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First UMC

Springboro, Ohio

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Series: “Life Together with Luke”

Scripture: Luke 11:1-13

Message: “Just the Basics”

“Lord, teach us to pray,” the disciples asked Jesus.

And Jesus taught them these words, words that are powerful when we pray them on our own, but perhaps even more so when we pray them together as we gather to worship. These are words that unite us across communities, across denominations, across divisions, across time, together we pray the prayer that Jesus taught us, that he is still teaching us today, “Our Father…”

As we pray, we pray with Jesus, with each other, for each other, and for ourselves. It draws us into and reminds us of the basics of our life together as Christians: putting God’s Kingdom and God’s ways first, asking for only what we need each day, living in grace, forgiven by God and forgiving others, and avoiding those things that harm and destroy us and others. It forms and shapes us and our lives together.

“Lord, teach us to pray.” These were the disciples asking. And if they can ask questions of Jesus about prayer because they are still learning, then so can we. We are all still learning to pray. We all still have questions about prayer, because prayer is not a formula, but a holy mystery based in our relationship with God, self, and the world. And that is a relationship that grows and deepens throughout our lives.

Thinking about all the questions we have about prayer, why and how some prayers are so easily and obviously answered, why others are so difficult and seem to remain unanswered, I began to see many parallels in our life together. We have many similar questions about our life together as the body of Christ. Why is it so easy sometimes to live together in grace and love, and yet other times, as hard as we try, we just can’t seem to get there. We are filled with discord and opposing viewpoints.

And like in prayer, sometimes the directions seem unclear. Sometimes they seem too simple for the complex situations we face. Sometimes there seem to be multiple sets of directions and we can’t agree on which ones to follow.

Yet the thing is, whether it is in our prayer life or our life together, regardless of our questions, our doubts, our disappointments, what we do know from the Bible and from looking at thousands of years of history is that these are the best resources we have for a life of hope and peace: prayer and community.

God, from the beginning has asked us to communicate with him through prayer and has called us into loving community. Jesus came and affirmed these gifts and taught us how to live and use them well.

And I have found that in those moments when I am about to give up on prayer, or on this life together as Christians, that something always comes along unexpectedly that reminds me once again that God is present in a powerful way in these gifts of prayer and in our life together. We don’t understand it. But how can we understand holy mystery? Yet we catch glimpses as we practice and commit ourselves to praying and living as the body of Christ.

As we think about this, the words of Alan Brehm are helpful. As he reflects on the places we get hung up when it comes to prayer, he writes, “I think the solution to the problem of prayer lies somewhere in the middle between self-interest and cynicism.”

I think these same words apply to the places we get hung up in our life together: “the solution lies somewhere in the middle, between self-interest and cynicism.”

And that middle place, what is it? It is the space of God’s Kingdom. It is the place Jesus starts his prayer—“You Kingdom come.” He teaches the disciples to find that place within that longs for God’s Kingdom to be present, and causes us to ask for and to act in ways that line up with God’s Kingdom.

It means only asking for and taking what we need rather than what we want or what the advertising or our own fears make us think we need, and then being thankful for what we have.

It means making our relationship with God and others a priority, and doing the work we need to be in a place of grace and peace with all, those we’ve sinned against and those who have sinned against us.

And it means knowing that temptation will creep in. We will be lured into places of self-interest, of selfishness, and cynicism. And committing to seek God’s help, to depend on these gifts of prayer and life in community to help redirect us to a Kingdom way of thinking and being.

Prayer and community are gifts that form us in God’s Kingdom ways and give us peace and hope. In both of these we come to a place of acknowledging that we cannot do this alone. David Lose writes of prayer, “When we ask God for something in prayer, we acknowledge both our need and God’s goodness.”

And it is similar in our life together. When we commit to being a part of community we acknowledge our need for others and the goodness of others. We also acknowledge that we have gifts to share. When we do this together, God’s Kingdom reality breaks in to our reality.

Jesus’ examples that finish our scripture for today illustrate this. In your prayer life and in your life together, help each other out like neighbors in a pinch when company shows up unexpectedly in the middle of the night. Don’t be afraid to share your need, because we’re all been there. And make sure to help because we’ve all been there and know it’s not always easy to ask.

And in your prayer life and in your life together, think of it like a son asking his father for dinner. The father is going to give the son good food, not poison.

So in our prayer life and our life together, depend on God and others. Ask, but only for what you really need. Share what you do have with God and others.

When we have this Kingdom mindset, then in our prayer life and our life together, we will live in and find the truth of the words, “Ask and it shall be given to you, seek and you will find, knock and the door will be opened to you.”

May it be so for us in Jesus’ name.