

Jesus' illustration of a man requesting bread at midnight from a friend is intended as an encouragement to pray persistently to God. If a friend will rise and give you bread at midnight, how much more so will God answer prayers? Persistent prayers are different than parachute prayers. Parachute prayers spoken only in emergencies are not based on a long-term relationship with our Heavenly Father. Our Gospel today reminds us that God is faithful to those who persistently ask, search, and knock persistently. God promises to respond by giving us those things we really need instead of those things we think we need. As Jesus says in Luke 11, God doesn't give us snakes and scorpions. Sometimes God's answer to prayer is "No." Sometimes God's answer to prayer is "Yes." Often God's answer to prayer is "Wait." Waiting is the school in which we learn to submit to God's reign and control. As so eloquently put by the poet John Milton "God doth not need either man's work or his own gifts. Who best bear his mild yoke, they serve him best. His state is kingly: thousands at his bidding speed, And post o'er land and ocean without rest; They also serve who only stand and wait." (Sonnet 19).

The Lord's Prayer is all about God's reign over us for our own good. We approach God in prayer as our loving Father and as the Lord of the universe. The prayer "Abba, Your Kingdom Come" picks up both ends of paradox of the king of the universe being our Father.

The first word in the Lord's Prayer is "Abba." "Abba" is the Aramaic name used by a Jewish child for his or her father. Aramaic is a Jewish dialect spoken by the Jews in Jesus' time and literally, "Abba" means "Dad." It is a term of affection. No one before Jesus dared to think or teach that we could approach God in such a way. That's one of the reasons the apostles were stunned by the way Jesus prayed. He talked to God like a son might talk to his Dad. Jesus not only prayed this way; he expected his disciples to pray this way, too.

The captain of the universe is our Abba. He pays attention to our petitions because he loves us. The first word in the Lord's Prayer encourages us to believe in the affection of the Lord of the universe, but that doesn't mean we should take God for granted. The first petition of the Lord's Prayer provides the corrective for those who forget that our Dad is also the Lord of the universe. "Hallowed be your name" is a reminder that we are called to be humble before the ruler of all things. The Lord's Prayer calls us to be uniquely personal and profoundly humble before our God. God's name is holy. We pray in this petition that we might make it holy in our lives by our words and deeds.

Moses and the people of God were so fearful of mispronouncing and/or misusing this name that they used the name "Elohim" instead. The Hebrews wrote the name, "YHWH," but didn't use it in speech and seldom do today. When Hebrew scholars added vowels to the language, it was uncertain which vowels to use and where to place them in this word. That's how the name "Jehovah" came into use. The first petition in the Lord's Prayer is a helpful corrective for the disrespect shown to God in our time.

Your Kingdom Come. To pray this petition means that we recognise that God is in control of our lives. The control issue is a major issue for all of us. In our time, we have remote controls, for television sets, for DVD players, fire-sticks, live streaming and Netflix and the ultimate control our "personal device" in our pocket or between our thumbs. We have remote controls for garages, gates, and car doors. The trouble is that we tend to think that we have the button on the remote control

device for life. To confess Jesus as Lord and recognise that he rules over us means that we believe God has the remote control button for life. That's what the kingdom of God is all about.

The kingdom of God doesn't come in fullness until the end of time when God shall reign forever and every knee shall bow before the Lord Jesus Christ, but the kingdom came to earth in a special way in the person of Jesus. In other words, the kingdom of God is a future event, but it came near when Jesus appeared on earth in the past. Jesus said, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent and believe in the good news" (Mark 2:15). While the kingdom of God won't come in fullness until the end of time, Jesus encouraged his followers to start living as if it had already arrived.

In addition, the kingdom of God comes today. The kingdom will come in fullness at the Second Coming of Christ; it came as a preview of coming attractions in the First Coming of Jesus and it comes in the present wherever Jesus comes today. Jesus is present in Word and in Sacrament. The kingdom of God breaks into Christian fellowship today as a foretaste of the ultimate reign of God. To pray, "Your kingdom come," then, means that we agree to God's rule over us. By nature, we fight this rule and have done so from the beginning of time. That's called the Great Rebellion. We have been rebelling ever since. We don't want anyone to rule over us, even when the Ruler is our Abba who seeks to rule us only because he knows what is good for us better than we do.

