

THE LORD'S PRAYER

Walking the Journey with Jesus

Katsuki Hirano



Table of Contents

Preface....	To the Fellowship of Blacknall Memorial Presbyterian Church: A Love Letter from Tokyo.....	3
Chapter 1.	Can You Hear the Living Voice of Jesus?	6
Chapter 2.	Praying While Looking Up to “Heaven”	12
Chapter 3.	A Prayer to Discover “Us”	17
Chapter 4.	We Get to Call God “Father”!	23
Chapter 5.	Let God’s Name Be Holy Among Us.....	28
Chapter 6.	Whose “Kingdom” Do We Seek?	34
Chapter 7.	Waiting for “Thy Will”	40

Chapter 8. “Our Daily Bread”—The Scent of Everyday Life	45
Chapter 9. Walking the Road of Forgiveness.....	49
Chapter 10. The Grace of Praying “Deliver Us”	55
Chapter 11. “The Kingdom, the Power, and the Glory” Belong to God ...	61
Chapter 12. “Amen! Amen! Amen!”	68
Appendix	75

Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).

Preface

To the Fellowship of Blacknall Memorial Presbyterian Church: A Love Letter from Tokyo

This manuscript is a rewriting of my book *The Lord's Prayer: Walking the Journey with Jesus* (The Board of Publications, The United Church of Christ in Japan, 2005), prepared for you in Blacknall Church.

The original was my first book. I am honored to say that it was chosen as one of the “100 Christian Books Everyone Should Read” (2016, Christian Publishers Association). That list includes names such as Mother Teresa, Thomas à Kempis, John Bunyan, Martin Luther King Jr., C. S. Lewis, Karl Barth, Bonhoeffer, Dostoevsky, J. Moltmann, and several distinguished Japanese Christian writers. That my small book found a place among them must be a great act of humor on the part of the selectors—editors from several Christian publishers—and perhaps also an act of kindness toward a young author they wished to encourage. I am grateful that it has been read by many in Japan, and that, unusually for a Japanese Christian book, it has remained in print for more than twenty years.

Through the kind invitation of my dear friend Chris Rice, I will soon have a chance to meet you online. With his encouragement, I rewrote it thoroughly, as a small present for you before we meet, hoping it would also give you a small glimpse of the church in Japan, and another perspective on the Lord's Prayer. With help from ChatGPT, I tried to turn “my English” into something closer to “your English.” Sometimes a black-and-white film says more than one in full color. I do worry, a little, that my own unpolished English might have reached your hearts more directly.

The original book grew out of twelve essays, one written each month

over the course of a year for a monthly magazine. So there are twelve chapters. If I may ask one thing of you, please do not rush through it. If you can read one chapter at a time, walking alongside it in your own life of prayer, there is nothing that would make me happier.

In 2003 I spent a whole year at Duke Divinity School as a visiting scholar, and again in 2013 I returned for an autumn semester. Durham is a town I carry with me. During that second visit, Chris and Donna welcomed me into their home. I stayed with them as a younger brother, sharing dinner every evening—and eating a great deal. More than twenty years have passed since I first met Chris. There is far more I could say about our friendship and my gratitude to Chris—but if I began, another book would be needed.

While I was in Durham, Professor Richard Lischer was extraordinarily generous to me, and I received a rich education in preaching, especially through the idea that “the Word of God does not always come from above or below but sometimes springs up from within the congregation.” And the stimulus I received from Professor William Willimon and Professor Stanley Hauerwas has continued to shape my path ever since—helping me find my footing as a pastor living, quite literally, as a “*Resident Alien*” in Japanese society. If you happen to know any of these three, you may notice their voices rising from the pages of this book. I have done nothing to repay what I owe them. But it is some small comfort to think that, in this indirect way, I am placing a pebble of gratitude at the feet of Durham.

During my time in Durham, I attended worship at First Presbyterian Church in Durham regularly, and at Blacknall Church on two occasions, as I remember it. The pastor of your church at the time—I am sorry to say I cannot recall his name—recognized me when we passed each other on the street and called out to me. He then spent about an hour helping me find the sneakers I needed. It is a warm memory I have never forgotten.

Evangelism in Japan is hard work. One of the questions I hear most often from people outside the church is this: “Why do Christian leaders support war—and keep on fighting?” Night after night, the news quietly presses into people here the idea that Christianity is simply what produces a certain way of life—powerful, prosperous, and armed. I know how mistaken that picture is. Because you are here.

And Japan, too, is not untouched by these winds. In recent years, the air in our own society has shifted in ways that trouble us—voices that put nation before neighbor, and a growing distance from the countries we once called friends. We are not watching from a safe distance. We are in it too. If you could pray for us, as fellow travelers on this journey, there is no greater joy I could ask for.

As a pastor in Japan, if there is one thing I can offer you, with a grateful heart, it is this: I need that fresh air—the breath of the Holy Spirit. For Jesus says to us, always: “*Do not be afraid, little flock.*” And I believe that is one of the reasons he taught us the Lord’s Prayer.

There is no need to be afraid. The Word of God is still alive here in Japan.

To fellow travelers on the same journey, from a country far away.

Autumn 2026, from Tokyo

Katsuki Hirano

Chapter 1

Can You Hear the Living Voice of Jesus?

The First Prayer We Learn

Late one Saturday night almost ten years ago, while I was still working on my sermon, the phone rang. A man asked me, “Would it be a nuisance if someone like me came to worship?” He had belonged to another religious group and had never read the Bible.

Of course I welcomed him. He began coming on Sundays, and then on weekdays as well, letting himself into the empty sanctuary and sitting there.

The first thing he set out to do was to learn the Lord’s Prayer. I gave him a card with the words printed on it. He would come to the sanctuary alone, hold the card in his hand, and pray the words aloud, over and over, in a low, steady rhythm, like someone chanting a Buddhist sutra.

Once he said to me, “It is Japanese, but this prayer feels like a foreign language. Like words I am hearing for the first time.”

Several months later he was baptized. He joined us on the journey.

In Japan, it is said, Christians make up roughly one percent of the population. Not many people come to church already knowing the words of the Lord’s Prayer. We learn it from the beginning—from a card held in the hand, from the voices of the people beside us.

For a long time, I thought of this as one of the difficulties of ministry in Japan. But I have come to think of it differently. The Lord’s Prayer is no one’s mother tongue. It reaches us from outside. Someone has to say it to us first.

“When You Pray, Say...”

The Lord’s Prayer is a prayer that Jesus Christ himself taught us.

When his disciples asked him to teach them to pray, he gave them these words:

“Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.”

And Jesus said to them,

“When you pray, say: Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come.” (Luke 11:1–2)

What makes this prayer feel foreign, even in our own language? Is it because, when we pray it in worship, we use words such as “art,” “thy,” and “thine” that we do not use in everyday speech?¹

But the difficulty goes deeper.

The words ask for things we do not always want. We can learn to say them by heart. Learning to live by them takes longer.

Before we ask for bread or forgiveness, we pray, “Hallowed be thy name.” Yet what we want first is often something for ourselves. Left to ourselves, perhaps our prayer would sound more like this:

My God, who is always on my side
(Our Father, who art in heaven)

Remember my name
(Hallowed be thy name)

May my kingdom come
(Thy kingdom come)

May my will be done
(Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven)

¹ In our church, we previously used the 1880 translation of the Lord’s Prayer, which uses archaic Japanese. We have since adopted the modern Japanese translation prepared jointly by the Catholic Church in Japan and the Nippon Sei Ko Kai (Anglican Church in Japan).

Give me enough to last a lifetime
(Give us this day our daily bread)

Forgive me, but make sure those who wronged me get what they
deserve
(And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors)

And when I give in to temptation and evil, please make an exception
for me
(And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil)

For mine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever
(For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever)

Amen.

That prayer would be easy for us to remember, because it sounds so much like the voice already inside us. We would not have to learn it. It would simply come.

But the Lord's Prayer is given to us. It comes from outside, from the lips of Jesus.

"Lord, teach us to pray," the disciples said. We need to ask him too.

We receive his words before we fully understand them. As we keep praying, we learn to let them shape our own desires.

How often, under the name of "prayer," do we repeat our own wishes and shut out everything we would rather not face? Even while praying, we can close ourselves off from God and from the people beside us.

The Lord's Prayer opens a way out. Its words reach us where we have shut ourselves away and invite us to walk with Jesus. To pray the Lord's Prayer is not merely to repeat his words. It is to begin a new journey with him.

Hearing His Voice in Ours

Did the disciples remember all the words Jesus taught them the first time?

In Luke's Gospel, Jesus teaches the Lord's Prayer during his journey to Jerusalem. We may imagine the disciples learning it as they walked with him through fields, over hills, and through towns and villages. Perhaps they learned it as we learn a new song—a little at a time, along the way.

The Lord's Prayer has come down to us in slightly different forms. Matthew gives us one form, Luke a shorter one, and the prayer we say in worship differs a little from both.

We do not know how often Jesus taught the prayer. Perhaps he gave it to his disciples again and again.

I can imagine one of them asking:

“Jesus, I'm sorry. I've forgotten it again. ‘Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come’—and then? How does the rest go?”

And I can picture Jesus saying it once more, without a sigh of impatience. Then, another day, saying it again.

The disciples saw things they would never have seen had they not followed Jesus. They watched him eat with people others would avoid. Their life with him took them to a wedding in Cana and to a house in Bethany where a brother had died. They heard him preach and saw him cast out demons. As they shared his days, they listened to his voice and learned to pray with him.

