

St. Andrews Lutheran Church, Tallebudgera

3rd September 2023

Luke 11:1-13

‘Dad, ...’ – conversation with our loving Father

An important part of any relationship, in many ways the most important, is communication. But we all probably know, some of us from both sides, that communication between a child and their parents isn't always the best. In honour of Fathers' Day, here are some things fathers don't often hear from their children: 'Hey Dad, got any more good jokes? My friends always love hearing them.' 'Hey Dad, here's the money I borrowed the other day'. 'No Dad, let me get lunch today, you pay for enough for me'. 'That shirt you were wearing the other day Dad, do you mind if I borrow it?' 'Dad, if I'm doing anything wrong, please tell me, it's the only way I'll learn'. 'Wow Dad, you were right! I'm pleased I did it your way, what I was going to do just wouldn't have worked out at all'.

We laugh about how what we say to our parents isn't always what it could be, but that's just another reminder of how important regular, open, and honest communication is in any relationship which we want to be real and have some level of intimacy.

Father's Day, a day when we reflect on our relationships with our fathers. While for some of us that relationship may not be good, or even very bad, for different reasons, for many of us we give thanks for our fathers, whatever form that relationship takes; who they are to us, what they have done for us, what they continue to do for us. We can of course do that every day of the year, but it's good too that we have a deliberate and intentional time when we can do this also.

It's also a good time to reflect on our relationship with God as our heavenly Father, and in thinking about the importance of communication in our relationships we think about the part prayer plays in our relationship with God. The best example we have of prayer is what is both shown and taught by Jesus. In the Gospels, whenever Jesus was tired, worried, or about to do something difficult or significant, He went away to pray: after feeding about 15,000 people He left the disciples as they headed off across the lake in a boat while He went away to pray. Before His final journey to Jerusalem and His death He went up a mountain to pray in what we now call the Transfiguration. And, perhaps the best known, on the night before He died, the night of His arrest, in the garden Jesus prayed, 'Father, if it is possible please take this cup from me. But not my will, but yours be done.' Prayer, staying connected with His Father, looking to His Father for strength and guidance, keeping His will aligned with the Father's, Jesus knew was very important for His relationship with His Father. He made sure then, to take the time, to get away from the crowds, to be with His Father, to pray.

And the disciples, not surprisingly, noticed that, and so Luke tells us here that one day they come to Jesus and say, 'Lord, teach us to pray'. I suspect that, like us, what they were after here was for Jesus to give them a simple formula and way to pray. From their culture they were used to prayer

being done in very set places, at set times, using set rituals, so Jesus just praying at different times and places, and seemingly quite informally, was different for them.

In response to their request, Jesus gave the disciples both what we now call the Lord's Prayer, and then a mini parable and other short teachings about prayer. Although we regularly use, not wrongly, the Lord's Prayer as a prayer itself, Jesus' intention was to give more of a teaching of what prayer is than a set formula. We've looked at it before, and no doubt we will again, so not to go into it too much here but in this teaching Jesus is telling us to begin prayer by praying for God's kingdom and His glory, that we can come to God and ask for everything we need in our lives, that we don't just pray for ourselves but also for others, to be persistent in coming to God, that many times prayer is more about conforming ourselves to God's will than conforming Him to ours, and that just as our sometimes imperfect human fathers normally do what is good for us, how much more so will our perfect Heavenly Father?

As I was preparing this Address, I kept looking for that deep, barely understandable but so important, teaching here which would totally switch us all on to the importance of prayer and while maybe not making it easier to do would make us work harder at it, for a while anyway. And then, I thought, isn't that so often the problem, that we over complicate, over formalise, over think, what prayer is all about and how we should be doing it? For what we are looking at today, about the importance of prayer as our communication with God, the most significant thing is how Jesus says we begin our prayers; who are we addressing? 'Father'. And that's not 'Father' in the way we might see on TV shows and movies children of very rich old money families address a parent they don't really have a close relationship to, it's a 'Father' which expresses a close, intimate, trusting, loving, bond and relationship. That's why for this theme I have changed 'Father' to 'Dad', as it picks up more how we would express the relationship Jesus is talking about here. A great teaching about what this means is found in Martin Luther's *Small Catechism*, in his teaching on the Introduction of the Lord's Prayer: 'God encourages us to believe that He really is our Father and that we really are His children. So we can pray to God with complete confidence just as children speak to their loving parents'. What Jesus teaches us, and what Luther reminds us, is that we speak to God as children speak to their loving parents. It is that simple, basic, normal, down to earth. Praying, having a conversation with God, is just like having a conversation with someone you are really close to, someone you love and trust. When it comes to prayer, just relax, think of God as your loving Father, and talk to Him.

