

“If God Should Speak” (fn.:IF GOD SHOULD SPEAK -2019.DOCX)

Scripture: Luke 11:14

William C. Pender (with assistance from Connie Steele)

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, 1/13/2020

Luke 11:1-4: *He was praying in a certain place, and after he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, “Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.”² He said to them, “When you pray, say:*

Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come.³ Give us each day our daily bread.⁴ And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us. And do not bring us to the time of trial.”

This morning we will consider a very important part of our service the Lord's Prayer; something that we say sometimes over and over again - and perhaps sometimes we forget what we are saying. There are a lot of things that Christians all around the world share together in terms of liturgy and creeds but perhaps you could go anywhere and find that where Christians meet together they pray this prayer that Jesus has taught us.

The format for this morning's sermon was borrowed from a friend who borrowed it from someone else. With that "footnote" at the beginning, let us begin by looking at that most familiar prayer, the Lord's Prayer.

Preacher: Our Father, which art in heaven...

GOD: Yes.

Preacher: Excuse me, don't interrupt me, I'm talking about the Lord's Prayer with these people.

GOD: But you called me.

Preacher: Called you? I didn't call you, I was saying the Lord's Prayer: "Our Father, which art in heaven..."

GOD: There! You did it again.

Preacher: Did what?

GOD: Called me. You said, "Our Father, which art in heaven." Here I am. What's on your mind?

Preacher: But I didn't mean anything by it. I was just beginning to say the Lord's Prayer. I always say the Lord's Prayer, particularly on Sunday. It makes me feel good. And saying my prayers each day is like getting a duty done.

GOD: A duty done each day?

Preacher: Sure, a duty done each day... Like brushing my teeth.

GOD: You **are** fairly regular about brushing your teeth.

Preacher: Wait a minute. Are you trying to imply that I'm not as regular about praying as I am with brushing my teeth? Cleanliness is next to godliness and all that. Prayer in the morning and the evening...

GOD: Like brushing your teeth?

Preacher: Yes, Exactly.

GOD: But is that always the case?

Preacher: Okay. I get a little rushed some mornings and don't have time to pray.

GOD: I see. But do you find time to brush your teeth on those mornings?

Preacher: Of course, who can afford dental bills or bad breath?

GOD: Uh-huh. And you brush your teeth at night?

Preacher: Yes.

GOD: And you say your prayers?

Preacher: Yes.

GOD: With thought?

Preacher: Well, "Now I lay me down to sleep; I pray the Lord my soul to keep," may not be too thoughtful but it is nice.

GOD: If you say so. Do you say your prayers alertly?

Preacher: Hey! So my mind wanders or I fall asleep, at least I try.

GOD: When you brush your teeth, do you ever forget what you are doing or fall asleep?

Preacher: Well...No.

GOD: So saying your prayers is not exactly like your daily "duty" of brushing your teeth.

Preacher: I guess not.

GOD: Well, carry on with your prayer.

Preacher: You mean the Lord's Prayer?

GOD: Yes.

Preacher: Let's see...Our Father, which art in heaven (that's you), hallowed be Thy name thy kingdom come...

GOD: Hold it! What do you mean by that?

Preacher: By what?

GOD: By "Hallowed be Thy name."

Preacher: It means...It means... Good grief! I don't know what it means. It is just part of the prayer. It's the way I learned it... By the way, what does it mean?

GOD: It means to honor, to respect, to obey, and to hold sacred my name.

Preacher: That makes sense. I never thought about what hallowed meant before. I guess I should know what I mean when I pray. Shall I go on?

GOD: By all means.

Preacher: Thy kingdom come.

GOD: And what do you mean by that?

Preacher: I'm not sure—maybe having angels flying around, you know, heaven on earth and all of that. But somehow, I don't think that's it, is it?

GOD: No, that's not it.

Preacher: It would probably mean things like trusting people.

GOD: Even the people from places like Iraq or Iran?

Preacher: Humm... I guess so.

GOD: What else does the coming of my kingdom mean?

Preacher: Maybe everyone having enough to eat.

GOD: Even if that meant a couple of meatless dinners a week for you?

Preacher: I think I could get used to that.

GOD: Anything else about my kingdom?

Preacher: I guess it also means everlasting life and all that.

GOD: Yes, no more suffering and dying. But are you really ready for my kingdom to come?

Preacher: What do you mean?

GOD: You know that the kingdom coming means the ending of things and yet a new beginning.

Preacher: I am not sure I'm ready for that. There are still some things I want to do, watch my children grow up, pay my mortgage, grow old, retire. Things like that.

GOD: But you could get used to perfect peace, complete trust and eternal life.

Preacher: Yes, that's something for me to pray for.

GOD: Okay then, continue with the prayer.

Preacher: Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

GOD: Do you really mean that?

Preacher: Sure, why not?

GOD: What are you doing about it?

Preacher: Doing? Nothing, I guess. I just think it would be kind of neat if you got control of everything down here like you have up there.

GOD: Have I got control of you?

Preacher: Well, I come to church, don't I?

