

Day 1 - Lord, teach us to pray...

“Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.” Romans 8:26-27 (NRSV)

Prayer is one of the hardest things to do for 2 reasons.

1. It is unusual to stop and be silent.
2. It can be really awkward.

Prayer in private is one thing we can muddle through that. But if we are honest, I think that most of us have a feeling of dread when it comes to public prayer. I mean, praying in a group is an awesome practice, but have you followed someone who has all the “thees” and “thous” in the right place? That’s a rough act to follow. It’s enough to make us feel like we aren’t capable of or worse not good enough to pray. But the truth is true prayer isn’t pretty or perfect, it’s directly from the heart.

One of the most honest prayers comes from the Gospel of Mark when a man desperate for his son to be healed and the disciples have not been able to cast the demon out.

“It has often cast him into the fire and into the water, to destroy him; but if you are able to do anything, have pity on us and help us.’ Jesus said to him, ‘If you are able!—All things can be done for the one who believes.’ Immediately the father of the child cried out, ‘I believe; help my unbelief!’” (Mark 9:21-24 NRSV)

The father’s prayer isn’t dignified but it is as honest as they come. He had a “God Moment.” God touched the father’s heart and he was moved by a violent faith that shouted out an ugly, honest prayer and God listened. The Lord’s Prayer invites us into a similar pattern of prayer. It is Jesus’ way of showing us what it means to truly pray. Unfortunately it falls into a place of familiarity where we just say the words instead of letting them come from our heart. However, as we have slowed down, perhaps we should take a little deeper look at the invitation to a holy and honest life that the Lord’s Prayer gives to us.

Prayer - God, you give me the words, now give me your heart. Help me in my weaknesses to overcome familiarity and apathy. Give me a heart that is willing and able to cry out in honesty and love. May my spirit be touched with Your Spirit and help me to pray. Help me to focus on you and our relationship, rather than my words alone. For you are the Word of Life who helps me in the midst of my need. Lord Jesus, for your name’s sake, help me. Amen.

Day 2 - Our Father, who art in Heaven...

“And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. This is indeed the will of my Father, that all who see the Son and believe in him may have eternal life; and I will raise them up on the last day.” John 9:39-40

Maybe this social distancing thing doesn't have to be a bad thing for the church. Maybe this is the modern way that we can stop and look at how we view what church is. I want to share something that I realized. Our church isn't our church. It's God's church. And not only that, the church is God's family. And if it is God's family, then how do we relate to each other?

The church isn't about attendance alone. It is about an eternal life that begins right now. When we were able to get together we liked to have conversations (sometimes opinionated and heated) about the type of worship, missions, sermon length, service length, dress code, carpet color, liturgy, and all other types of things you can have an opinion about. However, as things have slowed down and we have to take a step back, perhaps we can start viewing the church differently.

As we spend some time apart, it is important that we think of ourselves not as people who are just coming together each and every Sunday to attend church. But rather we are a church who are a family. When we are apart, we need to remember that we are always connected by our faith and forgiveness and we all have a Father in heaven who binds us together.

During this time we should remember one another and pray for one another. Call and check on one another. We are a people of heaven and not of the Earth. God has an eternal plan that begins now. When we can't be together we need to look at what our Father in heaven would have us do. Jesus came so that we might follow him, not attend him. He didn't come so we could feel good about ourselves and our meager hour we give him on Sunday mornings. He came so we could remain in him, seeking to do what God would have us do. Although we are separated now, let us look for ways to share love with our neighbors, family, and brothers and sisters in Christ.

Prayer - Father. Forgive me for elevating church so much. Help me to see my fellow church members as brothers and sisters. I may have my own preferences about what and how to do church, but you are my Father and you are my God. My heart breaks that I cannot be together with my church but help us to love one another and connect with each other so that we can show one another the eternal love that you have shown us in the new and eternal life that you have given us. Help us Lord Jesus, Amen.

Day 3 - Hallowed be Thy Name...

