

50 Days Ablaze! Sermon Series 2
Second Mission Response – April 23, 2006
Matthew 6:5-15
Rev. Barry J. Keurulainen

“Pray” Sermon: “P.R.A.Y.”

Lord Jesus, teach us how to pray. Amen

Who taught you? Who taught you how to pray—not who taught you *to* pray, but *how to* pray? For example, my Dad taught me *to* pray. He would say, “Barry, say your prayers before you go to bed.” But he didn’t necessarily show me *how* to do it. He was very handy with his hands, and he would say, “C’mon, Barry, I’m going to show you how to work on the car,” and I’d watch while he did it, but he never really taught me in the process. Later on he would realize that and try to do some quick make-up lessons, but anyone who has seen me and cars knows that it didn’t take.

Who taught you how to pray? Who was the model for you, that you looked at and thought, “This is what it means to pray,” and really shaped how you pray today? Anybody—out loud?

- Sunday School teachers as a little girl growing up? Great.
- Your mother? Another good person to teach you how to pray.

Florence, I lift you up as one of the prayer warriors of this congregation—I’ve said this many times. I can believe one would be taught well at your knees. Others? Who taught you how to pray?

- Mary Jean taught you how to pray? Good. She’s taught a lot of people how to pray.

My brother has been a big influencer for me in many things. Whenever I share with him any burden I might have or something that’s going on, there’s not a phone call goes by that, before the end of it, he doesn’t say, “Let’s pray.” He’s really taught me about that immediacy of prayer on the phone that I’ve tried to carry over into my own life. That doesn’t always happen, though, does it? You share with somebody about a burden on your heart, and they say, “I’ll pray for you,” and you so hunger for them to say a word of prayer right then. Who taught you how to pray?

The disciples, when they were with Jesus for those three years, must have heard Him pray often. So impressed, so touched were they by the way Jesus prayed. Do you know what that is like? Can you think of somebody in your life that when they pray you think, “Wow. I wish I could pray like that.” Well, the disciples spent time with Jesus, and finally one day they said to Him, “Teach us how to pray.” And He said, “When you pray, pray like this. . . (say it with me?)”

Our Father, who art in heaven,
Hallowed be Thy name,
Thy Kingdom come,
Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread
And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation
But deliver us from evil. **Amen.**

Yes, stop there. That is as far as Jesus taught, right there. He didn't add "For Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever." The Church later on would add the conclusion to give praise to Him. If you look in your English translation, it will include a footnote that says that most ancient manuscripts do not include that.

The prayer Jesus taught becomes such a model for prayer—of how to pray. Sometimes we fall into the trap of just saying it by recitation. In reality, Jesus was saying this is *how* you are to pray—this is the model...this is the blueprint. And what is it that we learn? Well, we could take a look at each petition. That is how Luther did it. But right now with you today I would rather look at some broad brush strokes of what it teaches me. When I look at the "Lord's Prayer," as we call it, I see four things in it that teach me about prayer. Look at your sermon outline and the acronym of pray: P.R.A.Y.

The "P" stands for PRIVILEGE. Don't ever forget that when you pray it is a privilege. For you to say 'Our Father' (or whatever your favorite name is for God) is a privilege that not everyone in the world has. This little infant who was baptized here today was born a creation of God, a creature of God, but not a "child of God." God claimed him to be His child through the waters of Baptism. Prior to that, this child was spiritually dead with no spiritual life in him. Not everyone born in the world is a child of God. You are only a child of God if you can by faith call Jesus Christ your brother. Two-thirds of the world rejects Jesus Christ, and so they are not the children of God. For you to say, "Our Father" is a privilege that is given only to those who are the children of God. After Jesus was raised from the dead, He spent forty days with His disciples and then he was ascended. After His ascension, what we know about the next 300 years is that the early Christian Church would take an adult convert to the faith and teach them in the faith for three years before baptizing them. During that time, they were not invited to pray the Lord's Prayer until after baptism, because it is a rare privilege only for the children of God.

Look at the first passage in your outline, John 20, and read it out loud with me:

"Jesus said, 'Don't hold onto me for I have not yet returned to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them I'm returning to my Father and your Father, My God, your God.'"

