

The Lord's Prayer

Matthew 6:7-15

A dialogue sermon from the pulpit of
First Presbyterian Church, Champaign, IL
by Matt Matthews

Matt:
Our Father Who Art In Heaven.

RACHEL:
Yes?

Matt:
Don't interrupt me. I'm praying.

RACHEL:
But you called me.

Matt:
Called you? No, I didn't call you. I'm praying. *Our Father who art in heaven.*

RACHEL:
There, you did it again.

Matt:
Did what?

RACHEL:
You called me. You said, "Our Father, who art in heaven." Well, here I am. What's on your mind?

Matt:
But, I didn't *mean* anything by it. I was, you know, just saying my prayers for the day. I always say the Lord's Prayer. It makes me feel good, kind of like fulfilling a duty.^[1] By the way, you sound really familiar. Do I know you?

RACHEL:
Of course, I'm familiar. You pray to me every day. Of course, you know me.

Well, don't let me interrupt your prayer.

Matt:
Okay. *Hallowed be Thy name.*

RACHEL:
Slow down. What do you mean by that?

Matt:
By what?

RACHEL:
By "hallowed by thy name"?

Matt:

It means, it means . . . That's a good question. It's one of those "churchy" words that I've never gotten. I don't know what it means. It's just a part of the prayer. So, what does it mean?

RACHEL:

It means honored, holy, wonderful, revered, consecrated. Sort of a big word, isn't it?

Matt:

Yes. I never thought about what 'hallowed' meant before. I just thought it was one of those church things that I was never meant to understand. The church is full of words like that, words like stewardship, tithing, eschatology, potluck. You never hear those words anywhere else. *Hallowed. Holy. Wonderful.* Thanks.

RACHEL:

You're welcome. Are you finished praying?

Matt:

Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven.

RACHEL:

Do you really mean that?

Matt:

Sure, why not?

RACHEL:

Are *you* doing my will on earth?

Matt:

I'm limited in what I can do. But I certainly don't want to stand in the way of *YOU* doing your will.

RACHEL:

That wasn't my question. My question is, Are you doing my will on earth?

Matt:

Sure, I guess. I mean, I go to church.

RACHEL:

I'm glad you go to church. But that only lasts two hours a week.

Matt:

I didn't say I went to Sunday School.

RACHEL:

Well, then "church" only lasts one hour a week. Do you do my will the rest of the week. How do you spend the other 167-hours in your week?

Matt:

I try to do your will. I guess I'm a little cynical; that's probably not your will. And I guess I'm a little selfish; that's probably not your will, either. And I don't trust you like I probably should. And sometimes I'm racist, and sexist, and ageist. And I gossip, sometimes; but somebody else usually starts it.

I guess I do have some hang-ups. I could probably name some others.

RACHEL:

So could I.

Matt:

When I pray that line in the prayer, I really do want your will to be done *on earth as it is in heaven*.

RACHEL:

If you want my will to be done, then you should do it. You should put your actions where your words are.

Matt:

I kinda thought that praying about it might be enough.

RACHEL:

I'm glad you pray. Keep on praying. And don't worry, ultimately, my will *will* be done. But start doing more of it yourself. Now. Everyday. Walk the talk. That's why you're here.

Matt:

Ok. I'll get right on it. After I finish this prayer. This is taking a lot longer than it usually does.

RACHEL:

What's the rush?

Matt:

I don't know, exactly. But I never spend this much time praying, no offense. I'm not a religious fanatic. You know, everything in moderation. Praying too long cuts into my other activities. That didn't come out right, exactly . . .

Where was I? *Give us this day, our daily bread.*

RACHEL:

Do you have plenty of bread?

Matt:

Yes, I do. I don't even know why I pray this part of the prayer. I can go to a grocery store and get food from all over the world. I've got plenty to eat. It's amazing. Thank you.

RACHEL:

You're welcome.

You know, not everyone has as much food as you do. I want you to share your bread with others. Did you know that 34-million people in the United States are food insecure? I know every single one of them. I want you to do something about it. YOU.