“And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.” Colossians 3:15-17 (NRSV)

So we are still not able to meet together and we don't know when that will be. So what do we do to connect? Maybe the answer is in the exhortation for community and active witnessing. When the term witnessing is talked about, sometimes the vision of someone on the street corner talking about hell-fire and damnation. But what if we looked at witnessing as a reflection of the Holy Name of God?

When God revealed himself to Moses and his people, he revealed his name as I AM. All of his qualities and attributes are tied into his being. When God speaks, he is saying, “I AM the Creator. I AM the true Father of Israel. I AM the God of promises made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. I AM the one who will deliver you out of bondage. I AM the God who will bring you to the land of promise. I AM your God and you are my people.”

As we are separated, we as Christians should think about who God is even in the midst of social distancing and separation. He is our God. He is our Father who sent his son Jesus to us. He is the God, Jesus, who forgives our sins and shortcomings. He is the God who meets us in our loneliness. He is the God who will bring us out of times of uncertainty. He is the God of all who call upon his name. But so what if God is all of these things. What does that mean for us?

“Therefore prepare your minds for action; discipline yourselves; set all your hope on the grace that Jesus Christ will bring you when he is revealed. Like obedient children, do not be conformed to the desires that you formerly had in ignorance. Instead, as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct; for it is written, ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy.’” 1 Peter 1:13-16 (NRSV)

How God reveals himself to us is how we should reveal ourselves to one another. As we think about what it means to be the Church it begs us to ask the question. Who am I in Jesus? Am I an instrument of his peace, love, and mercy? Do I care for the vulnerable, hurting, and lonely? Do I love my fellow church members? Am I one who is hoping for a better day and the day when I can greet my brothers and sisters with a handshake or hug? These are the witnesses to one who loves Jesus. Hellfire and damnation might scare people, but active love lets others see the work of a Holy God in the world and invites them to learn to love the Lord.

Prayer - Help me to live a Christian witness even when I am separated from others. Help me to be a witness on Facebook and social media. Help me to find new ways to tell others I love you and love them. Help me to follow Jesus and sing songs of hope and a future. Give me the patience to wait and the wisdom to follow the directions that God has so that my life would be a sign of love and joyful obedience. In Jesus name. Amen.

Day 4 - Thy Kingdom come, Thy Will be done...

“Once Jesus was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God was coming, and he answered, “The kingdom of God is not coming with things that can be observed; nor will they say, ‘Look, here it is!’ or ‘There it is!’ For, in fact, the kingdom of God is among you.” Luke 17:20-21

The kingdom of God is truly very mysterious. It's like a mustard seed. It's like a pearl found in a field. It's like a wheat field that has weeds sown in among the wheat. Not to mention all of the other "The Kingdom of God is like..." passages. Even though Jesus is somewhat mysterious about the Kingdom of God, the main message of his ministry is not that someday we're going to go to the kingdom of God, but rather, through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, the Kingdom of God is coming here to us.

When we pray the Lord's prayer, we praying not to go to the kingdom of God up in the sky. When we honestly pray the Lord's Prayer, we are asking for God's stuff to happen in our lives, in our church, in our community, and in our world. And we aren't asking for God to just come along and bless the stuff we are doing or to get on with changing the mess we made. When we pray, we are claiming obedience to Christ's great plan for us - whatever he might be calling us to. I don't think that the world is looking for proof of God's existence. Rather, they are looking for the church to be the church. They are looking for Christians to be Christ-like.

As I said before, our church is God's family. This is God's family and we need to show this community, our friends, and our neighbors that God lives in our lives. Jesus want to live in us but he wants us to love him by loving others. The Lord's Prayer invites us to pray that God's kingdom grows inch by inch in our lives and we find ways to love our friends, neighbors, and church in new and sometimes creative ways. When we pray honestly, we pray for God to reveal his way to us; it is our task to ask for the faith to walk forward and be the Kingdom people God is calling us to be.

Prayer - God of life, live loud in my lives. Help me to continue to grow in my faith so that my life might reflect your love. May your peace and grace shine through me so that I might be your reflection in this world. Help me to love you more and love my neighbors more so that they, like I, might know your love and see your work in this world. In Jesus name I pray. Amen.