That's huge. Jesus is just out of the tomb, just moments after the Resurrection, and He says to Mary, "You go tell the disciples; I'm going back to my Father and *your* Father." No good Jew in his right mind would ever dare call Yahweh 'Father.' No good Jew would dare to be that intimate. But Jesus is saying that God is not only His Father, but our Father. He's given

us that right. See, when we sinned we lost the right to call Him Father. But in Jesus' Resurrection, we again have the right to call Him Abba, Daddy, Father. Do you understand the rare privilege that is yours to call Him Father?

Elizabeth and Seth were visiting with us last week, and my Elizabeth—my daughter (I forget that she's been gone so long that some new people here may not know who Elizabeth is)—but I told her that in a couple of weeks I would be going to Virginia, near where she lives, for a speaking engagement. It would be a quick trip, and I told her I was not going to interrupt their routine with a quick stop as I drove through. Well, Elizabeth did her little begging routine that only Elizabeth can do—"You gotta stop, you gotta stop, I want you to stop." Even Seth got in on it. "Okay, okay," I said, "I'll stop by and stay over night." So I approached my assistant this past week and said, "Clear my schedule for Wednesday night. I'm going to leave a day early and stop to visit Elizabeth and Seth." My assistant looked at the schedule and said, "You have two really important meetings here." I said, "It's alright. Cancel them." Such is the sway of a daughter. Some would say she has me wrapped around her little finger. I won't deny it. But don't you understand that as much as I yearn to respond to my daughter's request—do you understand—that your Father in heaven yearns all the more to respond to your requests? You're His daughters, His sons. There's the relationship.

Folks, as I wrote this sermon, I thought I am such a peon when it comes to prayer. I mean that. I'm not being humble pie here. Who am I to preach on prayer? And so I thought I would share with you some quotes about a man who knew all about prayer. He prayed three hours a day. He said he could not make it through a day without that much time in prayer. Let me turn to what the blessed Martin Luther has to say about the privilege of prayer in regard to "Thy Kingdom come":

"From this you see that we are not asking here for crumbs or for a temporal, perishable blessing, but we are asking for an eternal, priceless treasure and for everything that God himself possesses. It would be far too great for any human heart to dare to desire it unless God himself had commanded us to ask for it. But, because He's God, He claims the honor of giving far more abundantly and liberally than anybody can comprehend, like an eternal, inexhaustible fountain which the more it gushes forth and overflows, the more it continues to give. God desires nothing more from us than that we ask many and great things of Him. On the contrary God is angered if we don't ask and demand with confidence."

That's the privilege that we have—to ask Him many and great things because He's invited us and given us the right to do that—because He calls us His children. But don't think for a moment that prayer is only a privilege. If it's only a privilege, you're going to get lazy in prayer and you're just going to pray whenever you feel like it. Let's look at the second letter in the PRAY acronym.

The "R" stands for RELIANCE. We cannot get by...we cannot function...we cannot live and be productive and fruitful as Christians unless we pray, and pray often. Will you read Philippians 4 from your outline out loud with me:

“I know what it is to be in need. And I know what it is to have plenty. I’ve learned the secret of being content in any and every situation. Whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through Him who gives me strength.”

Reliance. Jesus Christ, before every critical event in His life, would spend hours in prayer. What makes us think we can get by doing what we do in life without prayer? Jesus couldn’t do it. He absolutely relied on His Heavenly Father for wisdom, and for guidance, and for strength. What makes us think that six and a half minutes (the average time a Christian spends in prayer) is enough time for us to function? If left on my own, with my own resources, everything I touch becomes disastrous. In prayer I have to learn to rely on Him more than me. Luther wrote a prayer for Pastors before they went into worship and preaching. It’s called Luther’s Sacristy Prayer. I pray it often. It goes like this:

“Oh Lord God, you have made me a Pastor and teacher in the church. You see how unfit I am to administer rightly this great responsible office. Had I been without Thy aid and counsel I surely would have ruined it all long ago. Therefore do I invoke Thee. How gladly do I desire to yield and consecrate my heart and mouth to this ministry. I desire to teach the congregation. I too desire to learn and to keep Your Word my constant companion, to meditate upon it earnestly. Use me as Your instrument in Your service. Only don’t forsake me. For if You leave me to myself Lord, I will bring it all totally to ruin. Amen.”

