

## Sermon Series Lord, Teach Us to Pray Week 5

August 20, 2017

Irma LaBoop, appointed by the Bishop to the Ministry of humor. Humor is a serious business and sometimes gets overlooked in theology. Theology is the study of God, and everybody does theology. Even when you say, "Oh. My. God." You're doing theology... you're thinking about God. Even if you're thinking, "I don't believe in God"... you're thinking about God.

Here's some theology: Christians believe in the Triune God, three distinct personalities of one God... and more names for God than you can count. The Triune God (Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer, or Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) is sometimes known as the dancing God, the playful God. God is also a laughing God. We are made in God's image, so we are created with a sense of humor. And if all life is holy - humor is holy.

This is the last in a sermon-series about the Lord's Prayer. The disciples said to Jesus, "Lord, teach us to pray" and Jesus showed them a template for prayer, which is different than a formula. A formula is like a recipe and you expect it to turn out the same every time, like my potluck jello with turkey, cottage cheese, and pineapple. Every time, the same. But a template is more like a guide, and you can use it to take different paths. Jesus showed us this template for prayer that starts with acknowledging God's awesomeness. We've learned to say, "Our Father" but in Aramaic, the word Jesus used was "Papa." So the prayer starts out naming our Father, our Papa-God. "Hallowed be Thy name" or "Uphold the holiness of Your name" means that God is above all others, and even God's name is sacred. When we pause to pray... when we call on God's name... we are in the presence of holiness. There is no special place to pray: it's wherever you are because God is here. God is already here.

In this prayer Jesus has taught us to "shoot for the moon", that is, to ask that heaven come to earth, that the wholeness and rightness God has planned for the world would happen right now! And then... "Give us the bread we need for today." This is an exercise in trust, to wait, to expect, that God will give us each day what we need. Not necessarily what we want... what we need. And this is a prayer for the poor and hungry,

for the outcast and the forgotten too... “Give *us* the bread we need for today.” Those of us who have bread and security are to share with those who don’t.

Then Jesus said, “Lead us not into temptation and save us from the evil one.” I think Jesus was laughing in His sleeve when He taught the disciples to pray, “Lead us not into temptation.” I think Jesus was imagining Himself with Papa-God and the Holy Spirit, and He was imitating Groucho Marx for them, saying about humanity, “Like they need any help to walk into temptation!”

Those three years that Jesus lived with the disciples, He saw them walk, jump, and swim into temptation. He called the disciples... those people who were closest to Him, who followed Him, lived side-by-side with Him, “thick-headed” and “slow-hearted” to understand the Kingdom of God as Jesus demonstrated for them. “Lead us not into temptation.” I think Jesus was tempted to add, “Because we do it so well on our own!”

But then Jesus said [pray like this]: “Deliver us from the evil one” and then He was serious. Just an aside here: I personally don’t believe that God tempts us. It makes the God of Love seem vindictive and insecure to throw temptation-tests to God’s own beloved children. Poop happens, my friends, and we are meant to use it as compost, to learn from it, and to become softer and more compassionate; more vulnerable, more like Jesus.

Whatever you take from this sermon or this series on how to pray, take this: God wants to talk to you. Say that with me: God wants to talk to me. [pause] God wants to listen to you. Say that with me: God wants to listen to me. [pause]. And nothing can stop God from loving you. Say that with me: Nothing can stop God from loving me. [pause]

God is working in us, and whatever temptations life throws at us, God is working in us to shape you into becoming our true, selves, our beautiful, authentic, love-reflecting selves.

Jesus prayed, “Save us from the evil one.” I once got a tiara tangled in my naturally red hair, and it was a real fight to get out. What happens when we cooperate with evil is that we get tangled in the evil one’s lies. Here are some of those lies: That you are the most important person in the world; or that you are the least important person in the world; or that some people are less human, and less deserving than

others; or that what we do, how we live, and how we treat all creation, including the earth, doesn't have consequences.... Lies, all lies.

When you are tempted to be resentful, jealous, cruel, self-righteous, superior, or inferior, the evil one invites you - tempts you - to forget who you are: made in God's image; redeemed, ransomed at great price; and meant to be an ambassador of love and goodness in the world.

The "evil one" can be that voice that whispers in your ear, "It's okay to cheat. No one will see." Or "Take it before someone else does." Or "I hate those people." When evil whispers in your ear, call on Jesus. When I am upset I tend to shout, "Help me, Rhonda!" But when I'm under attack I shout, "Save me, Jesus!" When evil whispers in your ear, some lie or other, shout, "Save me, Jesus!" (try it with me) "Save me, Jesus!" Help me, Jesus, help me be my true, love-reflecting self.

We've all heard the slogan before, "Love wins." Love has to win every time, my friends, or the evil one gets a toehold in the door. "Love wins" means that our egos, our insecurities, our prejudices and preferences, in all ways and at all times have to take a backseat to God's love. We have to bow, to submit, to God's love for us, in us, and for all people. The alternative is to let the evil one in the driver's seat and that leads down a road to death and destruction. There's enough of that in the world. As followers of Jesus, we have to stand for life, we have to stand for love.

To keep the evil one from getting tangled in your naturally red hair (or your life) here's some advice: Stay close to Jesus. Pray the prayer He taught. Read it in the bible. Read some more in the bible. Be vulnerable, like Jesus was. Be yourself. Practice gratitude. Forgive. Yourself and others. And don't take yourself too seriously. You are a child of the joyful, laughing God. Let us laugh. Amen.