

## **Our Father**

*July 29, 2007*

(Pentecost 9 - Year C)

Luke 11: 1-13

*St. Alban's Episcopal Church, Waco, Texas*

Yesterday, I got home from spending the last 7 days at Camp Allen. Camp Allen is our Episcopal Camp and Retreat Center - nestled in the Piney Woods of East Texas, south of Navasota.

Every summer, I spend a week at Camp, serving as Session Director. This past week, we had 63 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> graders in our campsite. Susan works in the arts & crafts area. And I am in charge of the "spiritual aspects of the camp."

This year, for the first time, our son, Scott, served with us, as a cabin counselor.

Scott did a super job with the nine 8 and 9 year old boys in his cabin. And Judy Price, who is from St. Alban's, also did a great job as a cabin counselor.

It was - as always - a wonderful week of fun and of hard work and of hands-on ministry.

When I direct a session of camp, each camp day is purposely structured around prayer.

Before breakfast each morning, we staple a big piece of white poster board on the wall in the dining hall.

At the top of this poster board, we write:

"Today's Prayers"

And then, we attach a magic marker on the end of a string next to this poster board.

We teach the kids that whenever they think of something they want to pray for, then they can come up to the prayer board, pick up the marker on the end of the string, and write down their prayer request.

I wish that you could see the line of boys and girls that spontaneously

forms each morning, to write down their prayers and concerns. All throughout the day, children come up to the wall in the dining hall and write down their prayers.

During the morning program session, the kids gather in the dining hall and we say a prayer together.

Then, I read out loud the prayers that have been written on the poster on the wall.

I would pray:

“Holy God, we pray for all those concerns we have written:

For Mom and Dad.

For Nana and Grandpa.

For my uncle at West Point.

For my hamster, Mr. Whiskers.

For my sister’s asthma. (spelled a-s-m-a)

For people in Iraq.

For my dog, Sir Snuff-A-Lot.

For Cabin 3.

For my Mom, who died last year.”

Over and over, day after day, not a single prayer was listed for the camper themselves,

But, day after day, each prayer was for others.

Day after day, these Prayers of the People, rose up to the throne of heaven,

Rising up from a piece of white poster board, written in purple magic marker.

In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus’ disciples say:

“Lord, teach us to pray.”

And Jesus teaches them by saying:

“When you pray, say:

‘Father, hallowed by 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.”

Most of us know these words as a part of The Lord’s Prayer.

The Lord’s Prayer is probably the best known prayer in all of Christianity.

It is estimated that 2 billion people across the world prayed this prayer together on Easter morning this year, in churches and cathedrals, small and large.

Over the centuries, The Lord’s Prayer has become a part of our private devotions.

Yet, it is not to be used as just a private prayer.

The Lord’s Prayer is not about “me and my.”

The Lord’s Prayer is about “us and our.”

Just listen to words of The Lord’s Prayer, in the traditional language that we all know.

This language is anything but private.

“*Our* Father...

Give *us* this day *our* daily bread.

And forgive *us* - *our* trespasses,

As we forgive those

Who trespasses against *us*.

And lead *us* not into temptation,

But deliver *us* from evil.”

The prayer poster at Camp Allen was not a list of personal requests.

And, The Lord’s Prayer is not a list of personal requests written in the first person singular.

The Lord’s Prayer is plural.

It is communal,

The Lord’s Prayer is a prayer for all of us, not just a prayer for one of us.

Sometimes people will come to me and ask me about the purpose of prayer.

I believe that one of the purposes of prayer is that prayer gets us out of

ourselves and gets us to focus on other people.

When we pray for other people,  
When we pray for the people of the Sudan,  
When we pray for the people of New Orleans who are still rebuilding,  
When we pray for the people of Waco who walk the streets homeless,  
Those prayers rise up to the throne of heaven and are heard.  
And, although we do not know for sure the effects of those prayers upon  
the people of the Sudan or of New Orleans or of Waco.  
I do know that those prayers do end up changing *us*.

Because, when we pray ‘give *us* this day *our* daily bread’,  
We don’t just pray that we will have a nice lunch today,  
But our hearts go out *everyone* - our hearts go out to *all of us* around the  
world who will go to bed hungry tonight.

When we pray ‘forgive *us* our trespasses’  
We don’t just pray that God will forgive me,  
But we pray that God will forgive us, all of us, for our blindness to  
poverty and for our disregard to the ways that we will leave this  
earth to future generations.

When we pray ‘deliver *us* from evil’  
We don’t just pray that God will deliver us from our own private hells,  
But we pray that God will deliver us, all of us, from the powers of  
darkness that corrupt and destroy all the creatures of God.

The more that we pray for others, then the more that our hearts are  
enlarged beyond these walls.  
And the more that our hearts are enlarged beyond these walls, then the  
more we are changed,  
Changed into people who love and care for each other.

When those little campers that I spent this last week with wrote their  
prayers down on that piece of poster board with a magic marker,  
They knew, intuitively, that prayer is not just about me, but that prayer is  
about others.

Those campers knew, without being told, that when we pray for other people, then *we* are the ones who are then changed.

Those campers knew that the disciples of Jesus ask:

“Lord, teach *us* to pray.”

And, Jesus does not reply by saying:

“*My* Father,

Give *me* this day *my* daily bread.

And forgive *me my* sins.

And do not bring *me* to the time of trial.”

But, Jesus teaches us that we are all one family, with one Father.

Jesus teaches us to pray, saying:

“Our Father.”

And now, as our Savior Christ has taught *us, we* are bold to say:

Our Father, who art in heaven,

Hallowed by 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 trespasses against us.

And lead us not into temptation,

But deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, and the power and the glory,

For ever and ever.

AMEN.

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