Prayer
Luke 11:1-13

We saw last week through Martha and Mary that at the heart of being a disciple of Jesus is relationship with Jesus. That rather than all this other stuff that can consume our lives being our top priority, for the disciple it's Christ himself who takes that place.

But if relationship with Jesus is what matters, how do you nurture that relationship? How can you see that relationship grow? How can you see Christ and His influence in your life grow, and see the draw of all this other stuff that pulls you away from him diminish?

Well, one answer to that is prayer. And in this passage the disciples have been listening in on Jesus praying and Luke tells us that when he finished, v1, 'One of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray…" There was something about Jesus' interaction with His Heavenly Father in prayer that left these men asking, 'Jesus, we want to pray like that, will you teach us?'

It's interesting isn't it, that in one sense prayer is almost natural, it's innate within us, to call upon God - at least when things are going badly: 'God help me'. And yet at the same time we struggle over how to pray, and we feel awkward and the words aren't there and you start off and think, 'no that doesn't sound right', and on top of that you wonder whether God listens at all. So, it's no wonder the disciples hear Jesus praying and know that He has something they don't have. But asking Jesus, 'teach us to pray' is a pretty good place to start, isn't it? 'Jesus, I struggle in this area, will you teach me to pray?' Let's make that our prayer, this morning. Send up a quicky prayer: Jesus, as we look at this passage, teach me how to pray.

And in response Jesus says in v2, 'When you pray, say…' Which means Jesus has this assumption that we will pray. A disciple of His is going to pray. And the prayer He then teaches them is what we call the Lord's Prayer. Now if you've grown up in church or been a Christian for a while you might have heard Luke's version of this prayer and thought, 'that's short!' Where's the bit about your will being done on earth as in heaven, or deliver us from evil, or thine is the kingdom the power and the glory forever and ever Amen? Well, Matthew records the long one when Jesus taught it in the Sermon on the Mount. But here, with the disciples, Jesus uses this shorter version. And that should tell us something straight off, prayer isn't some kind of magic formula; say all the words in the right order, and the door will be opened and all will be well with your life. No, what Jesus is giving us here is a stand alone prayer, but also a pattern, a structure to help us pray.

And we're going to look at what Jesus teaches here in three parts. Firstly, how should you pray? Secondly, how should you come? Thirdly, who should you trust?

How should you pray?
The disciples ask Jesus to teach them to pray and in response he teaches them this prayer. Now, we could spend a week on each separate clause, but instead I

want you to see three main headings in how Jesus teaches us to pray, which are: our God, our needs and our greatest danger.

Our God

V2, And he said to them, "When you pray, say: "Father…"" What a starting point! The very reason you can pray at all is because God is your heavenly Father. Once you were a runaway, prodigal child, but in Jesus you have been brought back to your Father, you've been reconciled to Him, in Christ that breach has been healed and you can call God, Father.

And whatever else you pray after that, comes out of that knowledge, God is my Father. Prayer flows out of that relationship of intimacy and authority. The ground on which you pray is that through Jesus you are now God's child. It's not about getting the words right, or ticking the boxes or impressing Him or others. It's about coming to your Father.

You see, when it comes to prayer, you can worry about form and words: am I saying this right, what might others think? – but what God is interested in is your heart. *Religion* is all about outward form, saying the right words, using the right phrases: but in Isaiah 29:13 God says of Israel, "This people draw near me with their mouth and honour me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me." You see, it's possible to honor with lips – say all the right words, and draw near with mouth, pray correct and pretty prayers, and our hearts are a million miles away.

But Jesus says, when you pray, say "Father…' It's relationship, not religion that grounds our praying.

And yet, what follows doesn't then descend into sentimental slush. The next two phrases keep the focus on God: Let's look at the first one. V2, When you pray, say "Father, hallowed be your name." Which means, 'Father, may your name be made holy, may it be honoured, may it be worshipped, may it be glorified'. So God is your Father and He is Holy. And right at the very start, prayer isn't fundamentally about us, or our needs. Prayer is about God and His glory and His worship. It's about us in a relationship of love and dependence upon Him, and He's the focus.

And our Father is the High and Holy One. And the first thing Jesus teaches us to pray is 'may worship abound to you; may your name and your reputation be glorified in the world.' May I catch a vision of your glory. Father, may my children, my family, this area, these universities, this nation, may your name be glorified here. That's why Isaiah could say that a day would come when the people of God would declare "your name and renown are the desire of our hearts" (Isaiah 26:8) – that's top of what I'm praying for Father – that your name and your fame would be made great. That's why the Psalmist could pray in Ps 115:1 "Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to your name give glory." Father, I don't want to live or give my life for my glory, but for yours.

