

Christ Presbyterian Church
Edina, Minnesota
February 9 &10, 2013
John Crosby
The Essential Teachings of Jesus: Pray These Words
Matthew 6:7-15

For those of you who are our guests, all this winter we have been trying to distill the religious talk that says, it is just the essentials. We're calling our series "The Essential Teachings of Jesus." When you get down to the very core, what's there? Words to live by. We've talked about some of those words, words like *kingdom* and *come* and last week we talked about *judgment*. Each different side of Jesus' message can either be filled with life or it can be just one more thing you've got to memorize. Will this be on the test? The second week we did it, we talked about something called the Jesus Creed. If you really want to understand the teaching of Jesus, you ought to understand what He thinks is the most important thing. One time Jesus was asked, "What is the most important thing?" and He responded in a very simple way. I'd like us each week to say His answer together. Our challenge has been that you would each day talk about the Jesus Creed to yourself and to God, but at least in worship together. Let's say this together. Jesus was asked, "What is the most important Commandment?" and with Jesus we respond together,

(All:) ²⁹ ...'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.

³⁰ Love the Lord your God with all your heart
and with all your soul and with all your mind
and with all your strength.'

³¹ The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'

There is no commandment greater than these." [Mark 12:29:31]

That is what Jesus says we are supposed to believe! That's how Jesus said we are supposed to live! The essence of it. But is the Jesus Creed supposed to be the code you live by? I think it is more that the Creed is a doorway into a relationship. Jesus did not come to set up an 11th Commandment. He wants you to be able to know the invisible God, to have a relationship, so we not only know how to live and what to believe but are able to communicate, talk, with this God, who made everything and yet whom we cannot see nor usually hear. It is no wonder that His followers turned to Him and said, "We are not very good at this part, Jesus. Every time You get in a little trouble, You seem to go away and talk to God and when You come back, You've been with God. When we go away and talk to God, we come back and it's just the same. Teach us how to talk to God. Teach us how to pray, Jesus."

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.
³ Give us day by day our daily bread.
⁴ And forgive us our sins,
For we also forgive everyone who is indebted to us.
And do not lead us into temptation,
But deliver us from the evil one.” [Luke 11:2-4]

That is the Jesus Prayer. Actually, the disciples are probably a little surprised because they feel like they have heard it before but they can't quite put it together and besides, they struggled with prayer. How many of you have ever struggled with prayer? Amen! Of all the 12 weeks of sermons, this is the one that is hardest for me. There are all different kinds of pastors. There are chaplains. You want them near you when times are hard. They put their arms around you and you feel the love of God. There are activists who pick up the cross and run out into an angry world. There are intellectuals who make the impossible come alive. There are leaders. There are mystics, people who, when they pray, it seems like God comes into the room. I have to check *None of the above*.

I'm probably some kind of an intellectual leader and, because of that, I struggle with prayer and with feeling like my prayers mean something. I intellectualize them. In our baptism service just now, we told these parents we would help their kids learn who Jesus is. We would teach them how to pray. They're going to work on that already; they're already trying to teach their kids English. But they also want to teach their kids the language of heaven, teach them how to pray. Little John Emerson [John Emerson Otterlei] got his first golf lesson yesterday. He is almost four months old. It's a late start but he'll catch up. How do the kids learn how to pray? They learn to pray by watching their parents pray. They learn to pray by watching *us* pray. That's a little scary. What are they learning?

Here is what they learn to pray:

- Erin prays and says, “Dear God, are You really invisible or is it just a trick?”
- Norm: “God, did You mean for the giraffe to look like that or was it an accident?”
- I like Nan's: “Dear God, I bet it's very hard for You to love all the people in the world. There are only four people in *our* family, and I want to kill them.”
- Donny says: “Dear God, is Reverend Coe a friend of yours or do You just know him through business?”
- Darla says: Did you really mean “Do unto others as they do unto you” because if You did, then I'm really going to fix my brother?”
- Joyce says, “Dear God, thank You for the baby brother, but what I prayed for was a puppy.”
- My favorite is this last one, “Dear God, it rained for our whole vacation and is my father mad! He said some things about You that people aren't supposed to say, but I hope You won't hurt him anyway. Your friend, but I'm not going to tell You who I am.” Trying to protect dad.