Day 5 - On Earth as it is in Heaven...

“So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” 2 Corinthians 5:20-21 (NRSV)

Have you ever heard of the phrase we are the ‘hands and feet of Christ’? It makes sense. We believe that Jesus rose from the dead and gave his disciples and church the command to, ***“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” Matthew 28:19-20 (NRSV)***

But, in the words of G.I. Joe, “Knowing is half the battle!” Talking about being God’s hands and feet are one thing. Living this truth in our lives is another. To do God’s will on Earth doesn’t mean we have to be a missionary, a pastor, a chaplain, a Sunday school teacher, or any other “religious vocation.” Christ’s call for his Father’s Kingdom come and Will to be done on Earth is a call for all of us to live for Christ wherever we find ourselves. It means we treat people with respect when interact with them. It means that we use courtesy and patience when we go to the store. It means that we don’t take part in spreading rumors and false information. It means being a committed wife or committed husband. It means that we seek integrity, honesty, and godliness in all things.

God’s kingdom coming into the world is the sign that the church is doing what the church is supposed to do. When we share the hope, love, and peace of Christ in our humdrum ordinary lives, we are faithful. That is the beauty of the Christian life. When we live a holy life for Jesus we are not doing these things out of obligation but rather out of love for our Father in Heaven. It is for our Brother and Lord Jesus Christ that we are agents of change in this broken world and we seek to share God’s love and spread his Kingdom wherever we may find ourselves.

Prayer - Help me to be your faithful witness, God. Help me to keep my eyes on you so that I might be faithful in my everyday, ordinary life. Help me in my family, my job, my community groups, and anywhere else I might find myself to be your witness. Give me the open heart to share your love and encourage others to come and see your work in my Church. I ask for your help in the name of Jesus our Savior. Amen.

Day 6 - Give us this day...

"Again he (God) sets a certain day—"today"—saying through David much later, in the words already quoted, 'Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.'" Hebrews 4:7

Today is a hard concept because time is always flying away. Eventually today stops and becomes tomorrow. There are only so many seconds in each day and no amount of hoping or worrying will change that. Today will melt away into another day, into another day, into another day, until what?

Jesus' prayer is an invitation to make our lives more intentional. And one of the most important ways we can do this is by stopping and looking around us. Sometimes when we look back on a day, we realize that we have missed great opportunities to listen to God and make human contact in meaningful ways. I get wrapped up in myself and I miss out on ways that I might meet the needs of those around me.

What does this human contact look like right now? Perhaps a smile. Perhaps a wave. Perhaps some cordial words. Perhaps making sure our neighbors have what they need. Perhaps checking on our family. Perhaps something deeper. But if I never stop to pay attention to what is going on, I will never know what God might have been asking me to do for another. All of us who are taking the time to read this have been given today as an opportunity to see what God has for us today, who he puts in our path today, and how we might be a blessing to them today.

"And whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple—truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward." Matthew 10:42 (NRSV)

Although we are asked to distance ourselves for the time being, there are things that we can do here and now to share Jesus with others. And as things go back to normal, whatever that looks like, there will be other opportunities for us as a family to show Jesus to others who may be struggling to find work or needing assistance. The point is we will have opportunities to provide a blessing. And today and every day is an opportunity where we will be able to listen to Jesus and see who might just need a blessing more than anything else. Who knows, if we slow down and pay attention, we might just see a whole community who needs the love of Jesus today. Even if it is just a small cup of water to quench someone's thirst.

Prayer - God, help me pay attention to my surroundings today. Too often I get busy or bogged down in life and I don't see those around me who are hurting and in need of your love. Help me to have your eyes and your heart, listening to what you would have me do for you through what I do for others. Help me to be tender hearted to listen and obey your voice today. Lord Jesus help me. Amen.

Day 7 - Our daily bread...

"Jesus said to them, 'I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.'" John 6:35 (NRSV)

I love bread. I know this is sacrilegious in our low carb, Keto diet world, but there is something comforting about bread. The warm yeasty smell permeating the house. That's the very essence of comfort in my eyes. In Scripture bread is oftentimes symbolic of comfort and God providing for his people. The Israelites ate bread from heaven, David and his men ate the showbread at the temple, the prophet Elijah had bread delivered to him by ravens, the prophet Elijah blessed the widow at Zapheth and she had bread until the end of the three year drought, and so on and so forth.

