

Pentecost 7 Lectionary 17 - Sunday, July 24, 2022

Luke 11:1-14

Rev. Paul Sartison

There's a hymn in our book – it's number 402 in the ELW, if you want to make a mental note of that and look it up later...or now. It goes like this: "Eternal Spirit of the living Christ, I know not how to ask or what to say; I only know my need, as deep as life, and only you can teach me how to pray."

There are two more verses, but this one will do for now. The part that puts me at ease comes right at the start: "Eternal Spirit of the living Christ, I know not how to ask or what to say." Sometimes that's all I can say, when my need is too deep and I don't know how to express it, or when I'm just at a loss, or just too tired or disillusioned and confused to be able to put the words together: "Eternal Spirit of the living Christ, I know not how to ask or what to pray..."

Sometimes it puts me at ease, but this past week it made me laugh at myself. I was praying with someone after we'd had a good visit together, and as I started into the prayer, to be honest there was a little thing in my head saying, "Hey, this sounds good Paul. Way to go." So I kept going – and for me "keeping on going" means more than a minute or so – and then I kind of stumbled, and then wondered what to say next, and I said something that seemed sort of thin, and the words got stuck, and I'd sort of prayed myself into a corner and I couldn't get out, and the voice inside said, "Paul, you're losing the thread." So I wrapped it up and if I had paused for a minute those words would have come back..."Eternal Spirit of the living Christ, I don't know how to ask or what to say."

One of Jesus' disciples said, "Lord, teach us to pray."

I'm sure all of us have said or heard someone say, sometime, "I don't know how to pray," or "I'm no good at praying." But maybe there really is no knowing how or being good at it. Maybe our best prayer is to come with that disciple of Jesus and say, "Lord, teach us to pray. We don't know how. Teach us to pray."

We've prayed for Ukraine since February 24th, and it all just keeps getting worse, and how are we supposed to keep on with it and what do we even ask for any more? "Lord, teach us to pray."

A "Freedom convoy" is honking loudly and persistently four doors down from my house; some people think it's great and some think it's, well, not great....and how do we pray about this? "Lord, teach us to pray." We're divided; "Lord, teach us to pray."

The pavement was melting in France, there was heat like no one had ever felt. They say it's all just going to get worse all over. "Lord, teach us to pray."

We wonder about church; will there be anyone in our pews? Where are we going? How do we get there? "Lord, teach us to pray." We really want to be inclusive, but we're not really sure how. "Lord, teach us to pray."

Someone in Winnipeg has all their possessions in a shopping cart in a bus shelter - and there are hundreds more like - while I have so much more than I need, so much daily bread, and how did we let our world get that messed up? "Lord, teach us how to pray."

There's this someone I love, and their life is slipping away. "Teach us to pray." Or there's this someone I love and their love is slipping away. "Teach us to pray." "Teach us to pray, just like John taught his disciples. Just like you've been

teaching yours, like you've been teaching us, for all these generations. Lord, teach us to pray."

How do we pray for our own need, for the world's need, for my neighbour's need, for creation's need? "Like this," Jesus says: "God, let your name be holy. Let your kingdom come. Give us what we need each day. Forgive us, for we forgive everyone who owes us something. Don't bring us to the test." There. It sounds too simple. It takes about seventeen seconds if you read slowly with a pause or two for effect.

Prayer isn't complicated. It's not something you're good at or bad at. We just hold up the world's need to God, with or without words. And then we live in the world, and get on with the sticky business of living and caring and figuring out what to do.

And prayer is like this: One of Jesus' disciples came to him and said, "Lord, teach us to pray. Not just me. Teach *us*." And Jesus said "Pray like this," and he speaks that seventeen second prayer that says things like this: Give *us* our daily bread. Forgive *us* our sins as we forgive anyone who is in debt to *us*. Don't put *us* to the test. Without coming right out and saying it Jesus is reminding us that we do not pray alone. Sometimes that's obvious, like when we come here on a Sunday morning or when we gather any time, with prayers that are really old, spoken for centuries, or with prayers made up last Thursday or made up on the spot. We gather for prayers that are written down or memorized or spontaneous, spoken with quiet grace or with exuberant grace and hands raised high. However it is, we don't pray alone.

There are people who pray together in small groups in someone's home. It's not everyone's thing, but it's another way that we don't pray alone. A couple once told me how decades and decades ago they'd been parked at the local spot by the river where people went and parked to do what people do when they park by the river, but they just went there to pray. We don't pray alone.

And some of us prefer to pray by ourselves, in a quiet place, but even then we don't pray alone. In prayer we're not left to fend for ourselves.

However we pray, we pray with the whole communion of saints, then and now, here and there. So when we pray "Your kingdom come," we pray with everyone who needs a taste of living under God's reign. We pray with everyone who needs justice, with everyone who needs a taste of peace, with everyone who is left on the edges of society, with everyone who is excluded, with everyone who still needs to be healed. And we pray, giving thanks, with everyone in every place who has experienced some kind of peace, or healing, or healthy relationships, or welcome and belonging. We pray for what the world needs, we pray with gratitude for all that we have been given. And we pray these prayers together.

When we pray, "Give us today the bread we need for today," we pray with everyone who has never gone hungry; we pray with everyone who enjoyed daily food and drink with friends around a dinner table on Friday night; we pray with gratitude for the daily bread we've been given and we pray that it will be given again for another day. And when we pray for daily bread we pray with everyone who gets their daily bread from the Urban, or we pray with everyone who just has no daily bread, or daily shelter, or...doesn't have what they need from day to day. We pray together with longing and hope and urgency and even demand. We pray

with thanksgiving. We pray with trust. We pray all these prayers together.

We pray to be forgiven, together. We remind ourselves that we need to forgive. Together. We pray with the ones we are called to forgive. When we pray to be forgiven we remind ourselves, honestly, that we – as individuals, as a society, as a church – need to be forgiven. We pray together with the ones we have hurt and who might even struggle to forgive us. We pray this prayer together. We're not left all on our own.

And when we pray, even with this simple seventeen second prayer or with more words that take more time, we are praying to the one who has already given what it is that we pray to receive. We pray to the one whose kingdom has already come near to us in Jesus, with healing and welcome; sometimes with righteous anger and so often with righteous celebration and friendship. We pray to the one who fed Israel with manna in the wilderness, who fed a crowd of thousands on a hillside, who fed friends at a table the night before he was betrayed, who has fed us at the table. We pray for forgiveness to the one who has forgiven us before, and who is always so ready to forgive.

Lord, teach us to pray. For all that we have already been given. For what you promise to keep on giving for the healing of the world. AMEN.