

“Teach us to pray”

Sermon for Little Current and Sheguiandah United Churches

July 27 2025

Luke 11:1-13

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."

So he said to them, "When you pray, say: Father, may your name be revered as holy. May your kingdom come.

Give us each day our daily bread.

And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us. And do not bring us to the time of trial."

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,

for a friend of mine has arrived, and I have nothing to set before him.'

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.'

I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything out of friendship, at least because of his persistence he will get up and give him whatever he needs.

"So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you.

For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened.

Is there anyone among you who, if your child asked for a fish, would give a snake instead of a fish?

Or if the child asked for an egg, would give a scorpion?

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!"

Holy and gracious God,

As your disciples once came to Jesus and said, "Lord, teach us to pray," so we come before you now, asking to be taught by your Word. By your Spirit, open our hearts and clear our minds, that in this time we may hear your voice and be shaped by your love. May the words I speak and the meditations of our hearts draw us close to you, that we may live as a praying people—seeking your will, sharing your bread, and walking together in trust. In Christ, who is our teacher and our friend, we pray. Amen.

Jesus was praying in a certain place. That simple phrase begins our Gospel reading, but it comes after a long stretch of demanding ministry. In the chapters before this moment, Jesus

has healed the sick, calmed storms, fed crowds, confronted injustice, and sent the disciples out to proclaim the good news. His journey has been full, his mission urgent, and yet he repeatedly steps away to pray. In the midst of all the need and all the noise, he finds space to be still before God.

It is that practice, more than anything else, that makes the disciples pause. They have watched him do extraordinary things. They have listened as he taught, they have marveled as he reached out to those on the margins, and they have tried to follow his example. But when they see him praying, something stirs in them. Perhaps, they see a deep well of peace, a source of strength, and a connection with God that gives life to everything else he does. They realize by watching Jesus that prayer is not just one task on a long list; it is the centre of everything. And so they ask, “Lord, teach us to pray.”

Luke’s Gospel actually gives us a version of this prayer that may sound a little different from the version many of us know by heart from Matthew. It is shorter, more spare, and in Luke’s account Jesus simply begins with the word “Father.” When the disciples asked “Lord, teach us to pray,” they were asking for a prayer that would mark them as Jesus’ followers. So Jesus offers words that will shape them as a people and form relationship with one another and with God. Jesus gives them language that they can carry with them, words that are short, memorable, and deeply relational. “When you pray,” he says, “say this.”

This is not a complicated instruction manual, but a prayer so simple that it can be learned by heart and carried through a lifetime. These words have been whispered at bedsides, spoken at gravesides, sung in cathedrals, and murmured by the smallest child. These words have been passed from generation to generation, and as we sing this morning, “Our Father...”

Those two words change everything. Not “my Father,” not “your Father,” but “our Father.” Prayer, as Jesus gives it, is not a private transaction. It is not a moment of retreat from the world. It begins with a shared word: our. That one word declares that we belong not just to God, but to one another.

This is a particularly poignant word for us today. Here we are, two congregations – the people of both Sheguindah and Little Current United Churches – gathered in one sanctuary, standing on the threshold of a new chapter together. For decades, you have been partners, worshiping side by side, sharing ministry, supporting one another through joys and sorrows. And today you consider taking the next step, becoming one. You are discerning, in prayer, what it means to deepen the partnership that has been your way of life for so long.

In that context, the prayer Jesus teaches us has something important to say. To call God “our Father” is to let go of the illusion that God belongs to one group or another. It means that God’s family is always bigger than the circles we draw. It means that the welcome of God extends further than our preferences and beyond the walls of any building. To pray those words is to accept that we are bound together by God’s love, and that the life of faith is always something we share.

Everything in this prayer carries that same spirit. It calls on us to hold God's name holy, to long for God's reign to come near, to ask for daily bread so that all may have enough, to seek forgiveness and to extend it, and to trust that God will guide us through the trials of life. None of these are private requests. Every one of them draws us into the company of others. When we pray for bread, we are praying for our neighbour's table to be full as well as our own. When we ask for forgiveness, we are drawn into the hard work of forgiving those who have hurt us. When we pray not to be tested beyond our strength, we are reminded that our well-being is tied to the health and wholeness of the whole community.

To make the point even clearer, Jesus tells stories. He speaks of a neighbour knocking on a door at midnight, and of a child asking a parent for food. These stories are messy, ordinary, and deeply human. They are about people who keep showing up, who keep asking, who trust that even when the answer is slow to come, the one on the other side of the door will not ignore them forever. And Jesus says that if such persistence can move us to act, how much more can we trust God to respond with kindness and generosity when we turn to God in prayer.

Prayer, as Jesus teaches it, is not a set of magic words. It is a relationship. It is a way of living that ties us to God and to one another. It is about showing up, about asking for what we need and also listening for what God might be asking of us.

This is why, when we gather after worship today to vote on the proposal before you, that very act itself can be a prayer. It is not simply a meeting or a formality. It is a moment to stand together and to ask God for guidance, to give thanks for the journey that has brought you here, and to listen for the Spirit's leading into what comes next. In that moment, we can pray: "Thank you, God, for these congregations and for all that has been shared over generations. Give us the courage to move forward together, not with fear, but with hope. Unite us not only in name, but in purpose, in heart, in love."

The beauty of this prayer Jesus gives us is that it never asks us to have all the answers. It doesn't ask us to know every step that lies ahead. It simply asks us to trust God for what is needed today. "Give us this day our daily bread," it says. Just enough for this moment. Just enough to take the next faithful step.

And so we do not have to be perfect as we move into this future together. We do not need to know exactly how everything will work out. What we need is what Jesus offers: a prayer that holds us steady, a prayer that gathers us together, a prayer that opens our hearts to the work of the Spirit.

Prayer, as Jesus teaches it, is not only about the words we speak. It is about the way we live. It shapes how we serve, how we decide, how we belong. It shapes the community we become.

Imagine what it will be like when people speak of this newly united congregation as a community of prayer. Imagine them saying, "That is a church that doesn't just say prayers on Sunday. They live their prayer. They share what they have. They welcome with open arms. They forgive freely. They seek God with persistence and courage."

So today, as you prepare to take this next step together, hold fast to the prayer Jesus taught us. Let it be on your lips, yes, but more importantly let it be alive in the way you live. Let your lives say with joy and conviction that you are one people, called to love and to serve as one.

May every conversation you share after worship, every decision you make in the days ahead, and every action you take in your community be shaped by that prayer and its vision of God's generous love. May we walk forward trusting the One who answers when we knock, who feeds when we ask, and who binds us together in hope. Amen.

*Loving God,
we give you thanks for your Word
that calls us into deeper prayer and into deeper community.
As we stand at this moment of discernment,
knit our hearts together so that we may be one in spirit and in purpose. Give us the courage to
follow where your Spirit leads,
the grace to forgive, the faith to persist, and the generosity to serve. May we offer the prayer
Jesus taught—
not only with our words but with our lives.
In the name of Christ, our guide and companion, we pray. Amen.*

