



Worship Service Theme: Prayer
Fourth Sunday of Lent

Helpful Elements:
Purple table covering (Lenten Season)

Welcome: Welcome! Thank you for coming to our service today. My name is _____ and I'll be leading our worship time. Today is the fourth Sunday of Lent, the 40 days leading up to Easter, a time of reflecting on our humanity and God's glory. We use the color purple during Lent as the color of repentance and forgiveness. Today we'll be looking at the idea of **prayer**.

Please pray with me as we open our time together.

Opening Prayer: Great and loving God, we ask that your Holy Spirit bless our time together and to refresh us with your presence. In the midst of a world full of trouble and strife, we thank you for watching over us, guiding us, and as we confess our sins, for forgiving us. Enable us to enter your presence today joyfully and reverently, and let us depart with the assurance that our sins are forgiven. Fill us, O God, with the peace which passes understanding. Amen.

Opening Hymn: Doxology

Statement of Faith: Let us affirm our statement of faith by reciting Psalm 23 together:

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

²He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.

³He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

⁴Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

⁵Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

⁶Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Suggested Hymns:

For the Beauty of the Earth

Savior, Like a Shepherd Lead Us

Amazing Grace

First Reading: Psalm 86: 1-7

¹Incline your ear, O Lord, and answer me,
for I am poor and needy.

²Preserve my life, for I am godly;
save your servant, who trusts in you—you are my God.

³Be gracious to me, O Lord,
for to you do I cry all the day.

⁴Gladden the soul of your servant,
for to you, O Lord, do I lift up my soul.

⁵For you, O Lord, are good and forgiving,
abounding in steadfast love to all who call upon you.

⁶Give ear, O Lord, to my prayer;
listen to my plea for grace.

⁷In the day of my trouble I call upon you,
for you answer me.

This is the word of the Lord; thanks be to God.

Suggested Hymns:

Holy, Holy, Holy

Jesus Loves Me

Second reading: Matthew 6: 5-8

[This is part of the famous Sermon on the Mount. Jesus said to the crowd:]

⁵“And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. ⁶But when you

pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

⁷“And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. ⁸Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.”

This is the word of the Lord; thanks be to God.

Suggested Hymns:
Softly and Tenderly
Leaning on the Everlasting Arms

Interactive Homily: Let’s think a bit about prayer.

- I wonder how you would describe or define prayer.
 - Talking to God; asking God for what we need; listening to God.
- What sorts of things do you think should we pray for? [generate as many ideas as possible]
- One way to think about prayer is to look at the Lord’s Prayer, which we say every Sunday. What are the first words of the Lord’s Prayer?
 - “Our Father, who art in heaven.” So Jesus starts out right away by telling his disciples, this is how to pray: Identify God as who, exactly?
 - Our. Father.
- I wonder what it means that God is *our ... Father*?
 - Closeness, family, caring, looking out for us, knows us; not anonymous, not detached, not a puppet master or disinterested stranger. Ours, not someone else’s ... and our *Father*.
- In the Lord’s Prayer, what words come after “Our Father...”?
 - “Hallowed be thy name.” I wonder what “hallowed” means?
 - We sometimes hear the phrase “these hallowed halls” or a “hallowed Academy”; something special, set apart
 - The dictionary defines “to hallow” as “to honor as holy” – so we honor and worship God as unique, in heaven, and OUR God
- What’s next in the Lord’s Prayer? “Thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”

- What kind of kingdom do you think God has in heaven? I wonder what it's like? [generate ideas: peace, all is right and true, rest, beauty, music, feasting, glory, worship ...]
- What kind of kingdom do we have here on Earth? Does it look particularly heavenly? All joy, no tears? Hardly ...
- So this piece of Jesus' prayer, "thy kingdom come here," asks God to fulfill his purposes right here, where we live; purposes of peace, goodwill toward all

[could stop here]

- What's next? "Give us this day our daily bread." Why do you think Jesus includes this instruction as he teaches people how to pray?
 - Asking God simply for daily provision; practical; admits dependence on God every day
- After that: "And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us." What is Jesus saying here? Why does Jesus bring up forgiveness?
 - Reconciliation, being right with other people and with God, matters in bringing God's kingdom to Earth!
- Jesus ends his teaching on prayer with: "And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." I wonder why Jesus includes this part about asking God to help us with temptation and evil?
 - We try to do good, but we so often fail; and we are so often hurt by others, either intentionally or unintentionally. We ask God the Father's protection.

The Lord's Prayer encourages us to pray daily in dependence:

- Hallowed be Thy name: We worship God as our Father
- Thy kingdom come: asking for God's good work to be accomplished here and now
- Give us this day our daily bread: We ask and depend on God to provide for our physical and spiritual needs, especially forgiveness
- Deliver us from evil: We ask God for protection from things that would draw us away from God.

Especially because we are in the season of Lent, a time of reflection and repentance, let us pray together to acknowledge our dependence on God.

(Silent Prayer) ... Lord, hear our prayers. Now let us pray the Lord's prayer together:

Lord's Prayer: Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever, Amen.

Suggested Hymns:

This is My Father's World

It is Well with My Soul

Standing on the Promises

Third Reading: Quotes on Prayer¹

Prayer is simply talking to God like a friend and should be the easiest thing we do each day. –author Joyce Meyer

“Thank you” is the best prayer that anyone could say. I say that one a lot. “Thank you” expresses extreme gratitude, humility, understanding. –author Alice Walker

Work is a prayer, and I start off every morning dedicating it to our Creator. –artist Joe Murray

My prayer is to learn new things, imbibe fresh insights. You must not take life too seriously. You must enjoy the process of living. –Indian musician Sonu Nigam

As long as algebra is taught in school, there will be prayer in school. –National Public Radio commentator Cokie Roberts

Suggested Hymns:

Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing

Shall We Gather at the River

¹ <https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/keywords/prayer.html>

Fourth Reading: A Lighthearted Story about Prayer²

A very devout man was once caught in rising floodwaters. He climbed onto the roof of his house and trusted God to rescue him. A neighbor came by in a canoe and shouted, “The waters will soon be above your house. Hop in and we’ll paddle to safety.”

“No thanks,” replied the man. “I’ve prayed to God and I’m sure God will save me.”

A short time later the police came by in a boat. “The waters will soon be above your house. Hop in and we’ll take you to safety,” they shouted.

“No thanks,” replied the man. “I’ve prayed to God and I’m sure God will save me.”

A little time later a rescue helicopter hovered overhead; a rescuer let down a rope ladder and shouted through a megaphone, “The waters will soon be above your house. Climb the ladder and we’ll fly you to safety.”

“No thanks,” replied the man. “I’ve prayed to God and I’m sure God will save me.”

All this time the floodwaters continued to rise, until soon they reached above the roof and the devout man drowned. When the man arrived in heaven at the Pearly Gates, he demanded an audience with God. Ushered into God’s throne room, the man said, “Lord, why am I here in heaven? I prayed for you to save me!”

God replied, “I sent you a canoe, a boat, and a helicopter. Why didn’t you get in?”

Suggested Hymns:

Blest Be the Tie that Binds

I Need Thee Every Hour

Closing Blessing: (Strike bell as you say the word “Lord”)

The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine upon you, and be gracious unto you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and grant you peace. Amen.

Closing Hymn: Doxology, Reprise

² <https://storiesforpreaching.com/i-sent-you-a-rowboat/>