

First Presbyterian Church

Cheyenne, Wyoming

July 25, 2010

Rev. Bob Garrard

Worship Theme: Good Gifts From God,

Colossians 2:6–19; Luke 11:1–13

Today's scripture lessons are overflowing with good gifts from God. We will not have time to mention all the gifts in the passages, but will cover some very vital ones.

The first gift is prayer, which is an honest and direct communication with God. Prayer was of vital interest to all the disciples, so they came as a united body to ask Jesus to help them to learn how to pray. They must have been impressed by the way Jesus prayed. So they asked him for a model of how to pray in an honest and direct way to God.

What we heard read in Luke was what had been passed on to him by the other disciples as the model. (see bulletin info) "When you pray, say: 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." Luke 11: 2-4. This model for talking with God, this good gift is not only honest and direct, but uncomplicated and short.

Matthew remembered this gift of a prayer model just a bit differently. "Pray then in 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." Matthew 6: 9-13. Again this model is not only honest and direct, but also uncomplicated and to the point.

Unfortunately, complications with this good gift of prayer model, better known as the Lord's Prayer, developed in the Christian church over the centuries. We have argued over which version is best. The Reformers like John Calvin and John Knox chose debts instead of trespasses and added "thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever, Amen" to give it a more complete liturgical ending. Our Roman Catholic brothers and sisters kept it closer to the original ending, and a number of Christian denominations chose trespasses instead of debts. This is not good or bad, but complicates saying the prayer in mixed worship services. What really misses the mark is that people often insist that the Lord's Prayer must be said in a 1611 style of English used in the King James Version of the Bible. Often forgotten is that the original was taught by Jesus in Aramaic and written in the Greek by Matthew and Luke. So there is not just one language or style for this prayer.

When I served a church in Western, PA in the 1970's, I began to use the modern version occasionally in worship. An irate elder and his wife asked me to visit them so they could express their great anger over the new way to say the Lord's Prayer in modern English where debts are called sins. Some 25 year later, I can still see and hear that elder say to me: "Why can't we just pray the Lord's Prayer the way St. Paul taught it in the St. James Bible." You hear the problem, right? I had to explain to him and his wife, "that Jesus taught us the prayer, not Paul. Jesus first taught it to the

disciples in Aramaic, not English. The “St. James Bible” is really the “King James Bible.” King James was an English King (not James, the brother of Jesus), who authorized his English version of the Bible in 1611. Of course there is nothing wrong with the traditional versions of the Lord’s Prayer. Yet, learning the Lord’s Prayer in modern English only makes it more understandable for people of this age. Besides, in what language do people of other nations say this prayer?” My explaining the facts or asking such questions made no difference to them. I slowly realized that this prayer issue was not so much a matter of the head, but of the heart. Not of facts, but one of emotions.

This good gift of prayer from God through Jesus actually involves both intellect and heart. Consider how Jesus starts the prayer in Luke, “Father.” In the Aramaic, which Jesus spoke, it is “Abba.” To call God, Father, or Mother as some might prefer means that when one speaks with God it involves the deepest of intimacies. This is the God who created you and me; who in fact knew of us before we were in our mother’s womb; who watches over us all our lives, makes plans for and provides for our lives, saves us from sin and death, and then raises us from the dead as we are rooted in Jesus Christ, the Son. This is the God who never stops loving and correcting us. To begin the prayer as Jesus did with “Abba” involves both intellect and heart.

Jesus was also teaching us that there is no need for an intermediary of any kind when we pray. No priest, pastor, or saint is needed. In Colossians, some people foolishly thought they needed the stars of the horoscope or angels to speak with God. We can go straight to God who awaits our presence with him with the greatest of joy and intimacy.

As we pray, we do not even have to say a word, if we do not want to. We can just spend quiet time with God. What a good gift from God this is as one minister discovered. “As a young preacher he had his makeshift office in a Sunday school room at the back of the sanctuary. There was a single light on a cord that dangled over his small desk. He sat one afternoon working on his sermon. He heard a shuffling in the hall. ‘Who’s there?’ he asked. A little voice said, ‘Daddy, it’s me.’ The preacher said, ‘What do you want, son? Need some money for an ice cream? Come on in and I’ll give you a quarter.’ The boy sauntered on into the room and climbed up in his daddy’s lap and said, ‘I don’t want nothin. I just want to be close to you.’ How does that grab your heart? “The preacher told his congregation that real prayer is sometimes not wanting anything except to be in the presence of God.” “Emphasis,” July 29, 2007.