Each of these stories are times that God provided for his people's physical needs. And our church has opportunities and missions where we do this and it is good and holy. During this time of uncertainty, this is all the more important. There will be needs that we and our church are going to have to meet in our community. It is a time of fear for many of our neighbors so if we are able to help in any way, let's look for ways to do that. For them comfort is going to come from certainty to receive their daily food and supplies. We might be a blessing to them in a real and powerful way.

But Jesus's daily bread goes beyond just physical needs. Jesus wants us to be spiritually filled. And in this world there is a lot of spiritual junk food - money, drugs, sex, fame, prestige, power, just to name a few. These things promise they are filling and they might feel good for a short while. The problem is that these things leave us just as empty as we were before.

Jesus wants us to offer an eternal alternative to the world and that is what a vibrant Christian faith is about. It is more than just attending church one day a week or attending 2 or 3 times a month. Being a healthy Christian is about being filled with things that have meaning. Community (close or distant), faith, love, forgiveness, purpose, hope. These are the things that Jesus gives us and these are the things that fill us up to satisfaction.

So I say, bring on the carbs! Throw open the doors! Let us feast on Jesus as we grow in faith. Let us get filled with Scripture, prayer, and hope. Let us feast on the good works that God might have for us today. Let's have a meal of faith with a side of grace for our friends, family, and those whom we love so that they also might be filled with the lasting love of the Lord Jesus.

Prayer - God, you are a God of great gifts. I ask forgiveness when I try to hoard them and not share them. As I think about who I might invite to church, I pray you might help me to share the blessings of love and hope that you give so that I might invite another to meet you as the Great Provider and wonderful host you are. Help me, Lord Jesus. Amen.

Day 8 - And forgive us our trespasses...

“But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us. Much more surely then, now that we have been justified by his blood, will we be saved through him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life. But more than that, we even boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.” Romans 5:8-11 (NRSV)

Grace and forgiveness are at the forefront of the Christian faith. What we see about God is that he wants a relationship with people. Sin separates us from God, but in Jesus Christ, we are forgiven.

When I worked in hospice, I met a lot of great people who have gone to meet the LORD. As I was able to engage in conversation, the question, “Am I good enough to get into heaven?” came up. However this question was at the surface of a deeper issue. The truth is each person who asked wanted to know Jesus more deeply.

This idea of having enough goodness or merit to know Jesus better is something that’s honestly foreign to the Christian faith. The truth of Christianity is that God loves us as we are, not as we should be. The wonderful truth is that we can know Jesus fully and truly without “doing” anything. In God’s economy of grace, he is drawing us close to His Love so that we might repent and cry out in faith. We don’t make the first move, we are sinners but God is a God of love and doesn’t want us to be separated from him.

The Lord’s Prayer invites us and thrusts us into looking at our spiritual life seriously. Are we right before God. Have we truly turned our hearts to his and asked him to heal us spiritually? Have we relied fully on his grace to forgive us? Have we made him the Lord of our lives or are we turning to other things that might take the place of our love for God?

Isolation and solitude are hard things to endure. But it is a time to retreat from our usual hustle and bustle to take inventory. How is our relationship with God? Are we healthy spiritually? Are we filling the deep wells of our souls with good and holy things or are we filling them with garbage? This is a time for repentance and reflection, to focus on the love of God for us and an invitation to go deeper. God wants us to know him and love him.

Prayer - Holy God, I am sorry for my hard heart. I ask that your Spirit would enter my heart so that I might know your love. Send your presence to fill me during this time of uncertainty and fear. Send your love to transform me into the child you would have us be so that we might be witnesses of your love to those who feel separated, lonely, and afraid now. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.

Day 9 - As we forgive those who trespass against us...