But still, we sometimes, not surprisingly, like a bit of help with this, and that's ok too. Prayer is a very individual thing, but here are some suggestions which may help you out with the 'when' and the 'how', or at least help you to think about how it can look for you.

Firstly the 'when'. We can of course pray at any time, that's important to know and remember, but I also think it's good to have a regular time set aside. I'm reminded of that as I think about my relationship with my parents. I've always been close to my parents, but for much of my over 30 years since leaving home I would ring them just when I could, when I didn't feel too or tired or have too many other things going on, so I'm sure that on a number of occasions weeks or possibly months passed without me talking to them; unintentionally, it just happened. Three years ago, when COVID came and we had extended lockdowns, I made a point of ringing them every Monday afternoon, my day off. That was really good for my relationship with them, so I continue to do it. They now expect it, to the point where they send me a text if they're going to be out that afternoon so I know to ring them later, and if I have something else on I let them know so they don't worry and wait. I had always talked to them, but having an intentional time of doing that has really strengthened my relationship with them.

The same is true about our relationship with God. Again, we can pray any time, but also having an intentional time to do that means it does happen. It will work differently for each of us. For me, sitting at my desk first thing in the morning works well. Many years ago, I knew a lady who had three kids under school age at home, and each morning she would have 'Humphrey time', (shows how long ago it was) putting her kids in front of the TV to watch *Here's Humphrey* every morning so she could have time in Bible reading, reflection, and prayer. What does that look like for you? Is it driving to or from work? On a morning or afternoon walk? In the middle of the day, maybe a lunch break, when you can get some quiet time? Pray to God always, but also make the decision and effort to set aside the time to do this regularly, and see where your relationship with Him goes from there.

The second part people often wonder about is the 'How'. Simple answer; don't over think it, just have a conversation with God, see where that takes you. If, like many of us, you sometimes find it hard to focus and your mind wandering away from this conversation, there are some things you may like to try. For about the last six years I've regularly used a finger prayer labyrinth in my prayer time. There are many different ways you can 'pray' a labyrinth, and I find it helps me a lot with my focus. We also have below our Worship Centre a full-size labyrinth which you can walk and pray through; perhaps consider giving that a try before or after worship one Sunday. You can use Luther's *Small Catechism* as a prayer guide; to start with go through each of His explanations to the parts of the Lord's Prayer. Read each one, think about it, see what comes from there to pray to God about. I pray for you all regularly using our church directory, and while we can't give them out to everyone anymore on the weekly Bulletin are families listed to pray for each week, as well as other prayer points. There are prayer apps and websites. Some of you might find it useful as you go through each day to make a list on your phone or a piece of paper, jotting down things you are thankful for, things you are worried about, needs of others you want to bring to God. It is different for each

one of us. If you would like to change your prayer life, perhaps to be more intentional and focused, take the time and effort to find what works for you.

At the beginning we thought about, and laughed at, things fathers don't often hear from their children. To turn that around, having focused here on prayer as being a conversation with our loving Father, what are some things God is always ready to hear from us: Dad, ... 'I'm sorry'. 'It's been a while.' 'Please'. 'What do you think?' 'Thankyou.' 'I need help.' 'I just want to spend some time together and catch up.' 'I didn't think it would be this hard, help me through it.' 'What do I do now?' 'I can't believe how blessed I am!' As we think about our fathers who are no longer with us, and spend time with or speak to those who are, we thank our heavenly Father that in His love He wants us to have a close relationship with Him; a relationship which in prayer sees us opening ourselves up to Him, His will, His love, His care, in our lives. Amen.

FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION/REFLECTION

- Think about your prayer life, and the role it plays in your relationship with God. Are happy with it, (if so, that is ok) or would you like it to be more intentional and focused so your relationship with Him can be stronger?
- If you would like to work on your communication with your Heavenly Father, your prayer life, think about some of the things which have been mentioned here about times and ways to pray. Can you think of anything which might work for you? If you are struggling for any ideas which you believe fit you and your life, have a chat to some one or look around online and see what you come up with. Remember, this is different for everyone, and you might find a number of different approaches which are helpful to you.
- Take the time, quiet time, to be alone and still and just be with God and think about your relationship with Him. Ask Him to open your heart and mind to His love and His will, to honestly see where your prayer life is at and if it needs more deliberate focus and attention from you.

Pray: thank God that He is our Heavenly Father who loves us and wants a close and personal relationship with us. Pray that God leads us to work towards a relationship which is always open and honest with Him.

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