

Text: Luke 11.1-13
St Stephen's

July 24/25, 2010
Weekend Message

God and our Prayer

The Lord's Prayer (The Message):

Father,
Reveal who you are.
Set the world right.
Keep us alive with three square meals.
Keep us forgiven with you and forgiving others.
Keep us safe from ourselves and the Devil.

Last week AZ talked to you about Mary and Martha and God and our Projects, and I want to add to his good comments today because **projects and prayer are linked**. When you are involved in life's projects, they always push you beyond your own capacities. That is true when projects are **large**: raising a child, building a marriage, running a business... or even when they are **little**: making a meal... Projects can always push you **beyond your capacity**, and that means they are often a **focus of prayer**.

Martha and Mary are **sisters**, and they are **getting ready for the arrival of Jesus**. Both of them are **busy** cleaning the house, preparing the food, and you know that this can put your **whole house on lockdown** for a couple of days (don't ask me how I know this!).

Then **he arrives**. There are still tables to set, food to finish, and now guests to serve. **Martha picks up the pace** in the kitchen. But **Mary takes off her apron** and sits at his feet. Finally it is **too much** for Martha, and she **explodes**...

She came to Jesus and said, "Lord, doesn't it seem unfair to you that my sister just sits here while I do all the work? Tell her to come and help me."

Luke 10.40

I want you to notice that **Martha is praying** here. The Bible is full of prayers like this; there is actually a large category of prayers like this called **lamentations**. There is a whole book of the OT with that name. You know what lamentations are? **Complaints**. We pray like this. Say the underlined phrase with me, *'Lord, doesn't it seem unfair to you...?'*

Mary is a woman of prayer also...

Her sister, Mary, sat at the Lord's feet, listening to what he taught
Luke 10.39

She is silent and attentive to Jesus, sitting at his feet. In the whole episode, she says nothing, not a single word.

And then Jesus weighs in...

the Lord said to her, "My dear Martha, you are worried and upset over all these details! There is only one thing worth being concerned about. Mary has discovered it, and it will not be taken away from her."

Luke 10.41-42

I want to give you a Martha and Mary Prayer Test:

Look at your project life: Martha is working for Jesus but finds herself **overwhelmed** by the scope of the project. So she turns to prayer. And when she prays, she complains. That gives you a hint that something else is going on here. She has a **connection** to him; she knows him, she's serving him, but she is **more attached to the completion of her project than she is to the presence of Jesus**. That gets us some insight; what she is doing (with all that she is doing) is not so much for Jesus as it is for her. It's not about him. It's about her. Are you more like Martha or Mary? Do you pray to get your stuff done? Or to get into his presence? Or do you pray at all?

Well, let's **listen to Jesus' teaching about prayer:**

Once Jesus was praying. As he finished, one of his disciples came to him and said, "Lord, teach us to pray. Jesus said, "This is how you should pray..."

Luke 11.1-2

The disciples saw **Jesus at prayer** and it **impressed them**. They noticed... his intimacy with God, his simplicity, his authenticity, the clear sense of being heard. So they asked him to teach them to pray like that. That is **a good prayer** all by itself, '*Lord, teach me to pray...*' He will answer that prayer. Here is his **first lesson in prayer**:

We Have a Father

"Father..."

Luke 11.2

'**Father...**'? They had never heard anyone talk to God like that. And neither had the rest of the world. They might have expected Jesus to use a **different kind of phrase** when he addressed God, like - '*thou who dwellest in unapproachable holiness*', or '*thou whose name we dare not to speak*', or something like that. Do you know **Islam** has 99 names for God? 'Father' is not on that list. But it is on Jesus' lips, and he brings us to that kind of God.

The **main thing** in his teaching about prayer is that God is a Father, a real father, and that you have been given **family connection**, family **membership**, family **status** by Jesus. If you draw near to him, you draw near to his father. If you are welcomed by him, you are welcomed by his father. It is important to settle this in your heart. Say it with me, 'I have a real Father.'

We Have a Father Who Cares and Provides for Us

"Keep us alive with three square meals."

"You fathers—if your children ask for a fish, do you give them a snake instead? Or if they ask for an egg, do you give them a scorpion? Of course not! So if you sinful people know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him."

Luke 11:3, 11-13

If your **6 year old** comes in at 3 am and asks for a drink of water, what do you say? If **your wife** asks you to get up and bring her a glass of water, what do you say?

