

Christ Presbyterian Church
Edina, Minnesota
March 24 &25, 2012
John Crosby
Meditation after the Children's Musical
Matthew 6: 5-13

J.J. did a great job of teaching us that whether we are 8 or 88, it is hard to pray. It is hard to figure out how, whoever you are, you can talk to whoever God is, the invisible God. That is one of the things I got. The other thing I got out of the play is that Jody is way too young to have a daughter like Maggie, but that is partly because we are confused. I think one of the reasons we are confused is because we have distorted images of who we are and who God is.

Laura, my wife, showed me this the other day. She has this blog called *Awake My Soul*, and one day she put a picture in the blog of herself running. That is Laura up on the top, what she feels she looks like when she runs and then at the bottom what she is pretty sure she actually looks like. (*Slide shown*). It made me realize how the world distorts our sense of who we are. C. S. Lewis talks about us being those funhouse mirror distorted images where you look in the mirror and you are not sure who is there. For some of you, the world says you are guilty. For others of you, you are too young; you are too old; you're too fat; you're too short; you're too smart; you're not strong enough. Your image of yourself is often distorted, including the idea that others sometimes have the illusion you really are in control of life. It makes it hard to pray. Who is the real you doing the praying?

In the same way, who are you really talking to? Most of us have a distorted image of God, too. Many of you grew up with the idea that God was somehow angry at you. You weren't good enough. Some of you have the idea that God is way out there, remote, or that God is like an unpleasable parent. Some of you still feel like that when you pray. You are talking to the great magician, and if you can just get the phrase right, if you can just learn the magic words, then you will get your way. I think that is why prayer is at the foundation of what this life with God is all about. Figuring out who the real you is and figuring out how to talk like J.J. did to the real God. That is why Jesus said, "You are not just blah-blah-blah praying. You have to learn how to pray." Right? In Matthew 6, Jesus said,

⁵ "And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. ⁶ But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. ⁷ And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. ⁸ Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

So Jesus says, "Do you want to know what God is really like? Do you want to know who God really is?" Look at Jesus. If you want to know who God is, look at Jesus. Not you've got to measure up, but "I love you." Not syrupy, but "I'll serve you." Not you better be good, but "I forgive you." Then they prayed. Think about Jesus. What should you pray for? That's easy. Jesus went on. He said,

⁹ “This, then, is how you should pray:

“Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
¹⁰ your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
¹¹ Give us today our daily bread.
¹² And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.
¹³ And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one.’

In the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy....oh, wait. I messed that up last night. In the Name of the Father, the Son....no, is that prayer? We do that here every week, right? Is that prayer or are you on autopilot? This month we have been talking about practices that Jesus teaches us so we can have the God-life, live with God on Thursday afternoons. So I'd like us to do one of those exercises right now. Real easy. The kids have done all the hard work. Real easy. I'd like us to pray the way that Jesus taught us. I'll do a phrase at a time. You repeat after me, and then we will have a little silence to see if it is really prayer and not just the magic words. We can start out this way.

“Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,

(All:) “Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,

So, God, You say that we should think about You as the best mother and the best father and the best one who knows us and loves us and that every time You see us, Your face lights up.

¹⁰ your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.

(All:) ¹⁰ your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.

This one is harder, God, because I say, “Thy Kingdom come,” but I want my kingdom. I want You to do what I want, God. I pray that You will show me what Your will is and show me that it is best for me and that You will help me to go there.

¹¹ Give us today our daily bread.

(All:) ¹¹ Give us today our daily bread.

Show us what we need, show me what I need, not all the little toys that I want, not all those things that are supposed to make me secure and successful. Just show me today what I and the ones that I love need. Show us what we need.

¹² And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.

(All:) ¹² And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.

You know, Jesus, this is the one where there is just one little word, *as*, but I can't do the *as* part, "As we forgive." I want You to forgive me but I need Your help forgiving others. Bring somebody to my mind who I need to forgive...*(Pause)*...and I will try to forgive them.

¹³ And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one.'

(All:) ¹³ And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one.'

I guess, Lord, that means keeping away from those things I want to see. Keep me away from that food I want to eat or those people I like who suck me down. Help me to cease temptation before I jump in. Remind my friends that there is evil in this world and help us to run away. And after we have said all that, remind us who we are. We are Your children, and whether we are prodigal children, far away, or we live in the house all the time, we are Your children and You love us. Remind us who You are. For Thine is the Kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

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.