When I pray the Lord's Prayer during worship, I sometimes think of a familiar scene in films.

Someone opens a letter and begins to read it aloud. As they read, another voice begins to take over—the voice of the person who wrote it. By the end, we hear only the sender's voice.

Something like this happens for me when we pray together.

“Our Father, who art in heaven...”

We hear the voices of the people beside us. Through them, another voice seems to reach us—the living voice of Jesus, teaching his disciples to pray.

We follow his words together with people who are just beginning to learn this prayer, like the man with the card in his hand.

We are his disciples too. As we follow Jesus, we find ourselves on paths we would never have chosen on our own. We pray with our companions on the bright days and the bitter days, in seasons of joy and in seasons of grief.

The journey leads toward Jerusalem, toward the cross. Yet neither death nor the grave could bring his journey to an end. The risen Jesus stood among the disciples who were still hiding in Jerusalem. He joined the two walking toward Emmaus. He went ahead of his disciples into Galilee.

This is the same living Jesus with whom we walk.

He is teaching us still.

“When you pray, say...”

And so, as if for the first time, we begin.

“Our Father, who art in heaven...”

For Reflection

- From whom did you first learn the Lord’s Prayer? Can you still hear their voices?
- Read again the prayer that begins, “My God, who is always on my side.” Which line was hardest to read—and why?

Chapter 2

Praying While Looking Up to “Heaven”

Learning the Prayer by Heart

The church I serve has a kindergarten. We pray the Lord’s Prayer with the children during chapel.

“OUR FATHER, WHO ART IN HEAVEN!” they begin, their voices full of energy.

They stay together through “HALLOWED BE THY...”

But by the time they reach “NAME,” some of the voices begin to fade. The younger children probably have not yet learned all the words.

Then, at the very end, their voices come back in full strength:

“FOR THINE IS THE KINGDOM, AND THE POWER, AND THE GLORY, FOREVER. AMEN!”

The children do not yet understand all the words they are praying. That does not trouble me. They are learning the words as they grow up among people who pray them. We learn this prayer by heart, and little by little, praying it becomes a habit.

Even as adults, we do not always think about every word when we pray the Lord’s Prayer. Few of us would say that our hearts catch fire every time we say it. And perhaps that is not a failure at all. We pray it because it belongs to the life of the church and has become part of our lives too.

A habit? Does that sound rather dull?

Yet much of what keeps us alive is sustained by habit. We do not feel a thrill of excitement every time we eat or work. We do not make a solemn promise each night to go to sleep. We eat, work, and sleep as part of the rhythm of our days. We cannot leave these things entirely to how we happen to feel.

Prayer, too, has a place in that rhythm.

Looking Up Beyond Our Own Hearts

“Prayer is opening your heart to God.”

You have probably heard prayer described this way. And it is true. We may bring every worry to God, because he cares for us (1 Peter 5:7).

Yet the Lord’s Prayer does more than give voice to what is already in our hearts. It does not name every worry we carry. Sometimes its words may seem far from what we are feeling.

Jesus gives us words we might not have found on our own.

“Our Father, who art in heaven!”

The prayer begins by turning our attention to our Father *in heaven*.

Our Father sees more than we do. We often see only what is right in front of us. But God is at work beyond what we can see, feel, or understand.

To say that our Father is in heaven is to remember that we cannot hold him within the limits of our own hearts. God is greater than all we can think or feel. The Lord’s Prayer turns us toward him and opens our eyes to a world larger than our own.

“Am I a God near by, says the Lord, and not a God far off?”

(Jeremiah 23:23)

And how grateful we can be for that.

The Japanese philosopher Tomonobu Imamichi, who was a Christian, once wrote something I have never forgotten.

For Imamichi, the thought of encountering himself was like looking

down a steep flight of stone steps. He imagined his true self confined in a deep, dark cellar far below. The thought of descending to meet that self made his legs give way.

He wrote this at seventy-three, after a lifetime of thinking. He had never met himself.

But then he looked up.

“Regrettably, I have still never encountered myself. What I want to encounter is not my dark and wretched self, but the light of the good and of truth that illuminates and brightens even such a self: God. Is this longing presumptuous?”²

I recognized myself in his essay. I too long to encounter myself in a light that comes from outside me. That is not despair. It is closer to relief. I long for this, even if it is presumptuous.

Jesus did not give us the Lord’s Prayer so that we would spend our lives looking deeper and deeper into ourselves. We may open our hearts to the light of God. But we do not have to search those hearts for proof that he hears us. He teaches us to look up.

Again and again, the prayer turns us toward the Father, until looking to him becomes a habit. The children in the chapel are learning this long before they can explain it.

“Our Father, who art *in heaven!*”

Heaven, Where Jesus Dwells

Yet heaven is not some distant place we can only think about. Even here, in the midst of our lives, we sometimes catch glimpses of it.

² Tomonobu Imamichi, “Jibun to deau” [Encountering Oneself], *The Asahi Shimbun*, September 10, 1996, p. 9. Translated by the author.

Shepherds are keeping watch one ordinary night when they look up, and the sky opens. “Do not be afraid,” an angel says. The dark fills with angels praising God (Luke 2:9–14).

Heaven, it turns out, has always been closer than we think.

At the end of his life, Stephen looks up and sees it too—the glory of God, and Jesus standing at his right hand. Even as stones fall on him, he prays for the very people who are killing him (Acts 7:55–60).

“But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret... Pray then in this way: Our Father in heaven...” (Matthew 6:6, 9)

Even in a windowless room, we can call out, “Our Father, who art in heaven.” Even at midnight, in deep darkness, we can pray these words by heart.

I live in Tokyo. My days are spent among buildings and people—walls on every side, someone always within arm’s reach, and my eyes seldom traveling farther than the end of the street. And yet, even here, I can see an enormous distance. All I have to do is look up at the sky.

When we pray the Lord’s Prayer, we look beyond even the sky. We turn toward our Father in heaven. We are not merely talking to ourselves. Our Father hears us.

“Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and, lifting up his hands, he blessed them. While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven.”
(Luke 24:50–51)

This is the last picture Luke gives us of Jesus: his hands raised in blessing. The one who taught his disciples to call upon their Father in heaven was himself taken up into heaven. When we pray, we look toward

him—the Lord who suffered and died, who forgives us, who never lowers the hands he raised in blessing.

We live looking up to him. We die looking up to him.

And every Sunday with our congregation, and every day and night in our daily lives, we say it again.

“Our Father, who art *in heaven!*”

For Reflection

- At a few moments during the day, pause and look up. Pray, “Our Father, who art in heaven.” What do you notice?
- Have you ever found it hard to pray because of how you were feeling? What might it mean, at such a time, to say, “Our Father, who art in heaven”?

Chapter 3

A Prayer to Discover “Us”

The Church Says “Our”

During Sunday worship, I sometimes keep my eyes open while we pray the Lord’s Prayer. I stand at the front of the sanctuary, facing the congregation, and I love the view. I often wish everyone could stand here for a moment and see what I see.

A newly baptized teenager stands next to someone over ninety. Behind someone who has recently lost a spouse, a young married couple stands close together. Beside an older person who stays seated because their legs have grown weak, a child opens their mouth wide to pray.

With all of them, I pray:

“Our Father, who art in heaven!”

This is not my prayer alone. It is the prayer of the church gathered here and now.

Jesus did not ask his disciples to live entirely on their own. He called them into a community that would journey with him. The same is true for us. In baptism, we were joined to the fellowship we call the church. Our faith was never meant to be lived alone.

The church is a company of people who journey together with Jesus. In the Lord’s Prayer, we never say “I.” We say “our,” “us,” and “we,” again and again. Perhaps Jesus wants us to remember, every time we pray, that we have companions on the road.

The people who gathered around him were very different from one another.

There was Matthew, who had collected taxes under Roman rule. There was Simon, called “the Zealot”—a name that may hint at opposition to

Rome. Had they met before Jesus called them, they might have crossed the road to avoid each other. Yet Jesus called them to walk the same road and taught them to say, “Our Father.”

There was Peter, whose name means “rock”—and who could sometimes be just as hard to move. There were James and John, whom Jesus called the Sons of Thunder. With a name like that, I imagine they could make themselves heard. There was Thomas, who found it hard to believe that Jesus had risen, and Judas Iscariot, who would betray Jesus. Martha and Mary, who welcomed him into their home, were different from one another too.

These people did not all think alike. They were not always easy company for one another. What brought them together was that Jesus had called them. He had to teach them, again and again, to love one another, forgive one another, and serve one another.

People who might never have greeted one another on the street were now walking together, learning to say, “*Our Father*.” That is what the church is.

When Others Pray for Us

At my church, I invite members to join me in a reading group. We are now reading Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s *Life Together*, a book I love. These words especially strike me:

“The Christian needs another Christian who speaks God’s Word to him. He needs him again and again when he becomes uncertain and discouraged, for by himself he cannot help himself without belying the truth... He needs his brother solely because of Jesus Christ. The Christ in his own heart is weaker than the Christ in the word of his brother;

his own heart is uncertain, his brother's is sure."³

Among those who gather for worship on Sundays is a man well past ninety. What is usually a three-minute walk from the station to our church takes him half an hour. There is another man who can say very little, but keeps time to every hymn, shaking his head and waving his hands. And there is a woman who sits in the front row every Sunday, looking at her iPhone during the sermon. She loves being at worship. For more than twenty years, she has hardly ever missed a service.

