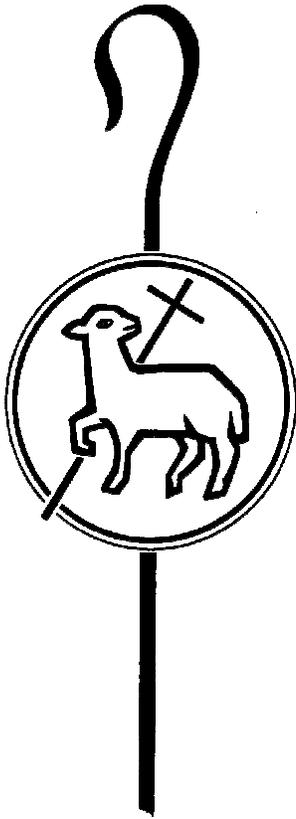


## feeding . . . gathering . . . carrying . . . leading . (Isaiah 40:11)

March 12, 2013

Dear Church Family,



In our Luke series, we looked at Jesus' teaching on prayer from 11:1-13. This teaching is in response to a disciple asking, "Lord, teach us to pray" after observing Jesus in prayer, which we have seen often in Luke (3:21, 5:16, 6:12, 9:18, 9:28). Consider what a teacher we have in Jesus! He has been a part of the triune God since before the beginning of time. Now he has taken on the human experience in the incarnation. He fully understands both the divine and the human side of prayer. No other person has that insight. This makes His teaching on prayer exceedingly valuable and precious.

Jesus begins the lesson with a model prayer in verses 2-4. This prayer emphasizes the position of intimacy and privilege that the disciples have with God. It is the exact same position that Jesus enjoys as the beloved Son, which is why they also are to address God as "**Father**". "**Hallowed be your name**" is a statement of respect and worship, but it also a statement of commitment to live in such a way as to present God as holy. There is OT background to this idea in Ezekiel 36 where the Lord, in declaring that He will restore Israel to the land from exile says, "*It is not for your sake, people of Israel, that I am going to do these things, but for the sake of my holy name.... Then the nations will know that I am the LORD, declares the Sovereign LORD, when I am proved holy through you before their eyes.*" "**Your kingdom come**" is similar in that it is an expres-

sion of longing for God's kingdom but also a commitment to live as if that kingdom was already present in the way we conduct our lives. So the beginning of this prayer establishes a position of intimacy with God the Father and an allegiance with His purposes. From this position of intimacy and allegiance, we bring our requests.

The rest of the passage through to verse 13 is all about asking. People who have been at COSC will recall Stuart's sermon series, *A Theology of Asking*, in 2009-10 (a good series to listen to online at our website). One of his main points was, "I'm trying to rescue 'asking' from being viewed as some low-brow form of prayer, as if it is immature and selfish." This section reinforces the centrality of asking in prayer as it is central to Jesus' teaching on the subject.

We are to ask, "**Give us each day our daily bread**". This communicates a dependence on God for our daily needs, which puts an emphasis on trusting God for provision. This requires the exercise, and subsequent strengthening, of our faith. It is also the antidote for anxiety and worry, already identified as choking the word in the parable of the sewer. We are also to ask, "**Forgive us our sins**". Along with daily bread, we should not use these petitions as a blanket prayer. Rather, we should be specific about the needs for the day and the sins that we want forgiven. The more specific, the more relational, real and personal it is and the more we are engaged with God about our lives.

Our own petition for forgiveness is linked to our commitment to "**forgive everyone who sins against us**". Jesus uses a different word for *sins* here, the word for debt. So this is a case of forgiving those who owe us something. The idea of debt highlights both our inability to pay our debt to God and the cost of forgiveness. While we may be uncomfortable with the idea of linking our own petition for forgiveness to our commitment to forgive, we cannot escape the fact that Jesus includes this phrase in a very succinct prayer. It must be both important and necessary to our seeking of forgiveness.

