk to God, how to listen for God's words. Next year we are going to look at the Old Testament and say, "Where do the Psalms, where do the prophets, teach us how to hear God's voice? How do they talk to God?" Then in two years we want to talk about the apostle Paul, because when I read the prayers of the apostle Paul, I think, compared with that, I'm in preschool. I don't talk to God like that. How do I learn to talk to God like that? That will be in a couple of years, but this year I thought, why don't we start with the Master? Why don't we start with the one who is supposed to know how to talk to God and how to hear God, Jesus, and I read this. It says, "Jesus was talking to God."

1 Now it came to pass, as He was praying in a certain place, when He ceased, that one of His disciples said to Him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John

John the Baptist

also taught his disciples." **2** So He said to them, "When you pray, say: Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. [Luke 11:1-2]

11 Give us this day our daily bread. **12** And forgive us our debts, As we forgive our debtors. **13** And do not lead us into temptation, But deliver us from the evil one [Matthew 6:11-13].

Now it's interesting that in all the four stories about Jesus, it comes out a little differently because He didn't just say it as "This is what you should memorize." It was more like "This is an outline. You don't talk to your boss at work the same way you talk to your three-year-old. You

should learn who you're talking to and that will determine the conversation. That's what Jesus was trying to do. He didn't want to say to you, "Memorize this prayer. Take two and go home." Learn who you're talking to because that determines the conversation.

There was a guy who wrote a translation of the Bible back a ways who said this.

Many men and women today are living, often with inner dissatisfaction, without any faith in God at all. This is not because they are particularly wicked or selfish or, as the old-fashioned would say, "godless," but because they have not found with their adult minds a God big enough to "account for" life,

I love that phrase. They're faithless because they haven't found with their adult minds a God big enough to account for life,

big enough to "fit in with" the new scientific age, big enough to command their highest admiration and respect, and consequently their willing co-operation.

Big enough to serve. He goes on and says,

We shall never want to serve God in our real and secret hearts if He looms in our subconscious mind as an arbitrary Dictator or a Spoil-sport, or as one who takes advantage of His position

uses his power

to make us poor mortals feel guilty and afraid. We have not only to be impressed by the "size" and unlimited power of God,

That's not enough, he said, to be impressed by the size of God.

we have to be moved to genuine admiration, respect, and affection, if we are ever to worship Him.

And because he kept running into people who said, "I don't believe in God anymore," he'd always ask, "Well, what's *your* God like?" And they would describe God and this guy whose name was J. B. Phillips would say, "I don't believe in that God either. Get rid of that God." He talked a little bit more and then said, "What's *your* God like?" "I don't believe in God because God is like" "I don't believe in that God either." He ends up writing a book called *Your God Is Too Small*. If your God is too small; get rid of it. The reason many of us don't pray is because our God is too small.

Let me give you just a couple of examples that Phillips uses. He says that the first view of God that is inadequate is when you see God like this. [Slide shown.] This is God, the Cosmic Creator. I love this picture. It's one of my favorites. This is the Eagle Nebula and one of the reasons I love the Eagle Nebula, 6,500 light years away, is because inside of it is something called the Pillars of Creation. [Slide shown.] Isn't that cool? There are stars being born inside those clouds.

If your God is the God of Spinoza, the philosopher, who said “He created the world and set it in existence and that’s as much as we can know about God,” why would you pray to that God? [Slide shown.] That God is so huge, He has no idea that my daughter is about to flunk third grade. How could I pray to that God if I’m losing my job? What difference would it make to that God that I feel afraid when I wake up? Then your God is too small or, in this case, too far away.

Many of you have *this* God though. [Slide shown.] Your God is too small because your God is a policeman who is angry at you. Honest! You’re driving here to church. You’re going 25 miles an hour and you see a cop. How many of us slow down? That’s me. Because when I see the police, I go, ohhhhh, I must be doing something wrong. When many of you think of God, you think, “Ohhhhh, I’m in trouble now.” For some of you, your ability to talk to God is filtered because you equate God with your parents. If your view of your parents when you left home was filled with anger or judgment, maybe when you pray, you feel like God is saying, “You will never measure up” [slide shown]. Some of you would like to have a great God but your God is cruel. Maybe not as cruel as Morgan Freeman [slide shown] but your God is cruel and He wants you to work it out for yourself. How can I spill my guts to a God who says, “I love you; work it out for yourself”?