Bonhoeffer reminds me that I need to hear Christ's word from my sisters and brothers. The man who can say very little brings that word to me through his presence and gestures. Each of these three people brings it to me and to others in the church. I need them all.

An older woman once told me a story.

She could see no way through a painful problem in her family. She knew that it had begun with a mistake of her own. She told a friend at church. Her friend offered no advice and did not try to solve the problem. Instead, she simply walked beside her through the streets for more than an hour. Through that quiet companionship, the woman found the strength to go on.

I wonder if, deep in their hearts, they were sharing the same prayer:

"Our Father!"

When we cannot find words of our own, the Lord's Prayer gives us words to use.

But what if we cannot pray even the Lord's Prayer?

³ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, trans. John W. Doberstein, chap. 1, "Community," p. 23.

I think we can simply sit in the sanctuary and listen to the voices around us.

“Our Father...”

“Give us this day our daily bread...”

“Forgive us our debts...”

“Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil...”

The church is praying for me. These are the voices of companions who walk with me. Through them, I hear the voice of Jesus, who walks with us.

“For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.” (Matthew 18:20)

We do not have to believe in God all by ourselves. Christian faith was never meant to be lived alone. When Jesus teaches us to pray, he gives us words that bind us to one another:

“Pray then in this way: Our Father in heaven...” (Matthew 6:9)

Carrying “Our Father” into the World

When worship ends, we go our separate ways and return to our homes.

As I mentioned earlier, Christians are a small minority in Japan. Some of us may go through the rest of the week without meeting another Christian—even at home.

Yet Jesus does not stay behind in the sanctuary. He walks our roads and enters our homes. He is with us at work, at school, and in the kitchen. He remains with us as we read the news, watch television, or spend time online.

There, too, we pray the Lord’s Prayer. We carry the prayer into all

these places.

“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people...” (1 Peter 2:9)

One part of a priest’s calling is to pray for others. We bring before God the people around us, including those who cannot find words to pray and those who do not yet know God.

I once worshiped in a church where the congregation was one woman.

The church met in a small house, about the size of a home for a family of four. She had arrived early, opened all the windows, and set out ten pairs of slippers. Then she welcomed me. She told me that a pastor from another church usually drove about an hour and a half to lead worship with her. That day, I had come in his place.

There were just the two of us.

When we came to the Lord’s Prayer, her voice grew louder, carrying through the open windows into the street.

That church was not there for her alone. She was praying for the town around it. When she said “our,” her prayer included people on that street who had never come through the church door.

The church might close before long—she was in her late eighties. But for as long as it stands, on Sunday mornings the neighbors hear a woman singing hymns and praying through the open windows:

“Our Father, who art in heaven.”

I do not believe our Father will forget that voice.

How much we need to pray these words—in our homes, at work, and among our neighbors: “Forgive *us* our debts, as *we* forgive *our* debtors.”

Listen to the voices carrying the Lord’s Prayer into the world. Beneath them all is the quiet, steady voice of Jesus, still teaching us to pray.

Together, these scattered voices become a choir.

We are never the only ones saying it.

“Our Father!”

For Reflection

- Whose voice has carried you in faith when your own voice was weak? When did they help you, and through what kind of words or actions?
- Right now, where and with whom do you especially want to pray the Lord’s Prayer? Why is that?

Chapter 4

We Get to Call God “Father”!

“Abba”—A Word Jesus Gives Us

Jesus teaches us to begin by calling God “Father.” In Mark’s Gospel, we hear the Aramaic word he used: “Abba, Father” (Mark 14:36). In that word, we hear his trust in the Father.

“When you pray, say: Father, hallowed be your name.”
(Luke 11:2)

Like an older brother teaching a new word to the younger children, Jesus bends down to us. It is as though he were saying, “When you pray, begin as I do. Call out, ‘Abba.’”

I still find this astonishing.

We may have said “Our Father, who art in heaven” more times than we can count. Yet “Father” is not an easy word for everyone.

A father may be too busy to share a meal, too impatient to listen, or quick to find fault. Some fathers hardly show what they feel except when they are angry. Such memories can follow us into prayer.

The prophets help us hear the word differently.

God speaks of his people as a child he loves:

*“Is Ephraim my dear son? Is he the child I delight in?...
Therefore I am deeply moved for him; I will surely have
mercy on him, says the Lord.”* (Jeremiah 31:20)

God’s love is deeper even than a mother’s love for her child:

*“Can a woman forget her nursing child, or show no
compassion for the child of her womb? Even these may*

forget, yet I will not forget you.” (Isaiah 49:15)

And he promises to carry us to the very end:

“Even to your old age I am he, even when you turn gray I will carry you.” (Isaiah 46:4)

The Man Running

Jesus told a story to show us what kind of Father God is.

A younger son asked his father for his share of the property while his father was still alive. It was almost as though he were saying, “I wish you were dead.” Yet the father gave him what he asked for.

The son left home and wasted everything in a distant country. When he had nothing left and went hungry, he decided to return.

On the way, he knew what he would have to say. He had sinned against heaven and against his father. He was no longer worthy to be called his son. Perhaps his father would take him back as a hired worker. Perhaps he practiced those words as he walked home.

But while he was still far away, his father saw him. And he ran.

He put his arms around the son who had left him and kissed him. The son had come home with words to say, but before he could speak, his father was already holding him.

The son confessed what he had done. He was no longer worthy to be called his son, he said. But the father called for the best robe, a ring for his hand, and sandals for his feet.

He told the servants to prepare the fattened calf. They would eat and celebrate together. His lost son had come home (Luke 15:11–24).

What an amazing story.

I have thought about this father for a long time.

But I have never met a father quite like him.

I have not been one.

This is the father Jesus placed at the center of his story when people grumbled that he welcomed sinners and ate with them.

He invites us to welcome others with him and share his joy.

“For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name.”

(Ephesians 3:14–15)

We so often begin with the fathers we have known and imagine that God must be like them. But Jesus teaches us to begin here, with this father who runs to meet his son. Every one of us who bears the name “father” must be measured against this Father’s love, not the other way around.

Yet he is also the Father who runs toward me.

“Our *Father!*”

Calling “Father” with the Crucified Lord

Even so, how can we call God “Father”?

If you walked into a beautiful house and called the person who came to the door “Papa” or “Mama,” you would probably be asked to leave. Yet we call out “Abba” to the Creator of heaven and earth—we who so often wander away from him and lose our way.

What allows us to do this?

The Gospels tell us of a day when Jesus pointed to his disciples and called them his family.

“And pointing to his disciples, he said, ‘Here are my

mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.”
(Matthew 12:49–50)

Jesus is the Son of God in a way that belongs to him alone. Yet he calls us his sisters and brothers. Because he has welcomed us into his family, we too may call God “Father.”

But Jesus did more than call us his sisters and brothers. He gave his life for us.

When we pray the Lord’s Prayer, we listen to his voice and follow his words. And in Luke’s Gospel, we hear him call upon his Father in prayers we must not forget.

On the night before the cross, he prayed in anguish:

“Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet, not my will but yours be done.” (Luke 22:42)

Nailed to the cross, he prayed:

“Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.” (Luke 23:34)⁴

And as he took his last breath:

“Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.” (Luke 23:46)

Jesus did not call God “Father” only when the road was easy. He called upon him in anguish, on the cross, and with his last breath. Even there, he was giving his life for us—the sisters and brothers he had called his own.

This is the voice we follow when we pray. We do not have to wait until

⁴The NRSV places this prayer in double brackets, noting that it is absent from some ancient manuscripts.

we can say “Father” without fear or doubt. Our elder brother has gone before us, and he has given us these words. We lay our own voices over his.

“Our *Father!*”

For Reflection

- Which of Jesus’ prayers beginning with “Father” speaks most deeply to you, and why?
- Try spending a day calling God “Abba.” How does it affect the way you pray?

Chapter 5

Let God's Name Be Holy Among Us

Beginning with God

The Lord's Prayer begins in a surprising way. Before we ask anything for ourselves, it turns us toward God.

First, we pray:

Hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come.

Thy will be done.

Then we bring our own needs:

Give us this day our daily bread.

Forgive us our debts.

Deliver us from evil.

Does this seem strange? We often think of prayer as telling God what we need, over and over, as though he might forget unless he wrote it all down. Why, then, does Jesus teach us to begin with God?

I was about to graduate from university, wrestling with a single question: What would make my life most worth living?

I had some ability. I had something like leadership. Everything around me said the same thing: use both to become someone. Realize yourself.

Then one sentence found me, and I have never been able to set it down since:

A person with ability, a person able to lead others—if he forgets God, forgets the neighbor beside him, and gives himself wholly to his own self-realization, he becomes nothing but violence. A monster, and nothing else.

I have repeated it to myself so many times since that I no longer remember where I read it, or heard it, or whether these are even its exact words anymore. Only that it found me, and stayed.

I could not walk away from it. It became one of the reasons I entered seminary.

That question remains open. The same pull still returns to me. Some days it wears the face of ministry itself—the quiet chance to serve people, and quietly build a name for myself while doing it.

You probably know this pull too, even if it wears a different face for you. Maybe it looks like a job you are good at. Maybe it looks like a family you are working hard to raise well. Maybe it looks like a cause you have given your best years to. None of these are wrong to love.