You see, it is easy for us to get fenced in by our own little world and the issues we are dealing with, and those can seem so overwhelming and pressing that they pre-occupy us. But this prayer just blows those fences down. It enlarges the scope and the vision of what you're praying is for. It undoes any danger of being small-minded in our praying. Father, glorify your name. Let all the earth be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

Well, that's the first phrase, but the second phrase is just as Godward. V2, Father, hallowed be your name. *Your kingdom come*. You see, God is your Father and your Father is Holy and He's the King. And Jesus says, pray that your Father's rule and reign would advance in people's lives. Pray that the domain of darkness might be pushed back, that God's justice and righteousness and mercy and love might be manifested. Now, that will only be fully completed when Jesus' kingdom finally comes in all it's fullness, on the last day. But in between we live in the now and not yet of the kingdom, with the kingdom breaking in, but with darkness still everywhere around. So Jesus says, pray for kingdom advance. In our hearts and those of our families, in our college friends and work colleagues, in the overturning of unjust laws. That the unborn and the poor and oppressed might be protected, that satan's domain might be pushed back, that many might come to know the King. Father, let your kingdom come.

So having established who it is we're praying to, our Father, and that the desire of our hearts is that His kingdom would come and His glory would abound, Jesus turns next to our needs.

Our Needs

Once we have God, and his kingdom and His glory as our focus, any subsequent requests are going to fall into their proper places. And Jesus sums up our needs as *daily bread* and *daily mercy*, because those are the things we need if we are to glorify His name and see His kingdom come. Without bread, we're dead. And without mercy and the forgiveness of sins we will just wallow in the guilt and slime of sin.

So in v3 Jesus says pray to your Father, "give us each day our daily bread." Now, take note, it's not, 'set me up for the rest of my life, God, so I don't have to keep coming back.' It's a daily coming to God, that teaches us this attitude of daily dependence: God, I can't get through today without you. You are my Father, you are Holy, you are the king, and you're my provider. And, this isn't just about food – but we are to look to Him, our Father, for whatever we need to get us through the day.

But for us here in Switzerland, God has so amply provided for us in our material needs that we really don't need any more bread in the larder. Instead, we should be looking to see how we can be the answer to someone else's prayer for daily bread. That God has given us His riches that we might steward them and share them with those who don't have, and use what He's given us to resource His name being glorified and His kingdom coming, and others being fed in the world.

Then Jesus says in v4, "and forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us." If we need daily bread, we surely need daily mercy even more. Some of you have heard me say before that one of the things the Lord used to bring me to Him was the realization that I was just churning out all this sin. I was like a sin factory and I couldn't turn it off, and this mountain of sin was getting bigger and bigger and I was only sixteen. Well, here, Jesus doesn't describe sin as a mountain, He describes it as a debt. It's not so much a mountain as a hole, an ever-increasing hole of debt. Now, how are you going to pay your debt off? Every time you do something you shouldn't do that debt-hole just grows bigger. And everytime you don't do something you should do, it grows bigger. And the problem is there is nothing you can do about it. Worse, our very efforts to do something about it make the hole bigger, because even our righteous acts are like filthy rags in God's sight.

So we need mercy. And in His great grace God gives us daily mercy in Jesus, who's paid the price for our sin at the cross, He's cancelled the debt, He's filled the hole. And all we need do is go to Him for mercy. Forgive us our sins Father – not because of anything we've done, but because of Jesus. No excuses, no blame shifting, just a humble acknowledgement of our sin and of His free and full forgiveness.

But what seems so much harder sometimes is to forgive those who sin against us. Yet Jesus says, when you pray, come with out holding onto any bitterness. Let that drop out of your hand. Because when someone has sinned against you, you really only have two options. Either you forgive them, or you become bitter. And as someone else has said, if you choose to go down the path of unforgiveness and hold this thing against them, it's like drinking rat poison and thinking the rat will die. Now, forgiving someone isn't pretending this sin didn't happen. And it's not pretending it's no big deal – it is a big deal, Christ had to die for it. But it is choosing not to hold this thing against them, and recognizing that just as we are hopelessly in debt to God, but He has forgiven us that debt, so in Jesus we can forgive this other person's debt to us.

So when we pray, we're coming to our Father, praying for His glory and His kingdom to abound, and for our needs of daily bread and daily mercy to see that happen. But in the last phrase of this prayer Jesus addresses our greatest danger.