Becca and I went across the country this week. We went to Seattle to meet a new daughter in law and we went to Washington DC to meet a new grand-daughter. This is our granddaughter, Emma.



Isn't she great? Here I am with both my grandchildren. Emma and her older brother Ian. Ian is telling me some finer points about his new little sister.



Do you think there is any place I would rather be than **with my grandchildren**? Do you think there is anything I would not do for them if they 'prayed me' (asked me)? Well, almost.

The rule in prayer Jesus gives us is '*Ask and you will receive*'. Let's think about **unanswered prayer** – and think about **Martha** again for a minute. **Jesus refuses to answer her prayer.** She is saying, 'Lord I am way overbooked, and this project is about to go up in smoke, and I'm about to go up in smoke, too, and I **need you to get me some help. Right now!!**' And Jesus says, 'I'm just going to let this play out. The cakes will fall, the pot will boil over, and this melt down is going to happen.'

Why? Because her activities have squeezed him out. And that means that her activities have become her savior. Her project has become her religion. That she is in that kitchen to **prove herself.** She

was asking for Jesus to bless this project and he wouldn't do it. She a scorpion, and he wouldn't give it to her.

Tim Keller: *He will always give you exactly what you would have asked for if you knew everything he knows.*

We Have a Father Who 'Over-Rules' Us

"Reveal who you are. Set the world right..."

Luke 11.2,4

This is at the heart of the prayer of Jesus, and **something very important happens here**. We pray for his Kingdom. His Kingdom is not the coming of heaven, though it will take care of that in due time. **His Kingdom** is the place where **the world is set right**, and we are praying for that here and now. All around us. Inside us. **Everywhere**.

Note that we are **not praying that we would set the world right**, although we will have out small part in it along the way. We are praying for **God to set his world right**. Inside us and outside us and everywhere. Sometimes you have to **let go of your plans to fix** everything in order to make room for his plans to fix everything. He is far better at it than we are.

Pray like that.

We Have a Father who Forgives and Protects Us

Keep us forgiven with you and forgiving others.

Keep us safe from ourselves and the Devil.

Luke 11.4

When Jesus told stories about the fatherhood of God his most famous story was about the father who had a beloved son who left his own home and broke his father's heart.

And so that dad **sat on his porch** every night and looked down that road that his son walked months before, and he **prayed**. I know that is what he did with his evenings. He prayed his Father's hand upon his boy, his Father's forgiveness on his boy, his Father's help for his boy. And when the day came that he saw his son come back over that hill, he rolled up his robe and ran to him. His son couldn't even get the words of repentance out of his mouth before the party was on!

I have learned over the years **in my own home** that one of the most important, most powerful, most transforming things a Dad can do is to **bring Christ's forgiveness into his family**, again and again - this wild, irrational, forgiving love to sons and daughters, brothers and sisters, moms and dads. **God does that** for his own family

George MacDonald was a Scottish author who wrote over 50 books in the late 1800's. He is one of my favorites, but I only found him because he was **CS Lewis' favorite**. Lewis actually called him his **mentor**, and said he never wrote a book without quoting Macdonald. High praise! I've been reading Macdonald's first and last books this summer. They are strange books, different than most of his writings, books of **different worlds**, strange worlds that are **true worlds**. At a key point in his first novel, **Phantastes**, the main character, **Anodos**, is wandering through a strange world and has met **a wise woman** who is a Christ figure. Her skin is ancient, her beauty is deep, her eyes are young, and her home has four doors that go out from it that Anodos must travel. Her home proves to be the **crossroads** of the world, and the crossroad of his life.

Through the doors are difficulties and sorrows and dangers – and redemption. He must go, but in every dark moment she is nearby. Before he goes, **she says this to him**, "I beg you for my sake dear child, to do one thing. In whatever sorrow you may be, however inconsolable it may appear, believe me that **the old woman** in the cottage, with the young eyes, **knows something**, though she must not always tell it, **that would quite satisfy you about it, even in the worst moments of your distress.**' Anodos would later reflect that "the wise woman in the cottage **knew something too good to be told.**"

What she knew was that at the heart of the universe is the one we now call "Father" – and He is good, he is setting all things right, and shall set all things right, and he has **gathered us by his son** to make us sons and daughters. And you can go straight to him and **pray**...

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