But love can turn without our noticing. Slowly, we stop serving God through these things. We start serving ourselves, and call it love.

This is why I still need this prayer. Not once. Every day.

The Westminster Shorter Catechism opens with a question familiar to many Presbyterians: “*What is the chief end of man?*” And the answer: “*Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him for ever.*”⁵

For years, I heard mostly the first half: “to glorify God.” I heard it as a warning against self-realization. To me, it sounded like a warning from a stern teacher who never smiled. But the catechism does not stop there. It says that we are also “to *enjoy* him for ever.”

I have slowly come to see that glorifying God does not mean erasing my life. It means receiving life more fully from God. As we walk with Jesus, through laughter and tears, we can keep wondering, “What will God

⁵ *The Westminster Shorter Catechism*, question and answer 1.

do next?” Perhaps this, too, is part of what it means to enjoy him. That is why Jesus teaches us to begin with God.

The Lord’s Prayer turns us toward his name, his kingdom, and his will. As we pray, we begin to see the things we have hidden from ourselves, and learn again to live as people who need God and one another.

“Not Our Name, but Yours”

We pray, “Hallowed be your name.”

To “hallow” God’s name is to honor it as holy. But this prayer is more than a promise that we will honor God. We are asking God himself to act—to make his holy name known among us and in the world.

We hear this in Mary’s song.

She was a young woman, engaged to Joseph and not yet living with him. Her pregnancy could leave her facing suspicion and shame.

When the angel greeted her, she was troubled and wondered what his words could mean. Yet she was given a promise:

“Nothing will be impossible with God” (Luke 1:37).

Later, she sings:

*“My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior*

...

*for the Mighty One has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.”* (Luke 1:46–49)

Mary does not make God greater than he already is. In the midst of uncertainty and fear, it is God’s name—not Mary’s own name—that becomes great in her song.

This is one way a human life begins to answer the prayer:

“Hallowed be thy name.”

We cannot easily stop worrying about our own names and our own lives. When suffering overwhelms us, we may lose even the desire to call upon God. At such times, we borrow the words of the church. We pray them even when our hearts pull us another way.

Ambition, jealousy, and fear still have their hold on us. Yet we can begin:

Heavenly Father—not our name, but yours—make your name holy!

Make your name great among us!

Living and Dying in the Holy Name

Early Christian tradition tells us that Peter was crucified in Rome. A later account says that he asked to be crucified upside down because he did not consider himself worthy to die as his Lord had died.⁶

This was the man who, on the night before the cross, stood in a courtyard and swore that he had never known Jesus.

Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Thomas, Matthew, Simon. Later Christian traditions remember many of them as men who died for their faith. These were the disciples who had scattered when Jesus was taken.

How could they go on to face such deaths?

The risen Lord had met them. The one they had abandoned came back and found them, behind locked doors and by the shore of Galilee. He called them again.

Death had not held him. Their failure had not ended his love for them.

⁶ Eusebius, *Church History* 3.1.2; Jerome, *De Viris Illustribus* 1.

They set out again on the journey they had abandoned—the journey with Jesus.

We can imagine how the prayer he had taught them now sounded in their mouths: “*Hallowed be your name.*”

Jesus himself had prayed words like these as the hour of the cross drew near:

“Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say—‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name.” (John 12:27–28)

“What should I say?”

Even Jesus spoke those words. His prayer did not come from a heart untouched by trouble. Yet he prayed, “Father, glorify your name,” and continued toward the cross.

The Lord who prayed those words died and rose again. He is the one with whom we walk.

We, too, take up our crosses and continue the journey, praying the words he has given us.

God’s holy name is greater than death—greater than any name we could make for ourselves. We do not have to become monsters. Ours are not the names that have to grow.

We are free, now, to live within that holy name—and free, one day, to die within it. Wherever the road takes us, we can keep asking God, “What will you do next?”

And as we walk with Jesus, we learn what it means to enjoy God.

“Hallowed be your name!”

For Reflection

- When do your own good name, success, security, or influence begin to matter more to you than God's name?
- Can you think of someone whose life helped you see God's greatness rather than their own? What do you remember about them?

Chapter 6

Whose “Kingdom” Do We Seek?

A Marching Song for the Road with Jesus

Near the beginning of Mark’s Gospel, we hear Jesus say:

“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.” (Mark 1:15)

And then:

“Follow me and I will make you fish for people.” (Mark 1:17)

Believing the good news and following Jesus belong together. His words call us into a journey with him, toward the kingdom he has come to announce.

In Luke’s Gospel, Jesus teaches the Lord’s Prayer on his way to Jerusalem. This is a prayer for the journey. We learn it as we follow him, like a song we sing together as we walk.

On Sundays, we gather in the sanctuary and pray aloud with the people beside us. In Japan, as a festival draws near, we begin to hear people practicing their flutes and drums. The sounds rise from here and there, and the familiar rhythm returns. Something like this happens when we gather for worship. Week after week, we pray the same words. We learn their rhythm together until it begins to shape the way we walk with Jesus.

We need to return to that rhythm. Around us, we hear a different tune.

Anxiety drives us to hurry. We are taught to see enemies in other people and to be afraid. Our desires are stirred again and again. There is always something more to want, someone else to keep up with. Even online, advertisements keep pulling our attention somewhere else. We can spend our lives in a race that brings us little joy and has no finish line.

Without noticing, we begin to move to that rhythm too.

So we gather again with our companions. We listen to God's word and hear the prayer on one another's lips. We remember whose voice we are following.

"Thy kingdom come!"

The Reign of God Has Already Begun

Jesus speaks of the kingdom of God again and again. Yet it is not always easy to see what he means.

"The kingdom of God is not coming with things that can be observed; nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or 'There it is!' For, in fact, the kingdom of God is among you." (Luke 17:20–21)

Some translations say "within you." Here we read "among you." These words turn our eyes beyond our own hearts, toward Jesus and the people around him.

He helps us see it through a picture from an ordinary kitchen:

"It is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened." (Luke 13:20–21)

The yeast is already in the dough. We may not see it, but it is at work.

This is what it looks like where I live.

A woman who has suffered cruelty in her own family prays, week after week, that she may become able to forgive them.

A man who has been told that his illness cannot be cured leans forward to hear the sermon.

Someone who has made a terrible mistake sits and listens as

forgiveness is announced.

These are people I worship with. The kingdom of God is among them—working like yeast none of us can see.

Since the pandemic, fewer than a hundred people now gather in our sanctuary for worship. An American friend likes to introduce me, with a straight face, as “the pastor of a mega-church in Japan.” It is a joke, but it is also true. A hundred people is a mega-church here.

Smallness can frighten us. We look toward growth, toward numbers, toward becoming something more. Yet Jesus tells his little flock not to be afraid.

That is why I return again and again to these words of Jesus:

“Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.” (Luke 12:32)

Jesus also compared the kingdom of God to a mustard seed. Once such a tiny seed has been sown, it seems to disappear into the soil. We may even forget that we planted it.

Yet life springs from that seed, and grows, and “*puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade*” (Mark 4:32).

What strikes me most is not how large the plant becomes, but that birds find shelter in its branches. The branches give them somewhere to rest. We may be few. Yet even a little flock can offer such shelter—someone, somewhere among us, may find a branch to rest on.

This does not mean that life in the church is easy. Jesus brings together people who might never have chosen one another. He still calls

sinners, people who need a physician.

Our quarrels are not proof that God is at work. But when people who have hurt one another gather again at the same table, we may catch a glimpse of his patience. Jesus has not stopped calling us.

So we return. We confess our sins, hear the words of forgiveness, and pray again like children. The gospel is preached. We share bread and wine. Even where only two or three gather in Jesus' name, he is with us.

Heavenly Father, rule over us.

"Your kingdom come!"

The Reign of God Has Not Yet Fully Come

When worship ends, we leave the sanctuary with Jesus. We do not leave behind the life we are learning with him.

In Mark 1:29, Jesus and his disciples leave the synagogue and enter the house of Simon and Andrew. The Japanese New Interconfessional Version calls them an *ikkō*—a company of people traveling together.

I love that word.

At a traditional inn in Japan, one sometimes sees a sign welcoming a group by name—for example, "The Tanaka Party." Even when we are returning to our own homes, perhaps the sign above us reads, "Jesus and Company."

His kingdom has already begun. Yet we know that it has not fully come.

The dough has not yet fully risen.

We see people struggling for power over one another. Violence can seem stronger than love. Lies spread, trust wears thin, and we begin to

wonder whether anything can change.

Jesus did not stay in one place. He said:

“I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to the other cities also; for I was sent for this purpose.” (Luke 4:43)

So we follow him into our homes, our workplaces, and the life of our towns. There, too, we pray, “Thy kingdom come.”

No employer, government, or head of a household has the final claim on our lives. We belong to the God of love and justice.

But learning to live under his rule can bring us into conflict with other powers. “The ruler of this world” (John 12:31) does not easily let go. Jesus became a threat to those who held religious and political power. They could not control whom he welcomed or whom he healed.

The church does not always follow faithfully.

During the Second World War, we in the church in Japan failed to reject a belief that treated the emperor as a god and justified invading other countries and even killing people. We did more than remain silent. We supported the war. We were afraid to be a “little flock.” We wanted to be part of something larger. We had forgotten the kingdom Jesus proclaimed. Jesus never killed anyone.⁷

This is not someone else’s history. It is our own, and we still need to repent of it.

Still, the risen Lord calls us again.

“Follow me.”

