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May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

Lord, teach us to pray. Jesus says “When you pray, say,” Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, as we forgive everyone indebted to us and do not bring us to the time of trial.

Prayer is a central part of our faith and of who we are as followers of Christ. So when I read this text for today I was both excited and frightened. Excited because even though I spend a lot of time praying as you might expect and I often need to remind myself of the very things all of you wonder about as well. Which is the frightening part of prayer because people desire to do it right and want a step by step method to ensure it is done properly. People want to know that God hears their prayers. So there must be a right way, a proper formula to follow, a certain position to ensure our prayers are heard.

Many times when I talk with people about prayer they express it in terms of frustration or futility. They say, “I prayed my mother would not have to suffer with her illness, yet she continued to live for many months.” I asked God to deliver me from an abusive relationship, yet the abuse continued on. I prayed God would protect my child, yet he was injured anyway. You know these prayers and these feelings of speaking words into the abyss, time in prayer with no perceived response from God. So then comes the questions. Does God hear me? Did I pray wrong? Did I not say the right words? Do I have to be in church for God to hear me?

So today I hope to dispel the myth that there is only one proper way as I invite you to think differently about what Jesus is teaching us about prayer. I want you to think about how you pray? Who taught you how to pray? What have you learned about prayer through your experiences in life?

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The disciples often saw Jesus off praying. In the Gospel of Luke prayer is pivotal and life giving for Jesus especially at the most important times in his ministry. Following his baptism while he was praying the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus as a dove. As Jesus begin his ministry, the people find him in a solitary place in prayer. From there Jesus goes and calls his disciples to come and follow him. Jesus was in the midst of prayer when he was transfigured in the sight of Peter, James and John on the mountain. The most notable times of prayer for Jesus was first on the Mount of Olives preceding his arrest and finally on the cross itself.

So it is not surprising that here in the midst of Jesus ministry as his disciples are struggling to understand as they journey with Jesus. Here as they are following him, learning from him and watching his every move that they come and ask him to teach them to pray. Here Jesus not only gives them a prayer to speak, but instruction on why and for what reason they are to pray and most importantly to whom they are pray.

There have been many times when people, especially young people ask me about prayer and to teach them how to pray. The first couple of times I was surprised that people asked me the teach them to pray. I thought everyone knew how to do it. I grew up around people who prayed all the time and to me it was like breathing, you just did it.

So when asked that question, I had to think back on who taught me to pray, where was it that is learned about praying. Growing up in a non-denominational church we there was always prayer and prayers often by the lay members of the congregation. So I imagine I learned from listening and being connected to that style of prayer. Their prayers were free form and from the heart. They spoke out of their faith in Jesus as their Lord by the power of

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the Spirit. My mother grew up in a southern Baptist house where prayer was just what they did. I grew up listening to prayers as a part of life.

After becoming a Lutheran I learned a different way of prayer. Not what I learned growing up was wrong, it is just different. In our tradition the prayers in worship are written with a specific purpose in mind. The prayers of intercession are prayers for the church, the world, and all the people of God. We specifically lift up the different parts of life with each petition asking for assistance or justice or mercy or guidance. Some of the prayers I use are written for me in the resources I use to prepare for worship. Others are my own prayer petitions written specifically for needs of First English.

But each is addressed to God, our Father, our Lord, our Creator, our Guide, or our Savior. One of the radical parts of the prayer for the people was in a culture who did not speak the name of God was to now address him in the most familiar term. We translate it as Father, which it is. IT is the same word the people would use to talk about their own father. I know in our day we have to qualify what we mean because we all know not all earthly fathers are the same. But here it stands for a loving, caring, forgiving parent whom we know and reflect back the same qualities we witness.

Who in your life do you know you can count on every time and any time you call?

Who is the person you could call or text or drop by on a moments notice knowing they will stop whatever they are doing to come to your aid.

Jesus tell a parable of a man who in the middle of the night comes knocking on the door of his friend asking for bread. The friend refuses to answer the door and shouts back, 'go home, it is late and I am in bed.' Jesus says because of his persistence the friend will get up and offer him whatever he needs.

Persistence is not the best translated word. A slightly better word would be

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'shamelessness' or boldness that comes with trust in your friend. The friend will get up not because the other is standing outside pounding and pounding and shouting for assistance. He offers assistance out of duty and friendship. The first friend came asking trusting his friend would respond, knowing his friend will do the honorable thing so his friend would not be put to shame.

Prayer is about being bold enough to speak your needs, your concerns, your requests to God trusting God is listening and responding. The difficulty is so often people act as if their prayers are a way to negotiate or to receive or to tell God what you want done. Then when it does not happen as you expect, feel left out or unheard or uncertain if your prayers were heard. It often leaves you frustrated looking for the proper formula to ensure God will answer.

Read passage from *'Traveling Mercies'* from Anne Lamott – the best two prayers are “help me, help me, help me.” And “Thank you, thank you, thank you.”

The primary reason for prayer is not the right words or form rather prayer is about communicating with and building a relationship with God. Prayer is our main way to communicate with our Lord. Jesus teaches us to pray not to give us a better formula or the only words we are to speak. But invites us into a deeper, more honest, more trusting relationship with God. Who wants to be known as the loving, caring and providing parent we all desire. He may not give us everything we want, but provides for us everything we need. Grant us O Lord our daily bread. Thank you, thank you, thank you.

AMEN

T.G.B.T.G.

*Pastor Michael*