As we continue to pray the prayer Jesus taught, we discover more good gifts from God. “Hallowed be your name” is a gift. It means God is the most holy, perfect and wonderful being in all creation. It means God is not a part of creation which will wither and die or otherwise fail us. He is instead the eternal creator and will never fail to give what is best for us. Jesus made this point in the parable attached to this passage.

“Your kingdom come” is another gift. If one takes seriously that God is our ultimate father, creator and in Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, this is also a wonderful part of the prayer. Jesus is the living Kingdom of God. With his kingdom comes more gifts: We are made into new creations who are ready to receive and practice the fruits of the Spirit as Paul wrote about in Galatians (6) which are “love, joy, peace, patience,

kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.” With his kingdom comes a changed world where as Isaiah (11) wrote: “The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder’s den. They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.” We want this kingdom to come!

“Your kingdom come” can also be a dangerous gift to pray for if we do not want it, for it means God is in charge and we are not. We might not like that. Are we ready for God to take over our lives, even if it is all good? Worse yet is to pray for God’s Kingdom to come and not really believe God will answer the prayer. This can be a subtle and sad thing to practice as seen in this story.

“Television interviewer and journalist, Larry King, describes three farmers who gather daily in a field during a horrible drought. The men are down on their knees, looking upward, and praying the skies will open and pour forth a much-needed rain. Unfortunately, the heavens are silent, and the petitioners become discouraged, but they continue to meet every morning to lift up their request to God. One morning a stranger approaches and asks the men what they are doing. They respond, ‘We’re praying for rain.’ The newcomer looks at them and shakes his head, ‘No, I don’t think so.’ The first farmer says, ‘Of course we’re praying. We are down on our knees pleading for rain. Look around; see the drought. We haven’t had rain in more than a year!’ The outsider continues to nod his head and advises them their efforts will never work. The second farmer jumps in and says, ‘We need the rain; we aren’t asking only for ourselves, but for our families and livestock.’ The man listens, nods, and says he isn’t impressed. ‘You’re wasting your time.’ The third farmer can’t take any more, and in anger he says, ‘Okay, what would you do if you were in our shoes?’ The visitor asks, ‘You really want to know?’ The three landowners answer, ‘We really want to know! The future of our farmlands is at stake.’ The guest announces, ‘I would have brought an umbrella!’ [\(From Powerful Prayers, p. 243\).](#) So are we ready for God’s kingdom to come when we pray for the gift? Do we expect God to answer the prayer?

“Give us each day our daily bread is another gift.” This request is in part about daily bread, for the people of Jesus’ day had to make their bread each day, and it was a vital part of their diet. We pray for daily food, too. Yet there is more to this gift for in it we are asking God to nurture us in our faith, our minds, hearts and relationship to him, others and ourselves. Sometimes we need this “bread” every hour, not just daily.

Ah, then comes an even more beautiful and dangerous gift, “And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us.” “As surely and desperately as we need daily bread, we need forgiveness.” Who does not want forgiveness of their sins—unless one does not believe in sin, which sets a person up for a whole other set of problems. However, as Paul reminded us in the passage from Colossians, Jesus died for our sins and in our baptism we died to them too. Jesus erased our trespasses

and God raised us to new life just as Jesus was. Now we can live this new life with him. What a gift from God!

Yet, before we get too relieved of the debt of sin, let us hear the second part of this gift again: “for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us. Matthew writes it this way, “And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.” Unfortunately, the versions we use in English do not adequately express the fullness of this second part. It literally means: “Before we come to God asking for forgiveness of our sins, **we have already forgiven those who have sinned against us!!** Yes we must first forgive others before we can expect God to forgive us. Following the Matthew (6) version of this prayer Jesus declared: “For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.” We need to remember this when we pray this for this beautiful and dangerous gift from God. “One who will not forgive cannot receive forgiveness; mercy flows through the same channel, whether being given or received.” “As surely and desperately as we need daily bread, we need forgiveness,” and need to first forgive others their sins against us. We might say to God, “But I do not know if I can do this.” Of course we cannot without God’s help—that is why we have come to the Father in the first place. He is right beside us to help us learn how to forgive. TNIBC Vol. IX, pg. 235.

Finally, Jesus tells us to ask God: “And do not bring us to the time of trial.” The Bible tells that God indeed tests us to cause us to depend on him even more. “In the light of this tradition and the threat of persecution for our faith, the gift of this model prayer appeals to God as the One who controls all of life for deliverance from any trials that will threaten our relationship to God.” Protect us God, we pray, from straying from intimacy we have with you and losing all the grand gifts you have given us. TNIBC Vol. IX, pg. 235.

Quite a gift, this model prayer from Jesus, is it not? Are we ready to accept it as we pray to God? Ready or not, let us now pray to “Our Father who is in heaven.”