⁷ For the full text of the United Church of Christ in Japan’s confession of war responsibility, issued on March 26, 1967, see the Appendix.

We go with him, still learning the song he has given us. We sing it in a world where his reign is not yet fully seen.

“Your kingdom come!”

For Reflection

- Where do you recognize God’s reign in the life of your church?
- Where have you seen “smallness” mistaken for failure—in your own life, or in the life of your church? What might it look like to trust Jesus inside it, rather than escape it?

Chapter 7

Waiting for “Thy Will”

A Prayer That Refuses Resignation

If we listen closely to the Greek word order of Matthew’s Gospel, we hear three urgent prayers, each beginning with a verb:

“Be hallowed—your name.
Come—your kingdom.
Be done—your will,
as in heaven, so also on earth.”
(Matthew 6:9–10, author’s translation)

God saw that the world he had made was good. Yet his name is not always honored here. His kingdom does not always seem near. His will is not always done. We hurt one another. We even use God’s name to excuse what we do. The name of Jesus can be used in the same way. But when we look at the way he lived and the cross on which he died, we may find it harder to excuse ourselves.

We become so busy with our own wishes that we fail to see the person suffering beside us. And in that person, we fail to see Jesus.

So we pray:

May your name be holy among us.
May your kingdom come.
May your will be done.

God wages a strange kind of war. It is not a war to destroy our enemies, but to rescue us all. It crosses every wall we build between “us” and “them.”

God does not answer violence with greater violence. He did not send his Son into the world with spears and swords. He sent him to bring the peace of heaven to earth.

But not every power welcomed this peace.

The demons recognized Jesus at once. And notice where one of them spoke: not in the wilderness, but in a synagogue. Demons, it seems, do not always avoid holy places.

“What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God.” (Mark 1:24)

In a palace, Herod was afraid too. He heard that a child had been called “king of the Jews.” Later, he ordered the killing of every boy two years old or under in Bethlehem and the surrounding area (Matthew 2:1–18).

The demons knew who Jesus was. Herod sensed a threat to his power. Perhaps we pay less attention to Jesus than they did. We would rather settle somewhere warm and safe, where little is asked of us. We would like to call upon God without being disturbed.

But when we pray the Lord’s Prayer, Jesus calls us back onto the road, among the people we would rather avoid.

The Lord’s Prayer is not a prayer of resignation.

It is a prayer for another kind of victory.

Watching Jesus Pray “Your Will Be Done”

“Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”

The disciples had heard these words from Jesus. In Gethsemane, Peter, James, and John watched how Jesus prayed them himself.

Jesus asked them to stay beside him:

“I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and stay awake with me.”

Then he went a little farther, threw himself on the ground, and prayed:

“My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want.” (Matthew 26:38–39)

In his second prayer, we hear him pray:

“My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done.”
(Matthew 26:42)

Jesus prayed three times. Again and again, he returned to find the disciples sleeping. They had seen his sorrow and heard him ask them to stay awake. But their eyes were heavy. Only a few hours earlier, they had shared the Passover meal with Jesus. Now their Lord was in agony nearby, and they slept.

The cross was only hours away. Everything seemed to be falling apart. How could God’s will be done here?

Yet the voice of Jesus did not fall silent.

While his disciples slept, he continued to pray the words he had taught them:

“Your will be done.”

The “cup” was not removed. Jesus was arrested, and the disciples abandoned him and fled. He was put on trial. The next day, he was beaten, sentenced to death, and killed on a cross.

When the risen Lord came to them, the disciples began to understand that even the cross had not defeated the will of God.

Jesus did not overthrow Rome. He did not drive the chief priests from power.

Violence, hatred, sin, and death seemed to have won. But they did not

have the last word. Jesus was killed, but death could not hold him.

Jesus Christ is the victor. The risen Lord shares his life with us. Through his death and resurrection, he has opened a way into forgiveness and freedom.

Praying So as Not to Lose Heart

“Then Jesus told them a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart.” (Luke 18:1)

Why did Jesus teach us to pray?

Jesus taught us to pray so that we would not lose heart.

To wait for God’s will is not to give up on the world. There are times when our own words fail. We may feel swallowed up by fate. We stop resisting. We fall asleep.

But the Lord’s Prayer gives us words for those times. With Jesus, we can still call upon God. Even when God’s presence seems hidden and God seems silent, the living voice of Jesus still calls us onward.

There will be times when we cannot see the Father. Even then, Jesus walks ahead of us. This prayer is given to “us,” so that together we may follow him.

Left to ourselves, our prayers soon become as small as our wishes. Sorrow comes. Our hearts grow cold. We fall asleep. Yet Jesus gives us this prayer and leads us into the larger work of God.

The cross looked like the end.

It was not.

Through the resurrection, God began to make all things new. Jesus has promised to come again. When he comes, we will see all things made new with our own eyes.

“Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven!”

For Reflection

- Copy down Romans 8:31–39, read it aloud several times, and discuss what stood out to you and what it stirred in your heart.
- Have you known a time when God’s will remained hidden and you had to keep praying? What helped you not to lose heart?

Chapter 8

“Our Daily Bread”—The Scent of Everyday Life

The Prayer Smells of Food

The Lord’s Prayer is wide enough to hold heaven and earth.

We pray for God’s name to be holy, for his kingdom to come, and for his will to be done. We ask for forgiveness and for deliverance from evil.

And at the center of it all, Jesus places bread on the table.

“Give us this day our daily bread.”

The Greek word translated “daily” is rare, and its exact meaning is uncertain. It may mean the bread we need for today—bread enough for this day.

At the church where I serve, we eat lunch together every Sunday. Some volunteers begin cooking the day before. Others arrive early on Sunday morning. They keep the kitchen doors and windows tightly shut. Otherwise, the smell of curry would drift into the sanctuary. We would sing, pray, confess our sins, and listen to the word of God—all while breathing in the scent of curry.

Perhaps they need not worry.

The Lord’s Prayer already smells of food.

Jesus loved to eat and drink with people. His enemies called him “a glutton and a drunkard” (Matthew 11:19). While John’s disciples were fasting, his disciples were not (Mark 2:18).

On the night before the cross, Jesus took bread, gave thanks, broke it, and gave it to his friends. After he rose, he ate with them again. One morning by the lake, the disciples found him beside a charcoal fire, with fish and bread waiting for them. “Come and have breakfast,” said a voice they knew (John 21:9–13).

Faith is not an escape from the body or from daily life. We follow Jesus here, where bread is broken, curry is cooking, and people grow hungry.

Every town has its own smells. So does every home. The Lord's Prayer belongs in all of them.

Bread That Disappears

The disciples ate with Jesus as they journeyed from place to place. The largest of these meals was shared with a crowd of more than five thousand. With five loaves and two fish, Jesus fed them all.

The four Gospels do not always tell the same stories. Only Matthew and Luke tell of Jesus' birth. The Sermon on the Mount is found in Matthew. Only Luke tells of the prodigal son. Only John tells of the raising of Lazarus. Even the Lord's Prayer appears in only Matthew and Luke.

But all four tell the story of the loaves and the fish. Matthew and Mark also tell a second story, in which Jesus fed another crowd with seven loaves.

Why did this story remain in all four Gospels?

Perhaps it was a joyful memory. Or perhaps the reason lies in us. We are quick to forget.

It was a great miracle. It was also a small one. The bread was soon gone. Before long, hunger returned. The bread in their hands did not last. But it pointed beyond itself, to the God who had fed them.

We are forgetful too. The bowls and plates on our tables seem ordinary. The food soon disappears. Yet every meal comes to us as a gift. Behind each small meal stands the God who gives it.

That is why we pray the Lord's Prayer again and again.

When Martin Luther explained "daily bread," he gave it a wide

meaning. For him, it included everything the body needs: food and drink, clothes and shoes, home and work, peace and health, good friends and faithful neighbors (*The Small Catechism*).

Still, we forget. We begin to think that we got all these things on our own. We forget that each one comes through God's care and bears the mark of his grace.

Paul once spoke sharply to Christians who had forgotten this:

"For who sees anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you received it, why do you boast as if it were not a gift? Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! Quite apart from us you have become kings!" (1 Corinthians 4:7–8)

The Lord's Prayer rescues us from pretending to be kings over what we have received.

Not My Bread, but Ours

Jesus did not teach us to pray for *my bread*. He taught us to pray for *our bread*. Not for bread piled high, but for enough for today.

Basil of Caesarea, preaching in the fourth century, did not soften his words:

*The bread you are holding back is for the hungry,
the clothes you keep put away are for the naked,
the shoes that are rotting away with disuse are for
those who have none, the silver you keep buried in
the earth is for the needy.*⁸

⁸ Basil of Caesarea, "I Will Pull Down My Barns," Homily 6, section 7, in *On Social Justice*, trans. C. Paul Schroeder (St Vladimir's Seminary Press).

That was more than sixteen hundred years ago. It has not become any easier to hear.

Everything we have was received. Yet we still call it ours. We close our hands around it. We become kings again, guarding gifts that were never ours alone.

As we continue our journey with Jesus, we meet people who have no bread, no home, no medicine, no chance to learn, or no one to call a friend.

What does “our” mean when they stand beside us?

This prayer for bread reaches into every other part of the Lord’s Prayer. God’s name is not honored when the hungry are forgotten. We glimpse his kingdom when closed hands begin to open. We glimpse his will being done when bread is shared. And when we say “our,” we ask forgiveness for all we have called “mine,” and deliverance from the fear that closes our hands.

