



## Gospel Luke 11:1-13

<sup>1</sup>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." <sup>2</sup>He said to them, "When you pray, say: Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. <sup>3</sup>Give us each day our daily bread. <sup>4</sup>And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us. And do not bring us to the time of trial."

<sup>5</sup>And he said to them, "Suppose one of you has a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; <sup>6</sup>for a friend of mine has arrived, and I have nothing to set before him.' <sup>7</sup>And he answers from within, 'Do not bother me; the door has already been locked, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.' <sup>8</sup>I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, at least because of his persistence he will get up and give him whatever he needs.

<sup>9</sup>"So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. <sup>10</sup>For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. <sup>11</sup>Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for a fish, will give a snake instead of a fish? <sup>12</sup>Or if the child asks for an egg, will give a scorpion? <sup>13</sup>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!"

### Echoes of Wisdom

Luke 11:1-13

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This past Friday, I was out and about and came across the Episcopal Church of the Heavenly Rest where I have heard about the folded doves called Les Colombes. As I approached the doors, it was unclear if the church was open or not. Considering I've got the Rev. in front of my name now, I thought, well, it can't hurt to peep in a church, right? There was no one else around and so as I peeped my head in, I ask the front desk if I could take a look at the doves. "Of course, you're most welcome" he said "You can stay as long as you like." Surprised by his hospitality, I walked into the chilly sanctuary, unsure of what to expect and as I looked up I saw hundreds of thousands of folded doves hanging right above me, flying as if in parallel with a winding river. The room was quiet, a woman was

praying a few pews in front of me and the birds hung above us symbolizing diversity and the goodness of the world. I found peace in that brief moment of awe.

Each origami dove was folded by people of all ages, race, and faith. Within each dove, that person writes or draws about what the word "release" means to them – release from burdens, pain, addiction, or the actual literal release.<sup>1</sup> This installation is in partnership with Hudson Link for Higher Education in Prison "who wants to draw attention to the issue of mass incarceration in our country and what the word "release" means to individuals in prison."<sup>2</sup> The creator of this art installation, Michael Pendry, comments that "the doves create an atmosphere of calmness, gentleness,

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<sup>1</sup> "First exhibition on the East Coast of Les Colombes on view at The Episcopal Church of the Heavenly Rest," *Artdaily.org*, <http://artdaily.com/news/112818/First-exhibition-on-the-East->

[Coast-of-Les-Colombes-on-view-at-The-Episcopal-Church-of-the-Heavenly-Rest-#.XTyPOS-ZM1g](#)

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

and virtue as they fly through the air in an arrangement which appears to be a loose flock of birds. Folded by so many people, the doves in their unity stand for the right to peace and freedom for all people.”<sup>3</sup>

And so what does the word “release” mean to you? For me, release means sinking into the arms of my beloved community. Release means to me feeling up to getting out of bed and enjoying a long walk and sunshine. Release means to not have to fear where my next meal will come from or where my head will lay for rest. Release to me means a prayer that is simply a large sigh of relief. Release means to me freedom, happiness, justice, rest, energy, acceptance, creativity, and most important for me, community.

And as I worked through this passage this week, Christ wants all that too, and teaches the disciples a prayer to guide them as they seek those things and more. It’s not unusual during this time for rabbis or teachers to provide a certain prayer to be repeated. And there’s no doubt that the format and subject matter of this prayer closely resembles other ancient Jewish prayers. And so those certain prayers that were taught were signs of identification among disciples and their teachers. This prayer, the Lord’s Prayer, marks their identity as a disciple of Christ. It is a prayer of a community, not of an individual. The pronouns are plural. And the prayer is both concern about the here and now, but also about the world that we all desire that we know God can provide.

And so it starts out with “Father, hallowed be your name.” Amy-Jill Levine and Ben Witherington the III provides back and forth commentary on the meaning of Father. Witherington suggests that Luke is possibly being political. For in 2 BCE, “the emperor Augustus accepted the title *pater patriae*, “father of the fatherland, a title similar to the American appellation of George Washington as ‘father of the country’. To call the God of Israel “Father” thus indicates that the emperor of Rome is not the ‘father’ to whom one prays or on whom one

relies”<sup>4</sup> And so by Jesus starting the prayer with “Father, hallowed be your name,” he completely destroys the power of the emperor and raises God as the one who provides.