The final petition is, "**And lead us not into temptation**". The word for temptation has two possible meanings and it is likely that both are in mind. One meaning is the idea of being tempted or seduced into sinful or disobedient behavior. The other is translated "testing" and refers to trials or persecution. It is helpful to have this as a matter for prayer as we might think that this level of faithfulness is really up to us. That Jesus includes this in the prayer both acknowledges the reality of temptations to fall away, and our need to bring this to God our Father. The idea

of leading is puzzling. Rather than a request for God's help in resisting temptation, we are to ask Him not to lead us into it. Perhaps this is a humble admission of weakness and vulnerability and a lack of confidence that we will stand testing. We will see later in Luke 22:31-33 that Peter's confidence in his ability to stand testing is mistaken.

Jesus then tells a story about a man who needs to provide hospitality to a friend that has visited him in the middle of the night. Jesus is still teaching on prayer and this appears to be about the proper attitude in prayer. Some cultural historical context is helpful to set the scene. To have a friend visit on a journey at midnight would present a very important obligation to provide hospitality in the form of a meal. The neighbor's house was likely a one room abode, so providing the bread would wake up the whole household. The interpretation of this passage is controversial with debate surrounding the meaning of the Greek word *anaideian*, translated *boldness* (NIV) or *persistence* (NAS). This is the only NT appearance of this word, but elsewhere in ancient Greek, it means to be without shame, or shamelessness. (Space does not allow me to summarize my analysis of the various interpretations of this passage. You will need to listen online for that.)

My understanding is that the shamelessness belongs to the man at the door and it is the reason that he gets what he asks for. However, there is no reason to focus on persistence. If it is true that Middle Eastern attitudes toward hospitality would make it inconceivable for a neighbor to refuse such a request, then the understanding would be that there was no initial denial. The neighbor gets up and grants the request immediately. Even if he does not do it out of friendship, he still does it. Also, if Jesus wanted to teach on persistence in prayer, he would have used a word which means persistence.

So what is Jesus teaching about prayer and what does it have to do with shamelessness? In an honor/shame culture, with a heavy emphasis on propriety (like the ancient Middle East) one is supposed to be very concerned with avoiding anything that would bring shame. As such, shamelessness was a negative quality. Jesus is teaching that this cultural concern has no place in prayer. Consider how prayer would be affected if disciples were to be concerned about their proper place and conduct with God. What would propriety with God even look like? It would stifle petition or certainly cause it to be pretty meek. So, *boldness* works, but better to get the idea of shame so that disciples understand that the honor and shame concerns that dominate their social relations are not to be a part of their prayer relationship with God. Shamelessness, which is undesirable in society, is desirable with God in prayer. We have seen numerous examples of shameless behavior in relationship with Jesus that have been praised by Him (Mary at his feet, the woman with the issue of blood touching his cloak, and the sinful woman at the house of the Pharisee).

Jesus continues by promising that prayer will yield results. The fact that He repeats this for emphasis in verses 9 and 10 indicates that we might be tempted to believe otherwise. The continual component of these verbs (asking, seeking, knocking) implies that we do need to persevere in our prayers with the confident conviction that we will receive what we are asking of God, will find God when we seek Him and will enter into His presence when we knock at His door. Are we going to allow our current experience in prayer (especially unanswered prayer) or the words of Jesus inform our motivation?

Jesus finishes with more inconceivable situations, highlighting that if earthly fathers know how to give good gifts, how much more can we trust God for good gifts. The gift of the Holy Spirit is the ultimate gift, absolutely essential for us to be able to be fruitful as disciples.

We closed our service with an application of this teaching on prayer to the focus on evangelism brought by Randy Newman, asking the Lord for opportunities to reach people in our lives for Him. I have heard from two people who have had opportunities just as they asked for already this week. That is exciting!

Pastorally yours,  
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<http://www.christourshepherd.org/pastlet.htm> (and follow links to download MP3 audio of sermon)