Luther understood that without God he brings it all to ruin. Prayer is important, because it teaches us to rely on someone greater than ourselves. In prayer I learn that I can’t trust me. But I can trust Him! “I can do everything through Him who gives me strength.” Has there ever been a time in your life that the Lord has allowed you to suffer for a while? Has there ever been a time in your life when the Lord has allowed you to be weak for a while? It’s an incredibly humbling experience, because those things you did naturally you found you could not do on your own. The only thing you could do is pray. But you found in prayer that it was more than just words—it was true—“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” And you learn that you can rely on someone more faithful and stronger than yourself. Listen to more of what Luther says about reliance in prayer:

“Accordingly, we Christians must be armed and expect everyday to be under continuous attack. Then we will not go about securely and heedlessly as if the devil were far from us. But we will at all times expect his blows and fend them off. Even if at present I am chaste, and patient, and kind, and firm in faith, the devil is likely at this very hour to send such an arrow into my heart that I can scarcely endure, for he is an enemy who never lets up. He never becomes weary. When one attack ceases, a new one arises. At such times, my only comfort is to run here, seize hold of the Lord’s Prayer, and speak to God from my heart, ‘Dear Father, you commanded me to pray. Let me not fall because of temptation.’ Then you will see that the temptation has to cease and eventually admit defeat. Otherwise, if you attempt to help yourself by your own thought, your own resources, you’re only going to make the matter worse, and you’re only going to give the devil a wider opening, for he has a serpent’s head. If he finds an opening into which it can slither, the whole body will irresistibly follow. But prayer can resist him, and prayer drives him back.”

Do you believe that? Do you believe those words? Then why is it that our lives are so prayer-less? Because our sinful nature keeps causing us to believe that we can do it ourselves. Our culture says we can do it ourselves. There is a story that I grew up with—*The Little Engine That Could*—it was one of my favorite stories...the little engine chugging up the hill, “I think I can, I think I can, I think I can.” Boy, I loved that story! The only problem is, it doesn’t work...because my experience in life is that I can’t do it on my own. Only in prayer do I connect myself to the very power of God to help me in every situation. There is nothing going on in your life right now for which God doesn’t want you to pray about, for which He then wants to respond with His help and His strength—nothing!

What we must realize is that we are not just battling a bad day...or a bad life...or a grumpy boss. We are fighting against Satan himself. That’s the third letter in PRAY. The “A” stands for AGAINST SATAN. Look on your outline at Ephesians 6:

“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against authorities, against powers of this dark world, and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God so that when the day of evil comes, you can stand your ground and after you’ve done everything, to stand. Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints. Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel.”

Our battle is against nothing less than Satan himself. Satan is such a powerful beast, and he is so, so angry. He’s not angry at you; He’s angry at God. But the only way he can touch God is by touching you. He can hurt God’s heart if he can weaken you, or worse, take you away from Him. He’s taking out all of his anger at God toward us. That in itself ought to cause us to shake and tremble—to think that Satan looks unceasingly for ways to take us down. But listen again to this great man of prayer, Dr. Martin Luther:

“For no one can believe how the devil opposes and obstructs the fulfillment of God’s will. Satan cannot bear to have anyone teach or believe rightly. It pains Satan beyond measure when his lies and his abominations are not revered, and are not honored, and are not listened to. Therefore, like a furious foe, he raves and rages with all of his power and with all of his might, marshaling all of his subjects, and even enlisting the world and our own flesh as His ally. For our flesh is in itself vile and inclined to evil, even when we have accepted God’s Word and believe it. The world, too, is perverse and wicked. Here the devil will stir everything up. He’ll feed and fan the flames in order to impede us, put us to flight, cut us down, and bring us once again beneath his power. That is his only purpose, his only desire, his only thought, and for this end he strives without rest, day and night, using all of his art, all of his tricks, all of his methods, all of his approaches to tear at us. Therefore, we who would be Christians must surely expect to have the devil with all of his angels and all of the world as our enemy. And we must expect that he will inflict every single possible misfortune and grief upon us. For where

God's Word is preached, accepted, believed, and bears fruit, there the holy and precious cross will not be far behind. Let no one think that we will have peace; rather, we have to sacrifice all we have on earth. Now this will grieve our flesh in the old part of us, for it means that we have to remain steadfast, but our confidence is found when we pray, and we say to God 'Thy will be done.' For our Father hears our prayers as a Father hears his own dear child's prayers."

Let me speak to you for a moment, as your pastor, about my life. There are times that in my proclamation of the Gospel...there are times in my ministry...that I feel so attacked and so beaten down by Satan, and I wonder, "How do I go one more step?" And I know that you've felt this yourself. What holds me up are many of *your* prayers. Florence, not to embarrass you, but we've talked about it before—you so often remind, and I know you pray for me regularly. Do you know what strength I find while proclaiming the Gospel to be upheld in prayer? Let none of you idly say, "There's nothing I can do" when Jesus calls, because you can pray. We can pray mightily for the Gospel to be proclaimed. And we can pray against Satan, that he would not be able to overcome any of us in our struggles in our journey.