This prayer brings us to our knees. But it does not leave us there.

The Lord who loves to eat and drink with us forgives us, lifts us to our feet, and sends us back to the people we once passed by.

And then we go and eat.

“Give us this day our daily bread!”

For Reflection

- What meal do you remember with particular gratitude? Who was at the table?
- How do the ways we give—and the way our church uses money—reflect the words “our daily bread”?

Chapter 9

Walking the Road of Forgiveness

Two Things We Cannot Live Without

I once attended a five-day retreat with about forty other pastors to study preaching.

At every meal, one of us said grace. After listening to several of our prayers, the oldest pastor among us finally asked:

“Don’t you fellows ask for forgiveness when you pray before a meal?”

Then he taught us a traditional prayer often said at German tables:

Lord, there are two things we cannot live without. In your mercy, give them to us: our daily bread and the forgiveness of sins.⁹

I had never thought of asking for forgiveness at breakfast. Yet the prayer made sense.

In the Lord’s Prayer, two petitions stand side by side:

“Give us this day our daily bread.”

“Forgive us our debts.”

Bread and forgiveness.

We need both every day.

How Many Times?

“And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.”

These are not easy words to say.

Jesus does not teach us simply to pray, “Forgive me.” He places the

⁹ Traditional German table prayer, “Zwei Dinge, Herr, sind not.” English paraphrase. For the German text, identified as überliefert (“traditional”), see Evangeliums.net, https://www.evangeliums.net/lieder/lie_d_zwei_dinge_herr_sind_not.html.

people who have hurt us inside our prayer. He does not allow us to leave them outside.

Peter knew how hard this was.

“Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?” (Matthew 18:21)

Seven times is not a small number. Peter was not asking whether he should forgive once. He was asking where forgiveness might finally end.

I understand why he asked.

Not long before, Peter had stood with Jesus on a high mountain. There he saw Jesus’ face shine like the sun and his clothes become white as light. It must have seemed far away from the noise and trouble below.

“Lord, it is good for us to be here.” (Matthew 17:4)

Peter offered to build three shelters.

Perhaps he was saying more than he knew: Let us stay here. Let us not go down yet. Let this journey end on the mountain.

But Jesus did not stay.

He came down the mountain. He returned to the crowds—to their cries and arguments, their sickness and pain. He kept walking toward Jerusalem, where rejection and the cross awaited him.

If Jesus had remained on the mountain, our journey might have been easier. There would have been fewer difficult people. Fewer wounds. We could have spoken of forgiveness without having to practice it with one another. From the mountain, forgiveness might even sound beautiful.

But Jesus teaches forgiveness below, among people. He does not teach it as an idea from above. He walks into the places we would rather avoid,

and he asks us to follow him, carrying the words: “as we also have forgiven our debtors.”

Here, sins are not ideas.

People hurt us. Sometimes the body remembers long after the mind has tried to move on. Our hearts race. Our stomachs tighten. Sleep does not come. The person who hurt us may not even know what they have done—or care. We may forgive, only to be wounded again.

Forgiveness does not mean calling evil good. It does not mean that trust returns at once. Nor does it ask us to remain where we are being harmed. Sometimes we need to step away, seek protection, and ask for help.

Even then, forgiveness remains hard. There is no easy formula. No number can measure a wound.

I am grateful that Peter asked. He gives words to the question we may be afraid to ask.

How many times, Lord?

Seven?

In the Light of Forgiveness

To Peter’s question, the Lord Jesus answered:

“Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times.” (Matthew 18:22)

Seventy-seven times. In other words, stop counting.

Jesus then told Peter a story.

A servant owed his king ten thousand talents. He fell to his knees and begged, “Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.” The king had pity on him and forgave the whole debt.

But as the servant went out, he found another servant who owed him a hundred denarii. He seized the man by the throat and said, “Pay what you owe.”

The second servant fell to his knees and pleaded: “Have patience with me, and I will pay you.” But the first servant refused. He had the man thrown into prison (Matthew 18:23–30).

The debt of a hundred denarii was real. It meant about a hundred days’ wages—more than three months of work. It was not loose change. It was enough to weigh on a household for months.

Jesus does not pretend that our wounds are small.

But ten thousand talents was about sixty million days’ wages—nearly two hundred thousand years of work. It was six hundred thousand times as large. No one could earn that much. No lifetime could repay it.

A man whose impossible debt had just been forgiven took another man by the throat over a debt worth one hundred days’ wages.

The smaller debt mattered. But the servant had forgotten where he stood.

He stood inside mercy.

Peter had asked Jesus for a number. Jesus showed him a place to stand.

But Peter would need time to understand.

On the night before the cross, Peter said to Jesus: “Even though I must die with you, I will not deny you.” (Matthew 26:35)

A few hours later, he stood in a courtyard and said: “I do not know the man!”

Then the cock crowed. Peter remembered what Jesus had said:
“Before the cock crows, you will deny me three times.”

And he went out and wept bitterly (Matthew 26:74–75).

Why did Peter weep?

Perhaps he wept not only because he had failed. Matthew draws our attention to what Peter remembered: *the words of Jesus*.

Jesus had known him—his courage and his fear, his promise and his failure. He had known it all. And he had not turned away. He had kept walking toward the cross.

Two men went out.

One went out from mercy and forgot it.

Peter went out into the night remembering the words of Jesus.

The man who had asked, “How many times?” now had no number to offer.

He had only tears.

Perhaps in those tears, Peter began to stand in the light of forgiveness.

When we pray, “Give us our daily bread,” we begin to notice the grace already waiting on the table.

In the same way, when we pray, “Forgive us our debts,” we begin to notice the mercy already surrounding us.

We do not forgive in order to earn God’s forgiveness. We forgive because we are already standing inside it.

This mercy does not make the wound less real. It does not make

justice unnecessary. But it breaks the cycle in which one wound gives birth to another. It does not allow evil to decide what we will become.

Sometimes forgiveness begins not with a warm feeling, but with a prayer we can barely say. Sometimes we pray it once. Sometimes we must return to it for years.

The prayer carries us when our hearts cannot yet follow.

We do not forgive from above, as though we ourselves had never failed. We forgive from below, as people who also live by mercy.

Every day, we need bread. Every day, we need forgiveness.

We receive both with empty hands.

And so we pray:

“And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.”

For Reflection

- Which words in this petition are hardest for you to pray? Why?
- Where have you seen forgiveness open a new way forward?

Chapter 10

The Grace of Praying “Deliver Us”

A Cry for Help

The Lord’s Prayer begins with God’s name, his kingdom, and his will. Then we ask for bread and forgiveness.

And the last petition is a cry for help:

“Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.”

I find this striking. After all these prayers, we still need to be rescued.

I think of the disciples on the lake.

Matthew tells us that Jesus got into a boat and his disciples followed him. Then a storm broke over the water. Waves swept over the boat.

But Jesus was sleeping.

The disciples went to wake him.

“Lord, save us! We are perishing!” (Matthew 8:23–25)

It was not a prayer of many words. It was one voice, breaking through the wind.

They had followed Jesus into the boat. Yet the storm came. They were not in danger because they had left him behind. They were in the boat with him. Walking with Jesus does not take us out of the world in which we live.

His prayer belongs here, among the things we see and hear each day.

God’s name is used to excuse what harms our neighbors. His love is refused. We insist on our own way instead of seeking his will. People go hungry. One hurt leads to another, and forgiveness seems far away.

These are not only things that happen around us. We too can turn

away from love. We too can add to another person's pain.

Sometimes it feels as though the waves are coming over the side of our own boat. We want to keep following Jesus. Yet we are afraid. We do not know how to go on.

The Lord's Prayer gives us words for that moment.

Lord, help us!

"Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."

It Is All Right to Pray "Help Us!"

Yet I still find myself hesitating.

May we really pray this way?

Shouldn't we ask to become stronger? Shouldn't we pray, "Give us the strength to resist temptation and overcome evil"?

There is nothing wrong with asking for strength.

Yet the Lord's Prayer is a prayer for the road with Jesus. Following him does not mean walking through a world without wilderness.

After his baptism, the Holy Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness, where he was tempted by the devil. Luther called such trials *tentatio*, or *Anfechtung*—those times when faith is shaken, when God seems hidden, and when we are driven back to God's word and promise.

Perhaps this is one reason Jesus teaches us to pray, "Lead us not into temptation." We do not always know what kind of road lies ahead, or what God may allow us to pass through. We ask not to be abandoned there.

But why do we find it so hard simply to say, "Help us"?

Perhaps we feel that needing help means we have failed. Yet Jesus himself gave us these words. He calls us to endure. He does not ask us to

endure alone. When we cannot go on, we do not have to hide it from him.

“Call on me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me.” (Psalm 50:15)

Our Father knows that we need help. He is not surprised by our cry.

While visiting the United States, I worshiped at a church where nearly everyone in the congregation was African American. It was an ordinary Sunday. The service lasted well over two hours. The sermon alone took more than an hour.

They sang, they danced, they laughed, they wept, they prayed, they shouted—I had never experienced worship like this before.

Afterward, I asked the pastor a question that showed how little I had understood.

“Why is the service so long?”

He answered as though I had asked him why people eat.

“An hour is not long enough to cry out for what you need and then find out what grace is. Is it?”

I had been counting the time. He was speaking about need and grace.