"Above all, maintain constant love for one another, for love covers a multitude of sins. Be hospitable to one another without complaining. Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received." 1 Peter 4:8-10 (NRSV)

Having children and working with youth gives me the excuse to watch lots of VeggieTales. They are great because these simple children's stories touch on difficult spiritual concepts. One of the first videos is called, "God Wants Me to Forgive Them?" And it pretty much tells me exactly what I don't want to hear. Guess what I learned? Yes, God wants me to love and forgive THOSE people who are DIFFERENT. The MEAN people.

If we are honest, forgiveness is a hard thing. This is especially true depending on the wrong someone did. We sometimes like to hold onto hurt feelings and grudges. It makes life easier because it is me vs. them. There's a virtuous good guy and a bad guy, the one who did wrong to me. But, the Good News of Jesus Christ is that God chooses to not give the world what the world deserves. He chooses to not punish all sin at once. He doesn't want revenge. He wants redemption. He wants to forgive us and more importantly He wants us to forgive each other.

I've met a lot of THEM in the world. I've met people who don't like me. I've met people who don't act like me. I've met people who have made seriously bad decisions or have fallen into bad habits. I have met people who have hurt me. The problem is when we withhold forgiveness, we withhold what God has given to all people. When we refuse to forgive we take the place of God and think that some people aren't good enough for God's grace.

The Lord's Prayer reminds us that God gave to us something we didn't deserve. Forgiveness. So just as we cry out for forgiveness, we realize that a lot of other people in the world are doing the same thing. This can be a time to bridge the gap. It invites in our solitude to explore relationships that might be broken and pray for the spiritual courage to extend a hand in hope and love. This is the time to explore how we can extend Christ's love to someone. To see who might need to be invited to know the love of a living God. To see those who may not know the forgiveness of Christ. To see someone who may feel far off and hurt by the church. God's forgiveness is for all who ask and is freely given to us through the love of Jesus Christ. It's time to start sharing that forgiveness and grace with others. This is the Will of God.

Prayer - God, help me to forgive others. Help me to share love with others who feel worthless, far away, and broken. Help me to be a light for the nations, no matter who it might be. I cry out for forgiveness while holding my neighbors' sins against them and for that I repent. Help this hard heart of mine break so that I might invite others to receive your saving love. In Jesus's name I pray, Amen.

Day 10 - And lead us not into temptation...

"No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it." 1 Corinthians 10:13 (NRSV)

Temptation is a part of the human condition. When someone cuts you off in traffic, what is your first response? "Oh, golly gee thank you for surprising me with your inconsiderate driving." Or something less kind. What about when you were young? A lamp got broken and suddenly someone named I DON'T KNOW lives in your house.

Temptation is unfortunately a part of our lives and for each of us temptation looks much different. For some temptation looks like lying or cheating. For others temptation is sexual in nature. For some others temptation is to respond inappropriately in anger or frustration. Others still struggle with a desire for something that brings only temporary pleasure. The important thing to remember is that temptation is serious but it isn't a spiritual death sentence. Temptation does not mean we are destined to sin.

Although temptations come in a variety of ways and tempt us to do a variety of things, these are things that help us to lean into God for strength. Temptation likes to dress itself up as the "good" choice. It likes to say it's the "right" choice to fulfill your desires. Sometimes it likes to say it's the "only" choice. However, Jesus teaches us that this does not have to be the case.

Jesus' prayer is that we would seek God's assistance to help us in our time of tempting. St. Paul has another response to temptation when he says, ***"Every proud obstacle raised up against the knowledge of God, and we take every thought captive to obey Christ. We are ready to punish every disobedience when your obedience is complete." 2 Corinthians 10:5-6 (NRSV)***

Temptation might come against us but we have to rely upon God for a way out. Whether that be to flee the situation completely, such as a recovering alcoholic leaving a party for fear of falling off the wagon. Perhaps taking the time to spiritually wrestle with the temptation and internal struggle in order to overcome. Whatever the situation, we need to upon Jesus. For if we rely upon ourselves we might be too weak to stand, but if we turn to faith, Jesus who promised the Holy Spirit will stand with us to endure and escape these temptations.