Some of you do not pray much because your view of God is what you hear about in church. It’s this: Gentle Jesus, meek and mild, holding this sheep, a lamb, probably not really able to help if there is a terrorist in the next block. “Probably not much He can do if I’m about to lose my job. He’ll console me but I need a *real* God.” You are never going to learn how to pray to God if you don’t know who God is and what the look on God’s face is when He hears your voice. We asked one of our friends here in the church if she would share with us what comes to her mind when she thinks about God. Her name is Anna.

[Video begins. *To view, see link below*]

When God looks at you, what is the expression on His face? Is He happy? Are His eyebrows furled in anger? Perhaps His eyes just look through you in indifference.

When God looks at me, what is the expression on His face? I grew up in a nominally Catholic home and imagined God’s expression toward me somewhere between disappointed and aloof. As a teenager I went searching for the love and validation from others that I had missed while growing up. I never dared pray for forgiveness. I assumed God had written me off long ago and yet, I yearned for a new start. Some of my high school classmates at the time, those I deemed good and clean, suddenly started talking to me. They were interested in my life and invited me to do things with them. I resisted for a long time, playing the cool card, but underneath I was petrified that they would reject me as soon as they realized all the things I had done. Yet they wore me down and eventually through their constant pestering, I ended up at a Young Life Club.

As soon as I walked into the room, I knew there was something special there and I was immediately hooked. When I heard the speaker say that Jesus loved me and wanted to be with me so much that even if I had been the only person to have ever lived, He still would have died for me. My heart leapt. Could it be true Jesus knew me and everything about me and still came to rescue me because He wanted to be in a relationship with me? That night I saw love and acceptance in the face of God and I surrendered my life to Him.

That was almost 25 years ago. Truly my life was never the same since that moment and yet there are still struggles I have to work through. My need for cleansing never waned. No, it actually seemed to increase and I began to try to outrun it, doing even more for God and more for others. It seemed to work for a while and yet I was exhausted. Life piled on and God seemed distant and small. If I had to imagine the expression on God's face, it would have been that of a taskmaster.

It was in that condition that I found myself on a week-long mission trip to Ireland. My stated motive for going was to serve God. I wanted to do something big for God. I don't know, maybe I thought it would get me noticed by God again. There I was, almost completely missing the most beautiful place I'd ever seen because I was so focused on trying hard to do above and beyond what God might expect of me. Then it hit me. Sitting there in a small room listening to an Irish pastor talk about how Jesus was at work in his church and in his village, I began to feel the weight of my self-centeredness. I could barely breathe.

I got up and ran outside and down the lane as if I could outrun God. I finally stopped and sat on a rock on the edge of the Irish Sea and wept. I was at the end of myself and there Jesus met me. It was as if He were standing right there in front of me, saying, "Look at Me. Look at what I have done for you. You don't have to be perfect. I did that for you so now it's not about you. It's about *Me*. It's about *My* grace." He knew I was a sinner when He came to die for me, and He knows I will continue to struggle against sin as long as I'm this side of heaven. My sin, what I've done or haven't done, is no longer the point. The point is that because of what He has done, His life, His death, His resurrection, I belong to Him.

That day on the rocks, I finally saw the expression on God's face clearly. I saw His smile and the enjoyment on His face as He looks at me. I saw the love in His eyes and this expression doesn't vary. And as much as my heart rejoices to remember this news, I often forget it. I can't believe how easy it is to revert to trying to keep the rules to earn favor with God. I need to hear the amazing news of the finished work of Christ every single day. I need to hear it when times are good for it is my true hope. I need to hear it in times of suffering for it is my only hope and I need to remind *you* of it because doing so helps me remember what Jesus has done for me. When God looks at you, what is the expression on His face?

[Video ends.]

Some of us seem to have profound experiences with God. Others of us are like Riley, much more honest, saying, "God, are You really there?" What I am saying is, our encounter with God can never really go anywhere until we know who we are talking to and what is the expression on His face. So as Jesus starts to say, here's how you talk to God, how does He do it? He starts out by saying, *Father*, not *our Father*. He starts with *Father* or *Dad*. After 2000 years we think this is the way we are supposed to talk, but this was unbelievable for a Jew. No Jew would ever say *Father* to God at the start of their prayer. He just wouldn't do it. In the whole Old Testament, the entire 39 Books of the Old Testament, God is only called *Father* 14 times. And almost all of those times, when it says *God, the Father*, it is God as the Father of Israel, God as the Leader of the Nation, not God, the Father of any individual.