And so, the next phrase says, “Your kingdom come.” This implores the coming of change in this world. A change of the earthly kingdom to God’s kingdom, a kingdom of justice and compassion, love and liberation of all oppressed people. But the phrase “hallow be your name” and “your kingdom come” are not independent from the phrase, “Give us each day our daily bread”. All three are necessary for this prayer of community. *Epiousios*, the Greek work for “daily” is problematic in its translation. It shows up nowhere else in Greek literature before Matthew and Luke. It could mean, “daily” or “tomorrow” or “necessary”. All three are accurate translations, so it could be translated as “Give us tomorrow’s bread” or “give us the necessary bread for survival”. All this, along with the present-tense imperative, so a command, “to give” tells us that it’s a prayer for the needy, for if the needy does not have tomorrow’s bread the night before, “they will not eat before working in the morning.”<sup>5</sup> These three sentences that come at the beginning of the prayer – “Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread” – well, these are not just a list of petitions, or wants for the community or individual, like maybe we have thought our entire lives. Instead, as Justo Gonzalez says, “It is a single, ardent call for the kingdom in which God’s name is hallowed, and in which all have what they need.”<sup>6</sup> This prayer is a call and a reminder that God truly takes charge of life, our lives, to bring justice and reconciliation and peace to our world, something that we can pray for and work towards and that only God can truly bring about with God’s kingdom.<sup>7</sup>

I’ve been listening to an NPR podcast, called *White Lies*. It’s about two journalists from Alabama who returned to the city of Selma. A city that carries the history of Bloody Sunday, a march on the Edmund Pettus Bridge that ended in disgusting violence. Selma is also the place where in 1965, Rev.

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Amy-Jill Levine and Ben Witherington III, *The Gospel of Luke*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 312.

<sup>5</sup> Levine, 314.

<sup>6</sup> Justo L. Gonzalez, *Luke (Belief: A Theological Commentary on the Bible)*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2019), 143.

<sup>7</sup> James A. Wallace, “Luke 11:1-13,” in *Feasting on the Word (Preaching and Revised Common Lectionary) Year C, Volume 3, Pentecost and Season After Pentecost 1, (Proper 3-16)*, ed. David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 289.

James Reeb, a white Unitarian Universalist pastor, was murdered. The podcast reveals the public history of this murder – that three men were tried and acquitted and never held responsible for Rev. Reeb’s death. And the journalists also exposed lies that kept the Reeb’s family from justice. They discovered “a story about guilt and a memory that says as much about America today as it does about the past.”<sup>8</sup> They found it extremely difficult to discover the truth. No one in that town wanted to talk about the murder that occurred 1965, even when most people knew the killers. And so, reconciliation and justice never happened for the Reeb family or for that town. Andrew Beck Grace, one of the journalists said in an interview “this country has never had a proper truth and reconciliation moment about race. And we’ve heard someone - very famous thinker on race, Bryan Stevenson, say this idea, which - truth and reconciliation are sequential. So, to have reconciliation, we have to first have the truth.”<sup>9</sup>

We can’t have the truth if we’re not ready to face it. And if we’re not open to the truth, we can’t have reconciliation and the potential of peace and the feeling of release. And so, what about God’s Kingdom if we don’t have those things? The two journalists continued and connected with Joanne Bland an African American woman who lives in Selma and cofounded the National Voting Rights Museum. She was 11 years old when she joined her sister and the others marchers on that bridge that Bloody Sunday. She profoundly told the NPR journalists, “I don’t know what it’s going to take to make the world right, I do know that you should not be sitting waiting for it to happen, for somebody else to do.”<sup>10</sup> Joanne is often criticized for trying to keep “a certain past alive in a place filled with lots of people who want to forget it.”<sup>11</sup> And the people who want to forget it, often tell Joanne, “You need to look forward and stop dwelling on this history – it’s water under the bridge.” No pun intended? I don’t know. Joanne tells them, “Unfortunately, we have too many people still that way – how can you tell me to move on? You don’t get bogged down in this history – that’s not true – those same things are still happening today.”<sup>12</sup> And she’s right.

