

Given being through prayer
Luke 11:1-13

“Lord, teach us to pray.” The disciples are waiting while Jesus is praying. And when he’s finished, one of them makes this request, “Teach *us* to pray.”

It’s an interesting request, isn’t it? Is it that they don’t know *how* to pray? Or, is there something about prayer and what they see in John’s disciples that they want to learn and be part of? What difference have they observed that prayer makes? Whatever it is, the disciple knows that he wants access. He wants Jesus to teach them to pray. As disciples of Jesus, they want to learn prayer from him so they can participate more fully in this life that he’s teaching them.

And Jesus is ready. His instruction is immediate. When you pray, Jesus teaches, “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 testing.”

This might be the briefest lecture in recorded history. I wonder if the disciples were disappointed. I wonder because of my own response. It isn’t just that it’s a short prayer, it’s that, at least at the surface, it’s a *simple* prayer. Perhaps even simplistic. A prayer for children. But it hardly seems appropriate for disciples of Jesus. They didn’t just start following Jesus yesterday. How could this prayer help them participate more fully in the life that Jesus is teaching them? Is teaching us?

So perhaps there’s more to this prayer than what appears on the surface. After all, at this point in Luke’s telling of the Jesus story, Jesus has already turned his face toward Jerusalem.

And he's already talked with the disciples about his death. Jesus knows that the disciples need a sturdy prayer practice to get them through what's ahead of them.

So...let's slow down...way down...and look at the prayer again.

"When you pray, say Father..." Now, for some of us, this first instruction is not instruction at all, but an obstacle. In the 21st century, many of us have been working against the oppression of patriarchy. The patriarchy that has given us the Doctrine of Discovery and the devastation of colonization. The patriarchy that has given us white supremacy. The patriarchy that abandons our sons and fathers to the loneliness and isolation of "being strong." In order to heal from the wounds and suffering that many have experienced at the hands of their fathers, praying to "Father" is the last teaching we want to hear.

And rightly so. If the image and idea of God as Father is painful, then surely we can pray, "Mother." Or "Parent."

And once we've removed the obstacle, we find something that we don't want to miss. There's something profound that Jesus is teaching. When Jesus teaches, "Say Father/Mother God..." he's talking about *who we are*, our identities, our very being. So we pray, "Parent God," as recognition that we are given our being by the Creator of the Universe.

With this first word of his teaching, Jesus is also invoking his own birth story. His mother was a virgin when she gave birth to him. This detail is important. Not because sex and sexuality are bad and Jesus couldn't be part of that. No. The reason it's important that Mary was a virgin is that in the social structure, identity was given to a person through the father. But Luke's telling of Jesus' birth story makes it very clear that the structures of patriarchy and empire *have no claim on Jesus*. Jesus' identity is given through the living God.

The Spirit that blew and breathed at creation is the same Spirit that breathes life and aliveness in Jesus.

By praying, Father/Mother God, we too are claiming our identities as children of God, siblings of Jesus. When we pray, Parent God, we are claiming an identity that's already ours. An identity that precedes the bloodline of our biological parents. When we claim God as our Parent, we are giving ourselves to being formed by God—God who is love and grace; who is mercy and justice; God who is giving and self-giving and forgiving; who is life and aliveness itself. *This* is the bloodline that we are claiming when we pray to God as our Parent. When we live into the fullness of our identity as God's beloved, we experience the abundance and aliveness of life—in all its glory, and in all its pain.

The second point of Jesus' teaching about prayer builds on the first, "Your kingdom come." There's an initial sense that Jesus is mixing his metaphors. It would make sense that a prayer that addresses God as Parent, would then open into, *Your family* come. But in this short prayer, every word counts. By using the language of a kingdom, Jesus keeps us from fixing on one image of God. And for a prayer that is forming us and preparing us for Jerusalem, by holding the metaphor of family and kingdom together, Jesus is both opening up and deepening this teaching.

As children in God's kingdom, this prayer teaches that we are, *each of us*, heirs in the kingdom. God's inheritance isn't for a single son or daughter, but for *all* daughters and sons. As we pray, "Your kingdom come," we are co-creating and participating in the coming of that very kingdom. A kingdom where everyone, *all bodies*, are God's beloved, receiving God's gracious and gratuitous inheritance of love and forgiveness. When we pray, "Your kingdom

come,” we’re praying to be shaped and transformed so that our being in the world is a reflection of our inheritance. When we pray, “Your kingdom come” we’re claiming our inheritance. We’re claiming God’s love and forgiveness as a gift and a reality in our living. And of course, inheritances are meant to be spent! In prayer we claim our inheritance so that in our living, we are free to share and spend the gifts we’ve received.

