



October 2, 2016
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Lord, Teach Us to Pray: Our...
Matthew 6:9

On this World Communion Sunday, as we continue our journey through the Lord's Prayer, I will offer the shortest sermon I have ever preached from the shortest text I have ever used. Our text comes from Matthew 6:9, the opening line of the Lord's Prayer. Ready? Hear the Word of the Lord: "Our..." This is the word of the Lord. (Thanks be to God.)

Our text for today is "Our..." and I'm not being flippant. Have you ever stopped to think about this opening word of the prayer? I want you to count how many times some form of first person plural appears in the Lord's Prayer. Our Father... give us this day our daily bread... forgive us our debts... as we forgive our debtors... lead us not... deliver us... 9 times! In fact, "we," "us," or "our" appear more often in this prayer than any reference to God. Furthermore, nowhere do we find any reference to the first person singular: no I, me, my or mine.

The whole prayer is about us, not me! This wouldn't have felt odd to the disciples. The Old Testament is all about God's chosen people—a covenant community! And Paul described our connectedness with the metaphor of the human body. "Each of you is like a body part, connected to each other. We need each other. How silly is it for the nose to say, 'I don't need you, ear.' Or for eye to say, 'I don't need you, thumb!' Every body part needs the other body parts. Otherwise, we are just a monstrosity." So it is in the Body of Christ.

But Americans don't get this. We are fiercely independent. We are proud when we don't need anyone. We view faith as private. So when we pray, we unconsciously translate it: "My father... give me my bread... forgive my debts... lead me not into temptation... deliver me from evil." But that is **not** what Jesus taught. Nine times: "we, us, our." So what is he saying? "You belong to each other! You need each other! You were not designed to walk alone. The idea that you can be my disciple by yourself is monstrous."

I asked in my Saturday blog what the Seahawks can teach us about this prayer. It's the 12th Man. People from diverse backgrounds put on the same jerseys and unite around a common love. After a touchdown, people who have never spoken to each other in their lives are high-fiving and hugging and cheering together. That's what the 12th Man means—a sense of unity, of connectedness. No matter who you are, when you are in that jersey, you belong to the family.

Now look around for a moment, into eyes! Isn't that what's supposed to be going on here? Because of our common love for Christ, we from diverse backgrounds are brought together! We worship together, serve together, pray together, eat bread and drink wine together. Because we, who bear the name of Christ, belong together. And even more oddly, we belong as much to the Thai who is receiving communion under a thatched roof, or the Syrian who is worshipping in a secret cave as we do to the person sitting next to us. These also are our "our."

So what do we do with this? It's fine to nod our heads up and down and agree, "Yes, we are family." But if all we ever do is show up on a Saturday night/Sunday morning, we will never experience what it means to live as if we really need each other. So do you know what the secret sauce is here at Chapel Hill? LifeGroups. We believe LifeGroups are our single most important disciple-making tool. More important, even, than Saturday night/Sunday morning. If you are not in a LifeGroup you are depriving yourself of the experience that Jesus considered essential for disciple-making: small group. It is in LifeGroups that we study the Bible and pray and grapple and mourn and celebrate and hold one another accountable for leading lives of integrity. If you aren't in a LifeGroup, you are shortchanging yourself. Go to the "Connect" page of our website, look at our 51 LifeGroups, and have the courage to send an email to one of the leaders. This will change your spiritual life.

This week after my LifeGroup talked about the "our" in the Lord's Prayer, one of our members sent this email to the rest of us: "The epiphany for me this week was realizing that not only am I responsible for my brothers, but I'm also responsible to my brothers."

Have you ever thought about Church that way? That you are responsible for those who sit around you and responsible to those who sit around you? Just like family, which in fact, we are because Jesus taught us to pray, "Our Father."

PRAY. (Remind congregation that we will say, "The body of Christ... broken for us. The blood of Christ... shed for us.")