All of the power of God, all of the mercy of Christ is available to us if we but ask. One of the saddest things Jesus ever would say is, "You have not because you ask not." We do not have to go through that battle alone. Luther would say of Baptism that it would be better not to baptize this baby today unless you are serious about arming this baby now with the Word of God, and with prayer, and with all the armor of God. Why put in him a new spirit...why put in him a desire to be of God...unless you are going to arm and equip him with the Word of God to fight against Satan who now is going to do furious battle with him? That's where your role comes in of praying for him and equipping him with the Word of God, so that he has tools by which to fight.

One of the greatest things Satan will do to fight against us is to take away our desire, our yearning for God. And now that leads us to the final letter of this acronym on PRAY. The "Y" stands for Yearn. Take a look at what David wrote in Psalm 63 on your outline:

"Oh God, You are my God, earnestly I seek You; my soul thirsts for You, my body longs for You, in a dry and weary land where there is no water. I have seen You in the sanctuary and beheld Your power and Your glory. Because Your love is better than life, my lips will glorify You. I will praise You as long as I live, and in Your name I will lift up my hands. My soul will be satisfied as with the richest of foods; with singing lips my mouth will praise You. On my bed I remember You; I think of You through the watches of the night. Because You are my help, I sing in the shadow of Your wings. My soul clings to You; Your right hand upholds me."

This sounds like the puppy-love of a freshman in college, doesn't it? This is new love expressed by David—he can't stop thinking about Him. Every waking moment he's thinking about Him. He yearns for His fellowship. He yearns to be in His presence. I look at this, and I think what's wrong me? What's wrong with me that I don't yearn for Him more than I do? Prayer is nothing less than a yearning for God—to talk with Him, to be in His presence. Prayer is nothing less than God yearning to be with me. When I read the Lord's prayer, when I pray the

Lord's Prayer, what I hear is yearning. "Thy kingdom come." "Thy will be done." It's a yearning. It's a yearning for Him. "Hallowed be Thy Name" in my life—a yearning, a desire.

Go back to Elizabeth for a moment. When Elizabeth gave me that Elizabeth-begging-look, saying, "Please, please, please, Daddy stay," do you think I was displeased? Give me a break! I was tickled! She was yearning for me, and I for her. Prayer is nothing less than that. When God expresses His yearning for you, and you for Him, pray unceasingly. Express your yearning for His fellowship, for His strength, for His love...and then just listen. Read the Word as He expresses His yearning for you. When you utter the words, "Thy Kingdom come," you are uttering a yearning, saying, "I want your Kingdom to be in me; I want your rule within me." But you're also expressing another yearning: "I want unbelievers to come into your Kingdom." Why is it that I don't yearn more for unbelievers to be saved? Why is it that I don't cry and weep more over people who are heading straight for hell and will spend an eternity there? Why isn't that reflected more in my prayer life? For those who are truly "ablaze" in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, they understand that prayer is a yearning.

My prayer for us this week is that we would be truly "ablaze" in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ and regard each and every prayer we offer as a PRIVILEGE. In that privilege we are expressing RELIANCE, that without Him we will bring everything to miserable failure. For we know that we battle not only against ourselves, but AGAINST SATAN. And Satan's greatest desire is to replace your YEARNING for God with a yearning for other things. For he knows—Satan knows—that if we yearn for God, we yearn for fellowship with God. Satan cannot stand to be in His presence—or ours—and he must flee. My prayer for us is that we would YEARN for the righteousness and the holiness of Jesus Christ and nothing less than that—that in our battle AGAINST SATAN we would RELY on the power and strength of God, not fearing, but knowing indeed that we have the PRIVILEGE to call Him our Father, in Jesus' name.

I close us with this prayer that Luther wrote:

"O behold, my Lord Jesus Christ, my misery. Needy and poor am I, and yet so loathe to accept Thy remedy that I do not sigh for the riches of Thy grace. Set aflame in me, O Lord, the desire for Thy grace, and faith in Thy promise that I may not offend Thee, my most gracious God, by my perverse and doubting unbelief. Through Jesus Christ, my Lord, I pray. Amen."