The Lord’s Prayer gives us a way to bring our need before the Father. We do not have to put our lives in order before we pray it. We can come hungry, ashamed, frightened, or tired.

Father, help us. Do not leave us alone in the face of temptation and evil.

We return to these words again and again. Not because many words will make God listen, but because we need him again today.

And tomorrow, we will need him still.

So That Your Faith May Not Fail

We pray “deliver us” because there are things we cannot face alone.

First Peter puts it this way:

“Discipline yourselves, keep alert. Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour.” (1 Peter 5:8)

It is a frightening picture. Yet danger does not always come with a roar.

Sometimes evil invites us to take an easier road. We could have what we want, if only we would turn away from Christ. At other times, it wears us down. We see people suffer. Cruelty goes unpunished. We try to love, and wonder whether it makes any difference.

Is there any point in following Jesus?

There are days when the news makes that question hard to put aside. We pray for God’s kingdom to come, but so much seems to speak against it.

On the night before the cross, Jesus said to Peter:

“Simon, Simon, listen! Satan has demanded to sift all of you like wheat.” (Luke 22:31)

Even Peter would be shaken. His love for Jesus was real. So was his courage. Neither would be enough to keep him from denying the Lord.

But Jesus had more to say:

“But I have prayed for you that your own faith may not fail.”
(Luke 22:32)

Before Peter knew how far he could fall, Jesus had already prayed for him.

This did not mean that Peter would never stumble. Before the night was over, he would deny three times that he knew Jesus. Yet Jesus spoke not only of his danger, but also of his return. When Peter turned back, he was to strengthen the others.

Peter's failure would not be the end of their journey.

When we ask our Father to deliver us, we do not pray alone. Jesus knows the weakness we have not yet discovered in ourselves. The risen Lord still prays for us (Hebrews 7:25). We do not have to hold on by our strength alone.

And his help may come through someone beside us.

When we gather as the church, we do not leave the world's troubles at the door. We bring them with us. We bring our fears, our failures, and the questions we cannot answer. Then we hear someone else begin:

"Our Father..."

We may find that we can join in.

The church is not free from sin. We know that only too well. Yet here, among people who also need help, we hear Christ's words again. We are reminded that this world belongs to God, even when evil seems to have its way.

Martin Luther knew how hard it could be to face his troubles alone. In his *Table Talk*, he admitted that, in times of distress, he sometimes needed to talk even with a child. He needed help. He could not sustain himself without the strength of Christ.¹⁰

¹⁰ Martin Luther, *Table Talk*, "Of Temptation and Tribulation," DCXLVIII (648), Christian Classics Ethereal Library, <https://ccel.org/ccel/luther/tabletalk/tabletalk.v.xxvi.html>.

A learned man may need a child. A pastor may need one too.

In my church there is a girl who arrives early by herself and sits in the sanctuary waiting for her friends. She is not there to strengthen my faith. But there have been Sundays when the sight of her has done exactly that.

Look around at the people who pray with you. Some are young. Some are tired. Some may be finding it hard to pray at all.

We do not always know how much we need one another.

Jesus taught us to say, “Deliver us.”

Not one of us has to carry that prayer alone.

“Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil!”

For Reflection

- When you found it hard to pray, who helped you? What words or small gestures have stayed with you?
- Who comes to mind when you pray, “Deliver us”?

Chapter 11

“The Kingdom, the Power, and the Glory” Belong to God

Watching and Waiting

Some time ago, I asked people in the church whether they remembered hearing the Lord’s Prayer on an occasion they had never forgotten.

A woman answered.

She had come to church for the first time late in her life, on a weekday evening. Only a handful of people were there. They prayed the Lord’s Prayer together, and she has never forgotten it.

She told me she could still see that room.

“Be dressed for action and have your lamps lit; be like those who are waiting for their master to return from the wedding banquet, so that they may open the door for him as soon as he comes and knocks. Blessed are those slaves whom the master finds alert when he comes.” (Luke 12:35–37)

These are words spoken by the Lord Jesus.

The night grows late, but the people in the house are still dressed and ready. Their lamps are burning. Someone passing by might wonder why they have not gone to bed.

But there is a reason. They have a master, and they are waiting for him to return. When he knocks, they want to be ready to open the door.

We do not literally dress ourselves for action and light lamps when we worship. Instead, every time we gather for worship, we join our voices to pray the Lord’s Prayer. In doing so, we show that we have a Master, and that we are waiting for his return.

A handful of people praying together on a weekday evening may not

seem like much. Yet this, too, is a way of keeping the lamps lit.

How many thousands of times will we pray the Lord's Prayer during our lives? Perhaps tens of thousands. Yet a day will come when we no longer need to ask for what we ask for now. Our Master, Jesus Christ, will return, and we shall see him.

On that day, all that we have asked for in the Lord's Prayer will be fulfilled.

God's name will be held holy throughout the world. His love will reign everywhere. His will shall be done on earth as it is in heaven.

But for now, we are still on the journey. We are waiting for that day.

The waiting can be long. We grow tired. Sometimes it is hard to keep our eyes open and our hope alive. So we gather and pray together again.

And at the very end of the prayer, we join our voices in praise. While we are still waiting, we remind one another to whom this world belongs:

"For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever!"

Who Is It That Rules This World?

The words with which we often end the Lord's Prayer have a history of their own:

"For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever!"

These words are absent from some of the earliest surviving manuscripts of Matthew. They are not part of Luke's version of the prayer either. Many modern Bibles therefore leave them out of the main text or place them in a footnote.

Yet very early, we find Christians already ending the prayer with praise. An early Christian writing called the Didache ends the prayer this

way: “For yours is the power and the glory forever.”¹¹

I find I do not mind this at all. The prayer came to us from the Lord, and the church has been praying it ever since. It is as though the church heard his words and could not help answering with praise.

Those words are still in our mouths on Sunday morning.

A prayer can survive with very little.

Here in Japan, after Christianity was banned nationwide in 1614, communities kept their faith alive in secret for more than two hundred years. Thousands died for their faith; church accounts speak of some five thousand martyrs known from historical records.¹² Yet prayers passed from one generation to the next.

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

These words do not belong only inside a church. They carry the scent of politics.

The first Christians lived in the Roman Empire, where emperors could be honored as divine. Augustus himself bore the title “son of a god.”

Against such claims, the church’s praise carries a quiet challenge: Father, the kingdom belongs to you. The power belongs to you. The glory belongs to you, forever.

We need not assume that these words were first added as a protest against an emperor. Yet we can hear what they mean when rulers demand

¹¹ *Didache* 8.2, trans. M. B. Riddle, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 7, as reproduced on New Advent, <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0714.htm>. Capitalization adjusted.

¹² Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Japan, “FABC 50 General Conference — Preparatory Response from the Church in Japan,” December 17, 2021, section 1.5.1, <https://www.cbj.catholic.jp/2021/12/17/23735/>.

the place that belongs to God.

An emperor may command an army. He may imprison those who refuse him. But the world does not belong to him.

For Christians facing persecution, such a confession could help them stay awake and keep walking. It can do the same for us.

Jesus says:

“I tell you, my friends, do not fear those who kill the body, and after that can do nothing more... Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten in God’s sight... Do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows.” (Luke 12:4, 6–7)

He calls us his friends.

He knows how easily we become afraid. We live under other “kingdoms,” fear other “powers,” and are drawn to other kinds of “glory.” Before we know it, fear begins to rule our lives.

The “emperors” of our own day do not always wear crowns. Sometimes their claims reach us through things we rightly cherish: a steady income, a good name, health, a happy home, a safe future.

These are good things. We ask for many of them when we pray for our daily bread.

But the fear of losing them can become our master. We may keep silent about something wrong because we fear losing our position. We may turn away from someone who needs us because we do not want our own peace disturbed. Little by little, protecting what we have becomes more important than following Jesus. It can feel as though we have no choice.

Yet Jesus calls us his friends and tells us not to be afraid. He does not

promise that nothing will be lost. He tells us that not even a sparrow is forgotten by God.

Neither are we.

And so, with fear still in our hearts, we answer together:

“For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever!”

The Glory of the Cross

What kind of glory belongs to God?

John’s Gospel tells us that people saw God’s glory in the works of Jesus. Even at the tomb of Lazarus, Jesus spoke of that glory. Yet as his journey draws near its end, he speaks of the hour of his glory.

And he turns our eyes toward the cross.

“The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.”

(John 12:23–24)

This is not the glory of a ruler who crushes an enemy and stands above the defeated. Jesus speaks of a grain of wheat falling into the earth.

He entered a world where nations fought nations and rulers struggled to keep their power. He had done no wrong. Yet he bore the weight of our sin and went to the cross.

The glory is not in the cruelty he suffered. It is in the love that did not turn away from us.

Those who feared losing their place in the world helped bring about his death. Jesus died, and his body was laid in a tomb.

But death was not the end of his story.

On the third day, God raised him from the dead.

And now the grain of wheat bears fruit throughout the world—even in a small room where a handful of people gather to pray.

I think again of the woman who could still see the room where she first heard the Lord's Prayer.

The gathering was small. But the life that began to bear fruit through the cross had reached that room too.

We join our voices with theirs:

“For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever!”

We may be poor. Others may speak badly of us. We may be ill in body or mind, or carry a sorrow at home that no one else can see. There may be little in our lives that the world would call glorious.

Yet we can wait for our Lord.

We do not have to pretend that the darkness is light. We wait because the one who went to the cross is risen.

