

## **February 3, 2019 – (Epiphany 4, The Lord's Prayer/Treasure in Heaven)**

### **Sermon Text – Matthew 6:7-21**

- "When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do... for your Father knows what you need before you ask him...And whenever you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites... so that your fasting may be seen not by others but by your Father who is in secret...Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth...but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven...For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." -

**A mother had been teaching her 3-year old daughter the Lord's Prayer. For several evenings at bedtime, the two would spend time saying, and then repeating each line from the prayer. Finally, the daughter decided to go solo. Her mother listened with pride as she carefully enunciated each word, right up to the end of the prayer. Then she concluded: "Lead us not into temptation but deliver us some E-mail. Amen." I've heard a similar story told about a child right hear at Trinity reciting that same line in the prayer as "Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from Emil." He was the janitor at the time. Well, it's easy to get mixed up when you're a little girl. And that Email idea isn't a bad one. After all, we've now got an entire tv show based on the idea that God might be manipulating what appears in a social media computer program!**

**As Jesus continues his teaching in the Sermon on the Mount in our lesson, he takes on the spiritual practices of prayer, fasting and giving. This was typical of most Rabbis in biblical days. They were teachers. They wanted to teach their students, their disciples, how to do things; so, they gave them examples. The Lord's Prayer is exactly that, a simple prayer, which in eight phrases, sums up our relationship with God: "Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done," are all phrases focused on God and God's sovereignty. God is the ruler. God is in charge. God is the almighty. Then come the expressions of our needs: "Give us this day our daily bread, forgive us our debts, [and then] do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one." All those focus on us. What we need. How God provides. What God will do for us. It won't surprise you that the phrases are reminiscent of the peoples' time wandering in the wilderness under the leadership of Moses. There they learned that God was in charge and that they were dependent upon God to care for all their needs. Manna from heaven, that thing about the "golden calf," fear of the future and the presence of evil are all a part of that story. It is the prime example of how God's Old Testament people learned to rely on God. The**

Lord's Prayer is a similar reminder for us.

Jesus begins his instruction by pointing out how easy it is. "Don't heap up empty phrases like the Gentiles do...Your Father knows what you need before you ask him." When I was working as a part-time chaplain in a chemical dependency treatment center as part of my internship learning a long time ago, one of the clients assigned to me for help in preparing his moral inventory and then confessing his sins explained to me that he had once decided to "get right with God" in prayer. He found a quiet place by himself. Got out a rug to kneel on. Lit some candles. And then struggled to find the right words, hoping to impress God with the brilliance of his rhetoric. Instead, he found nothing but the simple admission: "Oh heck, God, you know that I'm a sinner! Please forgive my sins!" To him, it seemed like a failure – no beautiful words or impressive phrases – but I assured him that he had done just fine. That is what Jesus is talking about. Simple is better. And it isn't intended to be a show. It's not about impressing your neighbors. It's between you and God.

The same thing is true for fasting and for giving. They are meant to be a devotional practice between you and God. If you want to refrain from eating as a reminder to yourself that God provides for you all that you need, that's great. You should do that. But do it in such a way that you don't intrude upon others. So, you're hungry! Wash your face. Comb your hair. Brush your teeth. Put on a smile and go about your business. You needn't be trying to impress others. Your spiritual practices are for you and for God, not everyone else. And, as to giving, giving is good, not because it is part of the fundraising appeal of the church or the congregation, but because it has a way of reorienting your lives. "Store up for yourselves treasures in heaven..." Jesus tells his listeners, "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." One commentator put it something like this: "Buy a ruby red Ford Edge and you will start to see ruby red Ford Edges everywhere! Buy a new Honda and you'll begin to see Hondas. Buy a Subaru and you'll see Subarus." Where your treasure is, there your heart will be. Give some money to the poor and you will begin to see the poor. Contribute to the Foodshelf or the Backpack program and you will become aware of the hungry, even in your midst. Donate to a homeless shelter and you will begin to see the need for adequate housing. Provide funding to aid the victims of injustice and you will realize there are many in need of justice and fair treatment.

I remind you again that these are kingdom things. These are teachings for what happens when God's rule is allowed to ease its way into our world. These are instructions for living as if God is in charge of our lives (and God is). But, not only that, they

are also good for us. Hundreds of studies published in mainstream medical journals show that people who do these things, attend religious services, pray, read Scriptures, engage in spiritual disciplines: -- live longer, -- are less prone to depression, suicide, alcoholism and other addictions, -- have lower rates of cancer, heart disease and other major illnesses, -- recover better from sickness/surgery, -- and cope better with chronic illness." And that's not me saying those things. That's science. So, listen to Jesus. His teaching is good. Pray, fast, give. Do it for you. Do it for God. Do it for the sake of your relationship, as you remember that you are already a member of God's heavenly kingdom.

Amen.