Prayer - Lord God, I struggle with sin and temptation each and every day. Help me to stand in faith and strengthen my faith so that I might know that the Holy Spirit lives in me and you stand beside me. Help me to look to you in my weaknesses so I might overcome all temptations and internal struggle. Help me feel your presence more deeply as I grow in faith. I ask this in Jesus name. Amen.

Day 11 - But deliver us from evil...

“Since, then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” Hebrews 4:14-16 (NRSV)

As with temptation, we have struggles and difficulties in our lives. The current events are a sign of this. We are facing uncertain and difficult times. Some will have a more difficult time than others. Some will lose loved ones. Some will lose their jobs. Some will struggle to make ends meet. All of us will struggle with the realities of what is happening and what is to come from this.

During these times we ask why. I have asked that question asked multiple times in my life and sometimes the best and most faithful answer is... “I don’t know.” The truth is I don’t always know the why to why things happen. I can have philosophical arguments and attempt to logically explain why evil exists and why bad things happen but these answers rarely make me feel good.

I might not know the “why” but I can tell you what the answer to the question, “Now what do I do?” The answer is go to Christ and pray. Pray for strength. Pray for the hurt. Pray for things to change. Pray for whatever is on your heart, but don’t forget to pray. We have one who suffered from all sorts of animosity, threats, and ultimately violence and death from the hands of sinful people and he intercedes on our behalf.

Our cry to be delivered from evil and trouble should always be tempered by faith. We of course do not want to suffer or struggle in life. We do not want people we love to suffer. But we can cry out to be released from the valley of the shadow of death while still knowing that we have a good shepherd who will walk with us should we have to walk through those times of trouble. Deliverance from evil is an opportunity to lean into the arms of a God who never leaves our side and will help us travel through times of trouble.

“Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff - they comfort me.” Psalm 23:4 (NRSV)

Prayer - Dear Father, We thank you for setting us at tasks which demand our best efforts, and for leading us to accomplishments which satisfy and delight us. We thank you also for those disappointments and failures that lead us to acknowledge our dependence on you alone. Above all, we thank you for your Son Jesus Christ; for the truth of his Word and the example of his life; for his steadfast obedience, by which he overcame temptation; for his dying, through which he overcame death; and for his rising to life again, in which we are raised to the life of your kingdom.

Grant us the gift of your Spirit, that we may know him and make him known; and through him, at all times and in all places, may give thanks to you in all things. Amen. (From the Book of Common Prayer, Litany of Thanksgiving)

Day 12 - For Thine is the Kingdom, the Power, and the Glory...

"The Lord says to my lord, 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool.'" Psalm 110:1 (NRSV)

This is the most quoted or alluded to Old Testament Scripture passage in the New Testament. The New Testament writers were clear that they believed that the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is the decisive battle in the war against all that oppose him. This is a theme Paul writes about in his letters as well. He believes that the authority of Christ is the hope for the people of God. We were hopeless due to sin and our evil corruption but Christ continues to work in the world and is making inroads against sin and the forces of darkness and the Evil One one heart at a time.

"For as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, after he has destroyed every ruler and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death." 1 Corinthians 15:22-26 (NRSV)

The Lord's Prayer assures us that all things are under God's power. All powers of the world, all circumstances, and all illnesses and things which can cause us trouble are under his authority. Jesus is seated at God's right hand to bring all things under his control. But the war still rages on. We still struggle with the forces of the Evil One and all that opposes God but we trust that Christ is still king, no matter what the circumstances we face. Even in these uncertain times, it is important that we continue to praise Christ as king.

However it is important that we also realize that, although Christ is King, we are his followers and have an active part to play in the Kingdom work. ***"Beloved, I urge you as aliens and exiles to abstain from the desires of the flesh that wage war against the soul. Conduct yourselves honorably among the Gentiles, so that, though they malign you as evildoers, they may see your honorable deeds and glorify God when he comes to judge." 1 Peter 2:11-12 (NRSV)***

Although Christ is in charge, he has given us responsibility to be his agents in the world. We are people of hope, faith, love, and joy. We seek to help our society and community, especially during this time so that Christ might be glorified and some might come to believe due to our faithful and joyful obedience to our King Jesus.