Teach us how to pray. The good news is that, when we're honest that we struggle with prayer, Jesus wants to teach us. He teaches his disciples a prayer and, frankly, it is an echo of a prayer that they already know. When Jesus taught the Jesus Creed, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength,” He was giving

them a teaching of the Jewish religion called the Shema. Every morning and every evening, Jews recite the Shema, "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your..." All that is the Shema. Every day they recite it to remind themselves who God is. Almost every day, they would say a Jewish prayer called the Kaddish. These days, it is still often said. When you see Jews at the Western Wall in Jerusalem, the Wailing Wall, and they are reaching out to the wall, they are often swaying like this, reciting prayers that they have memorized, often including the Kaddish. Here we use the Kaddish for mourning after someone has died or in worship or through the day. Jews would have heard it every day of their lives. This is the Kaddish. See if you can hear echoes of another prayer.

Glorified and sanctified be God's great Name throughout the world which He has created according to His will. May He establish His Kingdom in your lifetime and during your days and within the life of the entire House of Israel, speedily and soon; and say, Amen.

May His great Name be blessed forever and to all eternity. Blessed and praised, glorified and exalted, extolled and honored, adored and lauded be the Name of the Holy One, blessed be He, beyond all the blessings and hymns, praises and consolations that are ever spoken in the world; and say, Amen.

May there be abundant peace from heaven, and life, for us and for all Israel; and say, Amen.

He who creates peace in His celestial heights, may He create peace for us and for all Israel; and say, Amen.

Morning and noon and night in worship and on the streets, the followers of Moses and Abraham and God say the Kaddish. It is their prayer. Saying it every day over and over, they know it by heart, right? But it also can lose meaning. Anybody ever hear a prayer that you have prayed so often that it tends to lose its meaning? I grew up in a tradition that has prayers I was to recite, that I was to pray. Often after I had been bad, I would go to confession and confess my sins, and the priest would say, "Say 75 of these and 300 of those." It was a bad week. And I would go out and kneel at the alter and pray,

Hail Mary, full of grace. The Lord is with thee.
Blessed art thou amongst women,
and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.
Holy Mary, Mother of God,
pray for us sinners,
now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

That's the Hail Mary. I know it. I know it in my sleep, and I know that I know it in my sleep because I prayed it in my sleep. A lot. And before you Protestants get all uppity, how many of you can say,

Our Father,
Who art in heaven,
hallowed be Thy name;
Thy kingdom come;
Thy will be done on earth....

You know it. It's on autopilot. And when Jews prayed the Kaddish, that is what often happened. Why would Jesus teach them another memorized prayer? I think Jesus takes parts of the Kaddish and puts it into His language and says to His followers, "Pray like this," so that they will know how God wants us to talk to Him and will be reminded again and again and again of God's priorities. With the Jesus Creed, Jesus takes the Shema, "only one God," "love the Lord your God" and adds to it, "love others as yourself." Now with the Lord's Prayer, He takes the Kaddish, the Jewish prayer, and He makes it His own. He adds to the praise of God, the care for other people. When you start the Kaddish, you hear "Glorified and sanctified be God's great Name" or as Jesus would say, "Our Father who art in heaven." "Blessed be Your Name," "May You establish Your Kingdom." "Thy Kingdom come" and on and on. He echoes the Kaddish for His followers.

I tend to start my prayers for other people with what I know about those people, what I am sure that God needs to do with their lives. Jesus offers a different path. He says, "Begin with what God wants done for them, not what you want done for them." So the Lord's Prayer has two sections to it. **Jesus wants us to learn how to know God and love God better, and Jesus wants us to know other people and love other people better.** Love of God, love of others. Jesus goes beyond the Kaddish. First, instead of "Glorified and sanctified be God's great Name," Jesus says, "When you pray, say, 'Abba, Father, Daddy,'" so that we know that God loves us like the parents of Lucas [Lucas Arthur Whaley] love him, like John Emerson's mommy and daddy love him, so that we can learn to feel safe with that God, "Our Father...."

