

Wicker Park Lutheran Church

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Last Tuesday, we held our monthly Congregation Council meeting. It's a time when nine of your elected leaders gather to discern, discuss, and guide the work of this community. At the start, a councilperson offers the opening prayer. And we always close with the Lord's Prayer. But right near the end of the meeting—after the budget updates, ministry reports, and thoughtful discussion—the vice president asks: “Who would like to open the meeting in prayer next month?” And then... the most silent part of the entire meeting. I'm convinced everyone starts praying that someone else will volunteer. It's almost comical—and yet, it's telling. There's something vulnerable about praying aloud, even in a room of faithful people. Maybe it's the fear of not knowing what to say. Or saying it the wrong way. Or maybe people worry I'll secretly be grading their theology.

But this hesitation isn't new. In today's gospel reading, even Jesus's disciples—those closest to him—ask: “Lord, teach us to pray.” Let's not forget that these were faithful people. People who had witnessed miracles, heard Jesus' teaching, and still didn't quite know how to pray. Jesus responded not with a lecture, but with a prayer. A simple, powerful, formational prayer. One we've come to call the Lord's Prayer.

Let's be honest: most of us have heard this prayer before. Many of us have said it countless times. But sometimes, I think we say it on autopilot—zipping through without engaging with the words. That's part of why we shuffle how

we say it during worship. Sometimes we sing it during Lent and Easter. We use the contemporary version during the summer. During Advent and Christmas, we embrace the traditional language with “trespasses,” “temptation,” and lots of “thy” and “thine.” We change it up to better focus on Jesus’s teaching. Today’s reading invites us to do the same. So, we’re going to do a pseudo-teaching sermon to see what we can discover.

The prayer begins: “Father, may your name be revered as holy.” This isn’t just an opening line—it’s a theological declaration. Jesus uses the common Jewish way of addressing God as a loving parent, then moves into honoring God’s name. In Greek, “hallowed be your name” is written as an aorist passive imperative—which is a fancy grammatical way of saying this isn’t a description or a mere wish. Rather, it’s a bold command saying, “Let your name be made holy!” It’s a cry for God to show up, to act, to make the divine nature known in this messy, complicated world.

That naturally flows into the next part: “Your kingdom come.”

This, in my opinion, might be the most misunderstood and the most difficult part of the whole prayer. Because we often treat prayer like a wish list. We climb into God’s lap like children on Santa’s knee and ask for what we want—may it be help, healing, guidance, or a good parking spot. And that’s okay. God welcomes it all and it brings awareness to God’s presence, which is a primary goal of prayer. But Jesus teaches us that prayer isn’t just about making requests—it’s about being transformed. It’s about aligning ourselves with God’s dream for this world. A dream where love takes precedence over power. Where forgiveness replaces vengeance. Where generosity undoes greed. This is the kingdom Jesus proclaimed in Luke chapter 4 when he

stood up in the temple and read from Isaiah's scroll — the kingdom that liberates, restores, and includes. And this kingdom was revealed in Jesus' ministry: when boundaries were broken down between rich and poor, between saint and sinner, between clean and unclean. That is what Jesus teaches us to pray. Jesus shows us that prayer is not about granting wishes, but it is about grafting our minds to be one with God. It's And, like Winnie and Henry, this is the life we're invited into through our baptisms. For, prayer shapes us not because we're trying harder, but because God continually invites us into alignment with divine love, mercy, and justice.

Jesus continues his prayer saying, "Give us each day our daily bread." He invites us to pray for enough—not excess—but enough for today. He invites us to ask for forgiveness and to offer forgiveness, to live with mercy as our guide. He teaches us to pray that we wouldn't be swallowed by the lies of this world—the ones that whisper our worth comes from achievement, our identity from appearance, our security from success. Jesus invites us to love God, love our neighbor, and love ourselves so that we might find abundant life.

And after this prayer, Jesus tells a story to emphasize the nature of prayer, namely that prayer is a constant thing. It's something that we live and isn't about the words we say. And that's why I think it's so beautiful that every single service we say this prayer. For, as one pastor puts it, "The Lord's Prayer can't be just words that we recite. It is a prayer that we live. It is one thing to say the words of the Lord's Prayer, but it is an entirely different thing to live the Lord's Prayer... When you live the Lord's Prayer, it becomes more

than words that you say. It is the choices you make, the grace you show, the forgiveness you give, and the bread you share.”¹

So yes, maybe praying out loud still feels intimidating. Maybe you’re worried you won’t get it right. But prayer is far less about getting it right—and far more about remembering what God has already done and continues to do. Prayer turns our attention to the presence of God already among us. It reminds us to watch for signs of grace, glimpses of mercy, and the quiet work of love.

And at the same time, prayer draws us into God’s kingdom. Because in the end, prayer isn’t about moving God—it’s about God moving us. Not by demand, but by grace. Not through pressure, but through promise. God invites us to live into the vision of the kingdom—a world restored, relationships healed, daily needs met.

So the next time you pray the Lord’s Prayer—and every time you pray it—I hope you don’t just say the words. I hope you hear them. I hope you receive them. And I hope you trust that God is already at work in and through them. May God’s kingdom come, God’s will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Amen.

¹ <https://fatpastor.me/2013/01/22/the-prayer-we-live/>