When Jesus says, "Dad, Father," that was how He always talked to God. Sixty different times in the Gospel stories Jesus prays and every single time He calls God *Father*. When His friends ask who He is talking to, it's obviously become personal and He knows who He is talking to. Who are *you* talking to? Take just a second, when you think of God, what is one of the images in your mind? Far away or bad conscience or angry parent or gentle Savior who doesn't have much to do with life? Jesus said, "Dad, hallowed be Your Name." That sounds very churchy, doesn't it? I've got a doctorate degree but I don't know what "hallowed be Your Name" really means. I think somehow "Our Father in heaven, blessed be Your Name" is supposed to say "Bless Your Name" or "God, You are amazing!" Or like Rich Phenow was trying to teach the kids, "God, You're amazing!" I think when Jesus starts out saying, "Dad," He is next saying, "Remind Me who You are." "Hallowed be Your Name," who You really are, the Maker of Heaven and Earth, the God of the Jews, My Father.

I have to stop for a second and say, I understand for many of you the idea of starting out and talking to God and saying *Dad* is tough because of absent or incomplete or painful or mental or abusive relationships. It is a hard image for you. I don't want to break away from that. I would like to rescue it. The very best father in the room, the very best dad anyone has ever had, is not the dad that Jesus talking about. Over and over Jesus talks about this Father who is the King and He says, "The King has sent Me to start the Kingdom here. Let Me tell you what the King is like" and He tells story after story about fathers and children, fathers and sons.

Maybe the most famous story He ever tells is the story we call the Parable of the Prodigal Son but what it really is, is a story about the prodigal father. That is probably a bad title. It's really not about the bad son or the stuck-in-the-mud good son. It's probably not about them. To be prodigal means to waste what is very valuable. To be prodigal means, "I'm going to throw it out." The prodigal is not the kid who loses the money or the kid who wants his dad's money.

When Jesus tells the story of the prodigal father, that is who He is praying to, because the prodigal father gives when his kids don't deserve it. The prodigal in the story is the dad, who loves the kids so much he gives them all his money. He lets the kids, like us, walk away, and then waits for them (and us) to return. When they show up after they have wasted everything, he throws a party, a feast, for those kids who look a lot like you and me in the mirror. That's how the prodigal God welcomes us back. With our tails between our legs barely able to look up, He throws arms of love around us. And when the son finally returns, the prodigal father doesn't say, "I told you so," he throws a feast. He gives the son another ring. That's how the prodigal God welcomes us back. "They said he was dead but he is back!" He welcomes his son back from the dead. The prodigal God, the prodigal father, welcomes us in, the one who made everything, who made the Eagle Nebula, who made us, who knows us to the core and loves us anyway. "Oh, Dad, remind us who You really are." That is the way Jesus starts it. It all starts with who you are talking to and what's the look on their face.

I spent \$231 yesterday at the mall getting this fixed. Some idiot dropped it. My wife says it's a great waste of \$231 because I never answer my phone anyway. That's a huge fight in our family. It's true, I don't answer the phone. My phone is for me to call you, not for you to call me. But when I am at the office, the phone rings off the hook all the time, and when the phone rings I answer it and I can tell immediately who is on the other end. I pick up the phone and I hear this voice saying, "Dr. Crosby" and immediately I know this person has never in their entire life met me but they want to sell me something. Nobody calls me *Dr. Crosby*.

Another time I pick up the phone and I hear “Hey, 4-Putt!” and I know somehow one of my brothers has lied his way past the receptionist and is bothering me again. Just by the voice. When I pick up the phone and say, “Who’s this?” and I hear, “Mr. Crosby, this is the Internal Revenue Service,” I know I am supposed to say, “I’m sorry, you’ve got the wrong number” and hang up right away. Or the phone rings and rings and rings, I’m in the middle of four things, and sometimes a fifth thing. I’m talking to somebody on the phone, but I pick up the phone and say, “Who’s there?” and I hear “Dad?” and everything stops. Nothing else matters and I say, “I’ll talk to you later” and I say, “Honey, how are you? How is your day? What’s up? How’s the weather there? How’re you doing?” I want to talk until my daughter wants to hang up. It makes my day! You know what I mean. Or sometimes the phone will ring and it will be at a terrible time, a totally inconvenient time, and I pick up the phone, “Hello.” And hear another voice, “Daddy?” And then everything stops. I’m leaning forward and going, “Honey, is everything okay? What can I do?” That’s a tiny bit of how God feels. That’s how much God wants to talk to us. That’s why Jesus changes the way that everybody should talk to God. N. T. Wright talks about Jesus’ prayer and says,

This prayer starts by addressing God intimately and lovingly, as ‘Father’ – *and* by bowing before his greatness and majesty.