Then Jesus adds *us* to the Kaddish. The Kaddish is all about God and God bringing peace and Jesus adds *us* to that. "Forgive us our sins." "Give us our bread." "Deliver us from evil." He adds *us* to His prayer so that we'll know that the love of God sends us out to love other people better and provide for their needs, to show us temptation when it comes, to keep us away from trouble. Jesus sees the world differently than you and I do. You and I see the world in terms of good place, bad place; safe place, trouble; poverty, wealth; sickness, health; reputation. Jesus sees the world differently. When we pray the way Jesus prays, it helps us see the world differently. Let me say that again. When you pray the way Jesus prays, it helps you see the world differently. You put on Jesus glasses, and you see the world differently.

In 1968 Bobby Kennedy ran for the presidency of the United States. In his campaign he went where presidential candidates had never gone before. He went to the slums. He went to the boondocks. He said, "I want this to be a different kind of campaign." One time he went into Harlem, Spanish Harlem back then, with welterweight champion of the world, Joe Torres. He figured he would be safe if he went with Torres. Torres felt like he was just being used. "I'm a celebrity. You're a celebrity so you want me." They get into the limo that was taking them through Harlem and Torres said, "Mr. Kennedy, why do you want to be President?" Later after Kennedy was shot, Torres said, "Kennedy kept looking out the window and said, 'It's because I realized the world I was living in wasn't the real world at all. There was another whole world out there I was missing.'" "Thy Kingdom come to the earth. Thy will be done." Do we see the real world?

Prayer does not stop with the Lord's Prayer or with our prayers, it doesn't stop with *Amen*. The Lord's Prayer is supposed to get off its feet and walk out into the world. It is supposed to take our yearning to live the right way and turn it into action. That is what prayer does. Prayer is not just intercession. Prayer is supposed to be enlisting. When you pray to God, you are saying,

“God, I’m your woman. I’m your guy. This is me.” It’s not just asking, it’s enlistment.

I told you this is one of those battlegrounds for me. Before we pray together, I’d like to end with something that is still only half-formed in my mind, I want to say half-baked. I’m not there yet. I listened to a friend, a couple of weeks ago now, and he was talking about prayer. He said, “American Christians are different. You are the freest, best educated, wealthiest, most generous people in the world. You are the freest, and yet I feel like you are spiritually enslaved. I feel like the American church is enslaved to safety. You want so much for God to keep you safe. You are earnest and prosperous. You are thoughtful and, yet for you, trouble is bad. You are enslaved to safety.” He said, “When you’re not in trouble, when things are, ummmm, not great but not terrible, when you don’t desperately need God, you don’t cry out to God, and you don’t gloriously experience His power. You say, ‘Our Father, Who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy Name. Thy kingdom come....’ you say, ‘Thank You, Lord, for the food I’m about to eat,’ but it’s when you are in trouble, you see His power.”

His friends said that he sees in the American church, a tremendous preoccupation with programs instead of prayer, as if programs can work to have the Almighty God come and change your life. Don’t think about that too long! We have plenty of programs here. Programs will not change our lives, but if we can do our service to God without God, then if God doesn’t show up, it’s not a disaster, right? If we can do a half-million meals for Feed My Starving Children, it’s no disaster if God doesn’t show up because we have great capacities of our own, and we want to be safe. If we don’t need prayer for our work, maybe we are in the wrong work. If we don’t need prayer for our day, maybe we’re living the wrong day. If we’re not in trouble, then are we in the world that Jesus sent us into? Because in this world, people are suffering badly and you and I are called to bring the Kingdom to them. Evil has to be opposed for the Kingdom to come, and where evil is opposed, there is trouble.