Prayer - Lord God, help me to follow you in joyful obedience. Help me to trust you in times of difficulty so that I might be strengthened in faith. Help me to see your work of victory in the world and help me to be agents of the Kingdom in the world. I know I am facing uncertain times and I pray that you might be able to help other see joy and hope in the midst of trouble. I ask this in Jesus' Name.

Day 13 - Now and forever...

"For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom. He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time onward and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this." Isaiah 9:6-7 (NRSV)

Christians have a hope that lies beyond this current reality. Some call this paradise. Some call this heaven. Some call it the hereafter. Whatever the name we give it, we believe that this world is not all there is. However, we don't have to wait for heaven to start living like the people of God. We like to use the term "I'm only human." I understand the sentiment, as we have looked at the Lord's Prayer, we know that we struggle with temptations, sins, and forgiveness. The human condition is a struggle. We are not perfect in our current state. However, we have hope of God's power being able to work in us and through us for his Kingdom purposes.

"For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, "Abba! Father!" it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him." Romans 8:14-17 (NRSV)

When we pray the Lord's Prayer, we are asking God to work in us here and now. We are asking him to show his power in our lives. We can use the excuse that we are only human. However in our Wesleyan Scriptural understanding of grace and salvation, we believe we are more than just sinners saved by grace. We are children of the Most High God being taught the Father's Love. We are brothers and sisters of our Lord Jesus Christ learning grace from our older Lord and brother. We are people being transformed by the grace of the LORD. We believe the Holy Spirit can show his glory in us now as we wait for the glory of heaven or the hereafter or paradise or whatever you want to call it. God is working now and will complete his work on that glorious day.

"And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.'" Revelation 21:2-4 (NRSV)

Prayer - Even today as I wait and am confounded with the reality of our fallen world, I pray that you would work in me. I pray you would forgive me and help me to grow into the child you would want me to be. Give me the eyes to see your work, the heart to have the courage to do your work, and the strength to do what I need to do. Help me to grow in faith as I ask this in Jesus' Name. Amen.

Day 14 - Amen.

“Agree with God, and be at peace; in this way good will come to you. Receive instruction from his mouth, and lay up his words in your heart.” Job 22:21-22 (NRSV)

A-MEN or AH-MEN. The perennial question always comes up. Which way do we pronounce it? Well the long answer is Ah-men because Biblical Hebrew doesn't have the long A sound. (Isn't that completely useless information?) The short answer is, it doesn't matter.

This word Amen is more than just a word we say at the end of a prayer or when somebody says something we agree heartily with. (Bacon is awesome! Can I get a witness!?) The word is a word that means, "I agree," or "I commit myself to this," or "I stand for this."

Saying "Amen" means standing with God and getting along with what he says to us. It means we commit ourselves to the purposes of God and pledge our obedience. If we are honest the Lord's Prayer is about so much more than just a bunch of pretty words put together in a pleasant prayer. It is a countercultural, counter-me, open and honest cry to God. It is a cry for change in us and in the world.

By ending the prayer in this way, Jesus is inviting us to take the plunge into a life of radical faith and obedience. It is an agreement to see God as Father, with a name of love, seeking to do his work everywhere he takes us. It makes us take inventory into our lives to see if we are a hospitable, loving, and gracious person who seeks to bring forgiveness, healing, and love into our lives, into our community, and into our church.

I pray that you have been praying. Because something is going to happen. God is going to show up at the church when the doors open again. Our church will never be the same again. As life starts up again and we start to move forward from this time of social distancing I pray we might be known as "that church who loves their neighbors," "That church that is joyful and hopeful," "That church that continues to pray during all times," "That church that is filled with Christ-like people." Let us prepare for the coming Sunday by being prepared in our daily lives.

Prayer - God of grace, be with me to help me be in agreement with your plans for my life, my community, and your church. Help me to be faithful to my calling to share your love in words and actions. Help me to love you more. Help me to realize that I am loved by you. You are my Father and I am your child. I stand in agreement with you and ask your help. I ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.