“Hallowed be Your Name.” N. T. Wright goes on to say,

If you can hold those two together, you’re already on the way to understanding what Christianity is all about.

You’re at the start of talking like Jesus did because that’s how God feels when Jesus picks up the phone and says, “Hi, Dad.” Heaven stops. Why? Jesus changes the way that everybody should talk to God. N. T. Wright says Jesus’ prayer starts by addressing God intimately, “Dad,” and lovingly, bowing before His greatness and majesty. “Hallowed be Your Name.” When Jesus is in the Garden of Gethsemane and picks up the phone and says, “Daddy,” the angels stop. When you pick up the phone and you say, “Dad,” *that’s* who you’re talking to.

I wanted to remind you of that before we went anywhere with this. What I wanted to remind you of is not for now but for Tuesday morning when you get up and you are going, “Oh, my God, oh, my God, oh, my God, I’m in trouble.” Or for Wednesday afternoon and you are about to have that tough conversation. Or Thursday night and you’re coming home dog tired or for Saturday morning when you’re going, “What am I supposed to be doing here?” so that the words “Hey, Dad, Father” might come to your mind. Or would it be some discourse, “Oh, Ancient of Days, Eternal and Beloved”? Nobody talks like that except in church, but did you know that God just wants to see how your day is going?

As you leave today, we’re going to give you a coaster. There are going to be six of them, one for each week of the series. You will get these as you leave. The first one is the phrase that Rich was talking about, God is amazing. Be amazed. And on the back it says God is both King and Shepherd. Which do you need to be in touch with this morning? We want that coaster to be in your bathroom, in your kitchen, in your living room, somewhere where you put something down. It will remind you to say, “Father, Dad” because when we hold together the Creator of the Eagle Nebula and the prodigal Dad, we are just starting to talk.

I'd like to finish with a spiritual exercise. You can do it at home. When I said that Jesus starts to pray by saying "Our Father," I was wrong. It says in the Scripture that Jesus starts the prayer by being away from everybody else. It says when Jesus finished praying, He came back to the disciples. When you want to talk to God, get away from all the chattering voices around you. When you want to talk to the Creator of the Universe, it's probably not a good idea to be looking at your cell phone to see who's calling you. One of the ways to do it is to just close your eyes, so why don't we do that. Just close your eyes. When we close our eyes and say "Father, Dad," sometimes it helps if our posture reminds us who we are talking to, so where you are, take your hands and place them palms up. I like to just rest mine on my thighs and then keep my eyes closed or I can just look at my hands. What image of God came to your mind this morning? If it is too small or angry or distant or religious, get rid of it. You need the God who is the prodigal dad. Ask Him to wrap His arms around you, to hold your hand. Isaiah talks about that. He said that the people of God said

14 . . . the Lord has forgotten us." **15** "Never! Can a mother forget her nursing child? Can she feel no love for a child she has borne? But even if that were possible, I would not forget you! **16** See, I have written your name on my hand."

The Lord said, "I have carved your name on the palm of My hand."

And it's always right there [Isaiah 49:14-16]

I bet when Jesus went off alone to talk with God, He looked at the palms of His hands because He knew what was coming, what was in store for those hands, and that He saw that your name and my name would be written on His hands, too. *That's* who you are talking to, somebody who loves you so much that He's carved your name on His hands. Let's start to talk to Him, just one little phrase at a time. I'll say it and you repeat it and we'll let it sink in. We won't start out by saying, "Oh, Thou great Father, oh, our Father," we'll just start out by saying this: Repeat after me,

Father, who art in heaven.

[All:] Father, who art in heaven.

Blessed be Your Name. Because there's nobody else like Him.

[All:] Blessed be Your Name.

Thy Kingdom come.

[All:] Thy Kingdom come.

On earth as it is in heaven.

[All:] On earth as it is in heaven.

Right here, right now, give us today our daily bread.

[All:] Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins.

[All:] Forgive us our sins.

And help us forgive those who sin against us.

[All:] And help us forgive those who sin against us.

Lead us away from temptation.

[All:] Lead us away from temptation.

And deliver us from evil.

[All:] And deliver us from evil.

That's all for now or you can say *amen*.

Link to video shown during this service: <http://vimeo.com/106298058>
(THIS DAY: BE AMAZED)

The nature of oral presentations makes them less precise than written materials; any lack of attribution is unintentional, and we wish to credit all those who have contributed to this sermon. Soli Deo Gloria.