Everywhere we look, there are broken systems. Our guests who are here at our shelter each night are in one of the most broken systems in this city. I have people come to this church asking how they can sleep in our shelter. I tell them, if they go to a certain drop-in center and then request to come here, they are more than welcome. They tell me stories about being just a number in the shelters and having to go through a system that dehumanizes and analyzes their entire self and they will certainly not go through that again. They tell me they would rather sleep on the street. They asked me one more time, can I please just sleep here tonight? Then when people experiencing homelessness are in the system and staying at our shelter, I hear stories about how they are being kicked out because they have been in the system too long and system doesn’t know what to do with them. Because there aren’t enough social workers and the social workers are burned out. And there aren’t enough rooms or affordable apartments in NYC. Almost every guest in our shelter has a job or is looking for a job. They are trying their hardest and they nice, lovely men. Then I hear about the micro-aggressions that racially profile someone seeking shelter. If that one employee of the city has some sort of prejudice because of another person’s race or gender or sexuality, that person is placed last on the list for housing or given the weakest spot. As Joanne Bland said in the podcast, “I don’t know what it’s going to take to make the world right, I do know that you should not be sitting waiting for it to happen, for somebody else to do...how can you tell me to move on?”<sup>13</sup>

So often we hear this phrase in the news, “we send out our thoughts and prayers.” How can we pray, but not do? How can we do, but not pray? This passage today equips us with both. We don’t have to choose between one or the other. The parable that follows proves that God is eager to give assistance. A friend goes to a close neighbor in the middle of the night to ask for bread for another friend. Even though the neighbor did not want to get up in the middle of the night from his cozy bed, the shamelessness and

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<sup>8</sup> Rachel Martin, “‘White Lies’ Podcast Exposes What Happened The Night James Reeb Died,” interviewed by Rachel Martin, *Morning Edition*, May 14, 2019. <https://www.npr.org/2019/05/14/723134995/white-lies-podcast-exposes-what-happened-the-night-james-reeb-died>.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> *White Lies*, NPR, <https://www.npr.org/podcasts/510343/white-lies>.

<sup>11</sup> *White Lies*.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *White Lies*.

persistence of the knocker is the same as us shamelessly and persistently praying to God for change in this world. And then shamelessly and persistently working with God for that change. “Jesus’ illustrations characterize God as eager to give assistance; God, even more than a friend, is obliged and committed to respond to those in need.”<sup>14</sup> God is obliged and committed to respond to our prayers as well. But it’s not that we are to pray for what we want. It takes calling out systems of oppression, racism, sexism, homophobia that debilitate our community. This prayer is about community and when one hurts, we all hurt. So, no. There comes a time where we can’t continue to just give our thoughts and prayers to those who are hurting.

Back in November, for about a week, I was trained in Baltimore by NEXT church to organize communities and congregations who would like to seek systemic change in the community. Change from underneath so that lives become sustainable. There is an organization in NYC called Metro IAF New York who organizes and keep our leaders accountable by advocating for affordable housing or working with the school system for a more equal experience for our children. This organization, they are seeking justice. And I often hear about it from our friends are First Presbyterian of Jamaica Queens. They are looking towards a new kingdom, a kingdom of wholeness, where all are valued and worthy. They are living into the Lord’s Prayer. And so that entire week that I was in Baltimore, learning about how to organize leaders and communities, hearing stories and being pushed from the soul, we were in constant prayer. We were in prayer, while learning to do something new and good for this world. And so yes, we pray for God to bring the fullness of God’s reign to fruition. The strange parable that follows the Lord’s Prayer affirms God’s commitment to accomplishing God’s kingdom of peace and justice and release of the captives. And when we pray as Jesus taught, we should expect that God intends to use us as a means toward doing so”<sup>15</sup>

So, if we are to use this prayer as we do each Sunday, then we must understand that God intends to use us for the goodness of this world. God intends to use us for the sake of humanity. God intends to use us so that all people are released from their burdens

and the systems created to keep the low low. God intended to use us and we can’t ignore it. Where does God intend to use you right now? For thine is the Kingdom and the Power and the glory forever, Amen.

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<sup>14</sup> Matthew L. Skinner, “Luke 11:1-13,” in *Feasting on the Word (Preaching and Revised Common Lectionary) Year C, Volume 3, Pentecost and Season After Pentecost 1, (Proper 3-*

*16)*, ed. David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 29.

<sup>15</sup> Skinner, 291.