GOD: That isn't what I asked you. I asked about my will in your life. What about that habit of worrying you have? What about your bad temper? And cussing? And then there is the

way you feel about some people. What is it you say -- "Blacks" -- or is it... -- Well you get the picture. Of course, I am not mentioning your church pledge or your tax returns.

Preacher: Hey! Stop picking on me. I'm just as good as some of the rest of the folks here.

GOD: Excuse me. I thought you were praying for my will to be done. If that is to happen, then it will be best to start with the ones who are praying for it. Like you, for example.

Preacher: Oh, all right. I guess I do have some faults. Now that you mention it, I could name some others.

GOD: So could I.

Preacher: I haven't thought about it much until now, but I really would like to cut out some of those things. I would like to, you know...be really more Christian.

GOD: Good! Now we're getting somewhere. We'll work together, you and me. Some victories truly can be won. I'm proud of you.

Preacher: Look Lord, I need to finish up here. This Lord's Prayer is taking a lot longer than it usually does. "Give us this day, our daily bread."

GOD: You need to cut out the bread. You've been eating too much lately.

Preacher: Hey, wait a minute. What is this, "Criticize-me-day?" Here I am doing my religious duty, and all of a sudden you break in and remind me of all my faults.

GOD: Praying is a dangerous thing. You could wind up changed, you know. That's what I'm trying to get across to you. You called me, and here I am. It's too late to stop now. Keep on praying. I'm interested in the next part of the prayer.....(pause) Well, go on.

Preacher: I'm scared to.

GOD: Scared? of what?

Preacher: I know what you'll say.

GOD: Try me and see.

Preacher: Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.

GOD: What about Wally and Rita?

Preacher: See! I knew it. I knew you would bring them up. Why Lord, they never gave me a chance. Harp about this and harp about that. How could I forget when she asked if she could speak plainly with me? She told me I was just a poor mama's boy. I've sworn to prove them wrong. I'll get even!

GOD: But your prayer. What about your prayer?

Preacher: I didn't mean it.

GOD: Well, at least you are honest. But it's not much fun carrying that load of bitterness around inside, is it?

Preacher: No. But I'll feel better when I show them how wrong they are, how petty they are. Boy, have I got some plans for getting even. They'll wish they had never said anything about me.

GOD: You won't feel any better. You'll feel worse. Revenge is not sweet. Think how unhappy you are now. But I can change all that.

Preacher: You can? How?

GOD: Forgive Wally and Rita. Then I will forgive you. Then the hate, bitterness, and sin will be their problem. They may never change, but you'll have settled your heart.

Preacher: But Lord, I can't forgive them.

GOD: Then I can't forgive you.

Preacher: Oh, you're right, as usual. And more than I want revenge on Wally and Rita, I want to be right with you. (pause) (sigh) All right, all right. I forgive them.

GOD: There now!! Wonderful! How do you feel?

Preacher: Hmmmm. Well....not bad. Not bad at all. In fact, I feel pretty good. You know, I don't think I'll go to bed uptight tonight. Maybe I can get on to living life instead of plotting revenge.

GOD: You're not through with your prayer. Go on.

Preacher: All right. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

GOD: Good! Good! I'll do that. Just don't put yourself in a place where you can be so easily tempted.

Preacher: I don't understand. What do you mean by that?

GOD: Some of your friendships, for example. Some of the places you go. Some the habits you've formed. They are beginning to get to you. They all advertise fun, but for you it could be ruin. Don't use me for an escape hatch.

Preacher: I don't understand.

GOD: Sure you do. You've done it lots of times. You get caught in a bad situation, you get in trouble, and you come running to me saying, "Lord, help me out of this mess, and I'll promise never to do it again." You remember some of those bargains you tried on me?

Preacher: Yes, and I am ashamed, Lord. I really am.

GOD: Which bargain are you remembering?

Preacher: Well, when I made a few errors on my income tax return that one year, I do remember telling you, "O Lord, don't let the IRS find out, and above all, don't let my family and friends know." I said I wouldn't do it again.

GOD: But you didn't keep your promise, now did you?

Preacher: I'm sorry, Lord, I really am. Until now, I thought that if I just prayed the Lord's Prayer every day, then I could do what I liked. I didn't expect anything to happen like this.

GOD: Haven't you ever heard, "Ask and it shall be given to you, seek and you shall find, knock and the door shall be open to you..."

Preacher: Well yes, but I guess I really didn't believe it.

GOD: Go ahead and finish your prayer.

Preacher: For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

GOD: Do you know what would bring me glory? What would really make me happy?

Preacher: No, but I'd really like to. I do want to know how to please you. I can see what a mess I've made of my life. And I want to see how great it would be to really be one of your followers.

GOD: You just answered my question.

Preacher: I did?

GOD: Yes. The thing that would bring me glory is to have people like you truly love me. And I see that happening between us. Now that some old sins have been exposed and are out of the way. Well, there's no telling what we can do together!!

Preacher: Lord, let's see what we can make of me. OK?

GOD: Yes, let's see.

As those who have heard the words of God and respond to it in their hearts, let us pray the prayer that our Lord Jesus has taught us together:

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 debts,
As we forgive our debtors;
And lead us not into temptation,
But deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom and the power
and the glory forever. AMEN