The prayer petition, "Your will be done on earth as in heaven," drives home the point that the issue of the control button is a matter of the will. To pray "Your kingdom come" means that it is our intention to bend our will to the will of the one who made us, and to do it gladly, not with clenched teeth, fists and frowns. We don't always know the will of God completely, but to the degree God reveals it in his Word, we are invited to agree to his control like the angels do it. The angels do the will of God gladly.

Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread This petition of the Lord's Prayer clearly means that we should be grateful for the food which comes to us daily from God and to offer what we call "grace" at all our meals. Obviously there is more here than gratefulness for food. Alternatively, this petition may be translated, "Give us our bread for tomorrow" or as New Testament scholars Jeremias and Taylor suggest, "Give us tomorrow's bread today." In other words, this petition about bread is about the kingdom bread that we need to sustain us if we are to be the people who try to live under God's reign.

Tomorrow's bread is the bread of the coming kingdom of God. This bread comes to us in Word and Sacrament as we meet in Christian fellowship. It is like the manna from heaven given to the ancient Hebrews as they crossed the desert on their way to the promised land. Our spiritual journey is like that of the ancient Hebrews. We are no longer in Egypt, but we have not yet reached the promised land. We are wanderers in the wilderness of life. The wilderness is a place where we need to be sustained so that we can continue the journey toward heaven. God sends "tomorrow's bread," manna from heaven, to sustain us today.

Forgive Us As We Forgive Others. Forgiveness of sins is a sign of the breakthrough of the kingdom of God. Jesus not only taught his followers that they should forgive their enemies. He lived his teaching, saying from the cross, "Father (Abba), forgive them for they don't know what they are doing." In the parable about the prodigal son and his father (Luke 15:11-32), forgiveness is offered before repentance is made.

That's a kingdom of God way to do things. We aren't responsible for someone else saying, "I'm sorry." As Christians, we are responsible for a willingness to forgive even before those who have hurt us see the error of their ways and repent. As Christians, we are responsible for a willingness to forgive even if there is no repentance on the part of those who have hurt us. In a sense, it isn't our responsibility to forgive others. Our responsibility is to be willing to forgive and to offer forgiveness.

That's the way God treats us. Kingdom of God people try to do things the way God does them. God is willing to forgive us when we hurt him. Therefore, we should be willing to forgive those who hurt us. If we are not willing to forgive those who offend us, even when from our point of view, they don't deserve it, that's a signal that we don't understand that we have been forgiven, when we didn't deserve it. We become no better than the unforgiving servant in Jesus' parable with attendant consequences (Matthew 18:21-35). In other words, our promise to be willing to forgive is attached to the prayer petition about forgiveness. "We will try to do for others what you, our Abba, have done for us."

"Do not bring us to the time of trial" (NRSV) is a clearer translation than "Lead us not into temptation" (KJV). God tempts no one to sin. In my view, the best translation of this petition is: "Save us from the great ordeal." The Lord's Prayer begins with the term of affectionate intimacy, "Abba." That means that we can endure anything if our Dad is close by. Jesus went through the great ordeal when he cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" This is the only place in the recorded prayers of Jesus that he doesn't call God, Abba.

In this petition, we pray that we never have to go through what Jesus went through on the cross: the feeling of utter forsakenness. In Christian history this state of utter loneliness is called "the dark night of the soul." God loves us. He is our Abba. We learn to accept that love and love him back. God guides us. We learn to follow that guidance. Then when we really need God and pray to him to help us or someone we love because what is happening is far beyond our control, sometimes God seems to be asleep. Worse yet, God seems not to care. That is the great ordeal. Some Christians don't go through the great ordeal. Some go through it, get to the end of their rope, tie a knot, and hang on by their fingernails and just barely get through it. Because the great ordeal is the territory of the evil one who seeks to separate us from God, we pray we will be saved from going there. We are called to remember that Jesus got through it, conquered the evil one, and is calling us to overcome the temptation of feeling forsaken.

Persistence at such times is difficult but essential. God is listening, even when he doesn't seem to care. We want to have more effective prayer lives. Luke 11:1-13 gives us our Lord's instructions about how to do that. Having affectionate intimacy with our Abba and profound humility before the King of kings and Lord of lords, we are called to pray with persistence, overcoming the illusion that God doesn't care. We are called to believe that God is answering our prayers, even when he seems not to be listening or when he answers them in ways we don't understand. With the apostles, we ask, "Lord, teach us to pray." Amen.

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