As I do these baptisms, my temptation is to pray for little ones and say, “Oh, Jesus, please keep this kid safe.” “Oh, Lord Jesus, you love little John Emerson, please keep him safe,” and that’s the prayer of the parents, right? And the grandparents. The temptation is to keep our kids and our churches safe, to keep them out of trouble. We need to help our kids *find* trouble. I need to raise my kids so they *run into* trouble because when they are in trouble doing the work of the King, that’s when they are really going to pray. That’s when they’re really going to seek God doing what *they* cannot do. But will they pray to get into trouble if I pray all their lives that they will be safe? Does God show up in power just when we feel safest?

There was something else Jesus said. It was something like, “The one who saves his life is going to lose it but if you lose your life for Me, then you will save it.” *That’s* when we are really praying! I don’t have that one covered, but I’m through praying for you to be safe. Even worse, I’m through praying for my daughter who is about to get married to be safe. I mean, she’s going to get married. I *don’t* know if she is going to get in trouble. I want her to pray differently. I want us pray differently, to cry out to God. So what I’d like us to do is to pray together the way that Jesus taught us, one phrase at a time. I’ll say it. You repeat it. And then we will pause. He said it should start like this.

Dad, our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy Name.

(All:) Dad, our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy Name.

Let's close our eyes so that it's really prayer and we're not distracted.

Lord God, it starts with whom You are, how much You love us, how we are only really loved when we are in Your arms and turn to You. Our Father in heaven, our mother and our father, the best parents ever, praised be Your Name. Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy Name. Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Together,

(All:) Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Lord God, Father, I pray that You will give me eyes to see the real world, the eternal world that is starting around me right now, the battle between good and evil, and that You will help my friends here see the places where Your Kingdom wants to come. Enlist us today. Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy Name. Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread.

Together,

(All:) Give us this day our daily bread.

Thanks for that. I've not missed a meal in a long time, but very few of us grow all that we need and even what grows can't happen without You. Thank You for food. Help me be thankful and grateful instead of greedy. Show my friends what they need and what others around them really need. Give us this day our daily bread. Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy Name. Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our debts, forgive us our sins.

Together,

(All:) Forgive us our debts.

Jesus, is this the only reason I came out in the ice today? It is worth it, just to ask You to wash me clean, to wash us clean. Of all those things we've thought that we're hurt or bitter or angry or cynical about, of all those things we've said or haven't said just this week, the times where I have let You down or we have hurt others or fallen short, wash it clean, forgive us, we pray. Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy Name. Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.

Together,

(All:) As we forgive our debtors.

Okay, this is where I sometimes need help, help to be reminded of those people who have hurt me before. They surprise me and I'm ungracious. Sometimes I need courage to be reminded of those people I have hurt, to ask forgiveness. My life would be different if my relationships were reconciled. Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy Name.

Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors and lead us *not* into temptation.

Together,

(All:) Lead us *not* into temptation.

Lord, ring the alarm bells. When I'm about to say that wrong thing, shut my mouth. When she is about to lose her temper, when he is about to cut someone off, let me see it. Make the alarm bell ring louder when we are about to do wrong for You are 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. Forgive us our debts as we forgive others. Don't lead us into temptation but deliver us from evil.

Together,

(All:) Deliver us from evil.

Today maybe that's just, help us keep thinking about You when the world talks about everything else. Today when we see the Evil One at work being a bully, keeping people poor, splitting relationships, deliver us from evil for Thine is the Kingdom and the power and the glory forever.

I would ask you to continue in prayer with song, together,

(All:) Our father, which art in heaven
Hallowed be thy name

Thy kingdom come
Thy will be done
On earth as it is in heaven

Give us this day
Our daily bread
And forgive us our debts
As we forgive our debtors

And lead us not into temptation
But deliver us, deliver us from evil
For thine is the kingdom, and all the power
And the glory
Forever. Amen.

Let that be more than a beautiful song to you. Let it be a prayer that Jesus will stir your heart, so instead of *Amen* you will give up and live out that prayer. Today I'm not going to give you the benediction, may God keep you safe. Today I pray that God our Father who made you will get you in deep trouble, that God the Son will give you grace to cry out in prayer and clean you off when you mess up, that God the Holy Spirit, when you are in deep trouble and don't know how to keep going, will give you peace that the world can never take away. And all the people said,

(All:) 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.