Some people think when my son, Jesus, said, "You will always have the poor with you," that he meant the poor don't matter, and that we can't do anything about poverty. Nothing could be farther from the truth.

There is enough food for everybody if everybody shared. There's not a food shortage; there's a generosity shortage.

This prayer isn't just about you, Matt. You didn't say, "Give ME this day MY daily bread." Jesus taught you to say the word "us." That's *everybody*. So, I'm glad you have enough bread, but what about others?

Did Jesus teach you that the cup was only half full? You don't need to be stingy. I want you to be generous. I built you for generosity. *It's in your bones.*

Matt:

Praying the "Lord's Prayer" used to be pretty simple. With you around, it's pretty intense.

And time consuming.

RACHEL:

I've always been around. You just haven't noticed, maybe.

I'm here.

And I'm listening.

Matt:

Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.

RACHEL:

How often—and how well—do you forgive others? How often—

Matt:

(Interrupting) —I knew you were going to bring up something like this! Look, God, forgiving others is easier said than done. Besides, it seems everyone around me wants to get even. They think—and sometimes I agree—that forgiving others is a sign of weakness. They don't want to forgive.

RACHEL:

What do you want?

Matt:

I know I *should* want to forgive. But sometimes I just want to get even. I want to have the last word. I want to make those who have wronged me feel sorry.

RACHEL:

And where does that get you?

Matt:

Truth be told, it's tiring always trying to win, to be right. I don't know a lot, but being right isn't the same thing as righteousness. I also know—from experience—that revenge isn't sweet. Holding a grudge eats me up from the inside. It makes me feel hard, angry, and broken. The times when I've forgiven others feels pretty good.

RACHEL:

So, keep trying. Let go of old hurts and hatreds. And, remember, I forgive you, but you can't really *be* forgiven unless you *forgive*. You can't receive my love if your hands are full of hate.

I always have forgiven you and I always will forgive you. But just because I forgive you doesn't mean that I don't expect something from you. I have given you a heart that can only be whole if you forgive others as I have forgiven you.

There's no "EASY" button on this. You keep trying, and I'll keep helping.

Matt:

It helps me to know I'm not having to do everything all alone. You know what I mean?

RACHEL:

I do.

Anything else? In your prayer?

Matt:

Yeah. *And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.*

RACHEL:

I won't lead you into temptation. That's not my gig. But it's everywhere—temptation—isn't it? And you always seem to find it.

Matt:

Yes. That's why I always ask you to deliver me from it.

RACHEL:

I will never tempt you. Tough times come, but I don't lead you into tough times. Though I'm always with you in tough times.

Matt:

For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever.

RACHEL:

People often forget that I have that power.

Matt:

I think a lot of people believe that you have power, but they don't think you use your power. They think you're far away. Removed from our lives. Distant. Some people think that you don't want to get involved.

I don't blame you. It's messy down here.

RACHEL:

The people who believe I'm far away feel lonely. I know what it's like to feel lonely.

Matt:

You do?

RACHEL:

I sure do. I'm keenly aware that some people aren't able to feel my presence. And some people can't seem to believe.

That's where you come in. You remind them. You love them. You laugh with them. You sit with them. I'll reach them through your embrace. In that way, you'll be living what you call "The Lord's Prayer."

Matt:

This is not the sort of praying I set out to do when I started this prayer. *Living* the prayer will definitely take some growing into.

RACHEL:

Which is one reason I gave you that prayer in the first place. If you pray it enough—*really pray it*—you will grow into it. I will shape you through it.

Matt:

I will keep praying it. And maybe I'll listen a little more to the words I've been saying all these years, words like *hallowed*. That's a beautiful word that describes you well, if you don't mind me saying so.

RACHEL:

I don't mind at all.

Matt:

Hey God, are we having a conversation together, or am I just saying my prayers?

RACHEL:

(Pause:) What's the difference?

Matt:

Thank you, God.

Thank you, and . . .

Matt/Rachel:

AMEN.

[1] The section above this footnote is "borrowed" from an unknown author from a script found on the internet. The rest of this dialogue is original, or stolen accidentally.