But our inheritance isn’t something to keep for ourselves. “Give us each day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us.” The teaching is getting more difficult. It may be a simple prayer, but the teaching is hard. With this instruction about food and sins, Jesus is teaching us about the economy of God’s Kingdom. “Give us each day our daily bread” invokes the wilderness. As the disciples listen, they are recalling the story they’ve heard all their lives about their ancestors’ living in the wilderness. The incredible story that every day in the wilderness they received their bread. Everybody had what they needed for *that* day. They couldn’t store the bread. Or invest it in the stock market. They couldn’t buy it or sell it. The economy of God’s Kingdom could not and cannot be domesticated. In the wilderness that is God’s Kingdom, *there is enough*. God’s economy is an economy of enough. *There is enough bread for everyone*. Not only is there enough bread, but there is also enough love. There is enough grace and mercy. There is enough justice and forgiveness. There is no reason to be stingy in our relationships. Or selfish. Or afraid. Because God’s Kingdom turns on an economy of enough.

As we pray this prayer, we are praying to be formed by God’s economy. We have received such an amazing and generous inheritance. We’ve inherited God’s love and forgiveness, not because we deserve it or because we’ve earned it—we’ve inherited it

because of Who and What God is. God is self-giving and forgiving. And God is participating in the Kingdom not as an absent sovereign, but as a parent who is present and at home with those she loves. As a parent who is interested in the life of his child. As a parent who cares about the well-being of her children. “Give us each day our daily bread. And forgive our sins as we forgive everyone indebted to us.” The economy of God’s Kingdom turns with reciprocity and collaboration and partnership. We are free to forgive because we have been forgiven. We are free to release others from what they owe us *because there is already enough*. And because in God’s Kingdom our desire is *for* each other, we *want* all others to know the fullness of life.

Jesus has been formed by this prayer that he’s teaching. His very being reflects this prayer. Because he has been praying and practicing this prayer, Jesus is free to live in the security and confidence of his identity as God’s beloved with the inheritance he’s received. And he’s free to trust the economy of God’s Kingdom. It is in the fullness of his identity and inheritance, trusting God’s economy, that he is free to face Jerusalem, even while knowing that these claims will be challenged and tested. And it is from this foundation of security and trust that Jesus offers the last piece of his teaching, “And do not bring us to the time of testing.”

This last piece is more difficult. Jesus’ ministry began with a time of testing. In chapter 4, Luke tells the story of Jesus in the wilderness being tested. And he was driven into the wilderness by the Holy Spirit of God. So clearly Jesus *was* led into a time of testing. Then, in the Parable of the Sower, Jesus talks about the seeds that fall on the rocks, that sprout and grow, but because they aren’t rooted, when testing comes, they fall away. Testing shows up

again at the end of Luke's Gospel. When they're in Jerusalem, the disciples accompany Jesus to the Mt. of Olives to pray. And he tells them, "Pray that you may not enter into testing."

Then Jesus separates himself from them and prays, "Father/Mother God, if it is Your will...not my will but Your will..." For the things that are in front of him, Jesus needs his body and being and will to be rooted in his identity as God's beloved. He cannot be distracted by the concerns and economics of empire. When he is being falsely accused and executed, his desire is to remain confident that God's economy will be enough. And because his being has been formed in prayer, he is praying that he can bear this shame, that he can bear the pain because his inheritance is greater than both of these. And he is praying that he can forgive the cruel debt being inflicted on him.

This prayer, "Do not bring us to testing," seems to be something more subtle and nuanced than a simple petition. Jesus knows there will be testing. This prayer is about how we function and respond to times of testing. And when we watch Jesus, we see that prayer has formed him so that he is able to stay rooted, trusting that his inheritance has provided him with everything he needs. In order to face his time of testing, he returns to prayer so that he can rest in God's economy. So that he can relax into the enoughness of love and forgiveness, of grace and mercy. And because there is already enough, *he is able to bear it.*

And he does bear it. And in the resurrection we see how absolutely sturdy and indestructible and trustworthy God's inheritance and economy are!

This simple prayer has the power to form and transform us—our being, our will, our world, creation itself. It has the power to create God's Kingdom as a reality, on earth as in heaven. And it is a sturdy prayer. Sturdy enough to sustain Jesus...and sturdy enough to

sustain us so that we too, can bear every humiliation and shame. And we who are white and privileged, we especially need this prayer to root us as we are learning to renounce the principality and power of whiteness.¹ In the process, we will be humbled...and we *can* bear it. For we have received from our Mother/Father God an inheritance of bottomless love and forgiveness, grace and mercy, joy and peace. There is enough. More than enough!

In a few minutes we'll be invited to participate in Communion. Surely Communion is the Lord's Prayer enacted. When we eat at the Lord's Table, we are claiming our inheritance. As we eat Bread, we're participating in God's economy and it becomes part of our body and being and will. As we drink from the Cup, we're remembering that Jesus' bloodline is our bloodline. Gathered at the Lord's Table as a community, together we're practicing our prayer, "Do not bring us to testing." This Bread and this Wine will nourish and sustain us so that we, like Jesus, when we face the shame and humiliation of the cross, whatever form our crosses take, we too will breathe with the Holy Spirit, trusting our identities as God's beloved, trusting our inheritance, and trusting that God's economy will always open up into resurrection.

May we learn and *pray* the Lord's Prayer.

May we *give* ourselves to being formed and transformed by this prayer.

¹ Willie James Jennings' vocabulary. From his lecture in South Bend on 072719.