Our Greatest Danger

V4 "And lead us not into temptation." You see, if we get trapped by sin, it destroys spiritual vitality. Either we hide from the truth and sink into hypocrisy, or we acknowledge it and feel the weight of shame and guilt. And both wreak prayer and leave us unable to lift our eyes to the vision of His glory and kingdom. So pray, Father, keep me from temptation.

Now, you could hear that and think, would God deliberately lead me into temptation? And the answer is no. The Bible is clear, James 1:13, 'Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no-one.' So we can't point the finger at God and say, you made me do this! Rather, Paul tells us that when we are tempted God

always provides the way of escape (1 Cor 10:13) – and Jesus is saying, when temptation comes, ask God to show you the door. Pray, 'Father, keep me from those situations where I am going to be tempted to sin. I want to honour you with my life, not grieve you, I want to live for your glory, so Father, I put my hand in yours, like a child with his dad, and say Dad, I don't like it here, will you get me out.'

So, in this prayer Jesus teaches us what to pray. But then, in the rest of this passage, he tells us how we should come and whom we should trust in prayer. We're going to look at those two just briefly.

How should you come?
Having taught them the prayer, Jesus tells them this parable of the grumpy neighbor, whose friend comes knocking him up in the middle of the night, asking for bread. And the reason Jesus tells it is because you can think, God is Holy, and I'm not, and He's the king, and I'm just a pleb. And He may be my Father, but I know what some fathers are like and I daren't go near him. And Jesus tells this parable to say, when you approach your heavenly Father in prayer, you can come with boldness.

You see, there's this guy and a guest arrives in the middle of the night. But his host doesn't have any bread to feed him with. And there are no Migros or Co-ops around and if there were they wouldn't be open when you wanted them, so his only option is his neighbor. But his neighbor is poor, because they only have a one-room house and all the kids and the parents are in the same bed, and do I dare knock him up? And Jesus is saying, which of you would have the nerve to do that?

But the guy does go, and the neighbor is grumpy, and if you've ever just managed to put your children to sleep and someone then rings the doorbell and wakes them up again, you'll know why he's grumpy! And Jesus says he won't give him the bread because he's a friend, but because of the man's impudence. Because of his shameless boldness, because of his sheer nerve, he'll give it.

And the point is: if this neighbor will respond to that kind of boldness, don't you think your loving heavenly Father will more so? You don't have to sit at the back wondering, should I or shouldn't I, will I or won't I? Jesus says, 'go to Him, go knocking on your Father's door'. Pray and pray boldly, pray and pray shamelessly, pray and pray with nerve. The guy in the parable wants to be a good host, so he's prepared to upset some folks and risk rebuke, and wake up a whole family, because he wants bread for a friend. And he's not going to be put off. And Jesus is saying, be like that in prayer. If this neighbor responds to that kind of boldness, don't you think God will? You see, I don't think it's too strong to say that God despises lukewarm-ness, Jesus says He spits that out of His mouth. What He responds to is earnest, shameless, persistent boldness before the throne of God. So come to your Father and come boldly.

But Jesus closes out this teaching by telling us who we can trust when we pray.

Who should you trust?
And the answer is you can trust your gracious Father to answer your prayer. V9: 'Ask and it will be given to you, seek and you will find, knock and it will be opened to you.' And then Jesus repeats over again. It's as if he's saying, six times, pray and God will answer, pray and God will answer…

But that answer may not be yes. It may not be the answer you want. It may be yes, or it may be no, or it may be later. Because any of us who are parents know that no loving father would always give a child what they wanted. If I did that I'd be sharing our apartment with 14 horses, 3 dogs, 6 fluffy bunny rabbits and a flock of mountain goats.

No, Jesus says you can trust your Father to give you what's right. He's not going to give you a serpent instead of a fish – I mean what use is that? Or a scorpion instead of an egg, because that's downright dangerous. He won't give you what's no use to you and he won't give you what might harm you. You can trust Him, because He's your dad!

Now, sometimes we're asking for something and we think it's a fish. We want it, we think we need it and the Father is sat there saying, 'no, that's a serpent, I'm not letting you have that, I love you too much'. And we think we know our taxonomy better than he does. And Jesus is saying, 'pray, come boldly, God will hear and answer and you can trust Him to give you the right thing at the right time. He's your father.'

And in closing Jesus brings this right back to God. V13: 'If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him.' Because He is our greatest need. Our hearts are restless 'till they find their rest in Him. We can pray for situations and for stuff and that's right. But what all of us need more than anything else is more of God. So, Jesus says, pray for that: For His presence, for His guiding, for His empowering, for His fruit and for His gifts. AW Tozer said that each of us has as much or as little, of God as we want. So let us pray for more – and trust our Father to answer.