And waiting for him does not mean standing still. We continue the journey. We learn to carry his love into places we would rather avoid, even when doing so costs us something we hoped to keep.

Before the cross, Jesus said:

“I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming. He has no power over me... Rise, let us be on our way.”

(John 14:30–31)

He is still saying to us, “Rise, let us be on our way.”

We hear his invitation and leave the sanctuary. There are people to meet, burdens to share, and steps we have not yet taken.

We go with him, waiting for the day when we shall see him.

The lamps stay lit.

For Reflection

- What goes wrong when we use God's name to justify our conflicts?
How does the cross help us see this?
- Where do you see God's kingdom, power, and glory in the life of your own church? Can you recall a particular moment?

Chapter 12

“Amen! Amen! Amen!”

A Password Across the World

I once attended an international conference where Christians gathered from all over the world.

There were about forty of us. For one week, we lived and ate together. Each day began with morning worship. When we came to the Lord's Prayer, each of us prayed in our own language.

Korea, Taiwan, Indonesia, Thailand, Myanmar, India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Zimbabwe, South Africa, Germany, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Denmark, Norway, the United States, Canada, Costa Rica...

We had come from all these places. How many languages were we praying in?

Around me were words I had never heard spoken so close before. I added my own voice.

Our countries have not always been kind to one another. Some of the wounds between them have not healed. Yet the words we prayed that morning did not come from our governments. They had been given to us by the Lord Jesus.

We spoke different languages, but we shared a prayer, a creed, hymns, and Scripture.

“Our Father, who art in heaven...”

It was the same prayer. Yet each voice carried different sounds. I could not understand all the words around me, but I knew the prayer they were praying.

Then came a word I could recognize:

“Amen.”

From one voice, then another, the same word reached me.

“Amen! Amen! Amen!”

The small room filled with it.

The sounds were not quite the same in every language. But we could recognize the word we shared. At the end of the prayer, we could hear one another saying it.

Even now, people around the world are praying the Lord’s Prayer. Most will never meet one another. They may never learn one another’s languages. Yet they pray to the same Father, with the prayer Jesus gave them.

And at its end, again and again, comes the word:

“Amen! Amen! Amen!”

“More Sure Than I Feel”

“Amen” comes from Hebrew. It is a word of agreement: This is true. So be it. When we say it at the end of the Lord’s Prayer, we make the prayer our own.

Yet we may hesitate.

Dear God, I often say this prayer without thinking very much about it. My thoughts wander. Do I really mean what I am asking? May I still say “Amen”?

There are words I would like us to hear at such a moment. They come at the very end of the Heidelberg Catechism:

Q. What does that little word “Amen” express?

A. “Amen” means: This shall truly and surely be! It is even more sure that God listens to my prayer than that I really desire what I pray for.

(Heidelberg Catechism, Question 129)¹³

I find great comfort in those words.

Sometimes we pray with a clear and eager heart. Sometimes we hardly know what is in our hearts. Yet God hears us more surely than we can feel how much we want the things we ask for.

We did not invent this prayer. Jesus gave it to us. He is the one who taught us to come to the Father with these words.

And “Amen” was a word he often used himself.

More than seventy times in the Gospels, Jesus begins a saying with it. In English, we usually hear it as “truly I tell you.” Behind “truly” is the word amen.

“Again, truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven.”
(Matthew 18:19)

We say “Amen” at the end of a prayer. Jesus says it before his promise.

He is telling us that his words can be trusted.

The book of Revelation even calls him “the Amen, the faithful and true witness” (Revelation 3:14). He does not merely speak a word of assurance. He himself is faithful and true.

So our prayer does not rest on how certain we feel, or on how deeply we can stir our hearts. It rests on the Lord Jesus Christ.

This does not mean that the words of our prayer do not matter. It means that we can return to them even when our thoughts wander and our

¹³ The Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 129, in The Book of Confessions of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) (Louisville: Office of the General Assembly, PC(USA), 2016), 4.129.

faith feels weak.

We do not have to keep looking inside ourselves, asking whether we feel enough or believe enough. We can listen again to what Jesus has taught us to ask.

Our Father. Your name. Your kingdom. Your will. Our bread. Our forgiveness. Our deliverance.

We follow his words, and little by little they become our prayer.

Even with a quiet and uncertain voice, we may say:

Amen.

Though I Am Weak, He Is Strong

This took place shortly after I became a pastor.

There was a woman in our church who had no family left. She had been bedridden in a hospital for more than twenty years and was nearly one hundred years old. A tube through her nose carried food to her stomach. Her mouth was dry.

Whenever I visited, her eyes moved a little. Beyond that, she gave no response. I thought that, although her eyes were open, she was no longer aware of what was happening around her.

Other elderly patients shared the room. No one was speaking, yet the room was full of sound: loud snoring, low groans, and laughter from a television that no one seemed to be watching.

One day, I tried singing a hymn near her ear. I had been told that she had grown up in the church. Perhaps a song from her childhood could still reach her.

“Jesus loves me, this I know,
for the Bible tells me so.

Little ones to him belong,
they are weak, but he is strong.”

Then her dry lips and tongue began to move.

I heard her voice.

The words were not clear, but I could hear the rhythm of the refrain:

“Yes, Jesus loves me!
Yes, Jesus loves me!
Yes, Jesus loves me!
The Bible tells me so.”

After the hymn, I began the Lord’s Prayer.

“Our Father, who art in heaven...”

Her voice continued. Again, I could not make out every word. But she was following the rhythm of the prayer.

And at the end, we quietly said together:

“Amen.”

In the kindergarten chapel, children shout this prayer before they understand all its words. In that hospital room, a woman who could no longer speak clearly still carried its rhythm.

At both ends of life, the prayer holds us.

I had gone to her bedside to pray with her. There, the words Jesus had given us carried us both.

We are weak, but he is strong.

“Our Father, who art in heaven...”

We do not say these words alone. We pray with Christians across the world and with those who have prayed before us over the past two thousand years. With them, we continue our journey with the Lord Jesus.

Some voices are loud. Some can barely be heard. Some of us understand much of what we pray. Some are only beginning to learn. None of us holds the whole prayer in our hearts.

Yet the Lord who gave it to us is faithful.

We ask for God's name to be holy, for his kingdom to come, and for his will to be done on earth.

Amen.

We ask for our daily bread, for our sins to be forgiven, and for deliverance from temptation and evil.

Amen.

We do not yet see all that we pray for. But we trust the one who taught us to pray. His promise is more certain than the strength of our voices.

One day, others will pray these words when we can no longer speak them.

The prayer will go on without us. That, too, is a comfort. We are not the ones who must keep it alive by our own strength.

For now, we add our voices and take another step with Jesus.

Amen.

Amen! Amen! Amen!

For Reflection

- Is there someone who might welcome a visit and a prayer? If they would like to, pray the Lord's Prayer together. Listen to their voice as well as your own.
- After reading this book, which words of the Lord's Prayer stay with you? What do you hear in them now?

Appendix

Confession on the Responsibility during WW II

The twenty-fifth anniversary of the founding of the United Church of Christ in Japan (Kyodan) was celebrated during the Fourteenth General Assembly of the Kyodan held in October 1966. The serious concern for us now is “The Kyodan of Tomorrow.” Taking this as our theme, we prayed and reflected on the responsibility the Kyodan bears towards the future of Japan and the world.

It was indeed on this very occasion that we freshly realized yet again the mistakes we committed in the name of the Kyodan at the time of our formation and during the following war years. We therefore seek the mercy of our Lord and the forgiveness of our neighbors.

In those years, the government of our country, out of the imperatives of waging war, demanded as a matter of national policy that religious bodies be consolidated and cooperate with the war effort.

From the opening of Christian mission early in the Meiji Era (1868-1912), most Japanese Protestants had long desired to dissolve the various denominations and to establish a single evangelical church in Japan. Therefore, the church leaders of the time, taking advantage of this demand by the government, entered into church union whereby the Kyodan was formed.

When we recognize that the Providence of God, the Lord of History, was at work in the formation and continued existence of the Kyodan despite our weakness and failings, we not only feel a deep sense of profound gratitude, but with fear, we painfully realize our responsibility.

The church, as “the light of the world” and as “the salt of the earth,” should not have aligned itself with that war effort. Love of country should, rather, have led Christians to exercise a rightful judgment, based on Christian conscience, toward the course our nation pursued. However,

in the name of the Kyodan, we issued a statement at home and abroad in which we approved of and supported that war, and encouraged prayers for victory.

Indeed, even as our country committed sin, so we too, as a church, fell into the same sin. We neglected to perform our mission as a “watchman.” Now, with deep pain in our hearts, we confess our sin and ask the Lord for forgiveness. We also seek the forgiveness of the people of all nations, particularly in Asia, and of the churches therein and of our brothers and sisters in Christ throughout the world; as well as the forgiveness of the people in our own country.

Over twenty years have passed since that war ended; and we are fearful that our beloved country, set in today’s problem-plagued world, is once again headed in a dangerous direction. At such a moment, we seek God’s help and guidance so that the Kyodan may not repeat its errors but, rather, may rightly carry out its mission in Japan and in the world. Looking toward tomorrow, we hereby make public this resolution.

SUZUKI Masahisa
Moderator

Approved by the Kyodan Executive Committee, Feb. 20, 1967

Issued on Easter Sunday, March 26, 1967

Revised English translation issued Jan. 20, 1982