

Sermon for Proper 12 C  
Church of the Good Shepherd, Wareham  
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Jesus was a radical! He didn't throw bombs into buildings; he didn't lead sit-down strikes or plot the overthrow of governments. Nevertheless, he radically challenged people's notions of God, religious practices, and morality. In today's lesson, he manages to do that in one word!

Let me back up. Today's Gospel reading is the last of a 3-part passage on loving God and loving neighbor. In the Gospel two weeks ago, a lawyer asked Jesus how to gain eternal life. The answer was, "Love God and love your neighbor as yourself." The story of the Good Samaritan illustrated both who was a neighbor and how to love that neighbor. Last week's Gospel reading was the story of Mary and Martha, which we can call, "Loving God, Part I." The take-home message there was that to love God means to spend time with God, sitting, like Mary, at the feet of Jesus, listening to him and learning from him.

Today we hear the lesson called, "Loving God, Part II." The disciples ask Jesus to teach them how to pray, so Jesus the Radical does. And his very first word gives him away. He says, "When you pray, say, 'Daddy!'" He didn't tell us, "Say 'Almighty and Everlasting God'" or "'Lord Most Powerful'" or "'Great and Awesome Creator of the Universe Who Could Squish Us Like a Bug'" but "'Daddy.'" 'Papa.' 'Dad.' 'Pa.' 'Da.'

Here is how we are to pray:

"Daddy—may you be worshipped.  
May your Way and your Blessings govern all life.  
Take care of our basic needs,  
Forgive us our failings,  
    as we forgive those who have wronged us,  
And keep us from falling away from faith in You  
    because of temptations or difficulties." (MLH)

The radical nature of the prayer and of this whole section on loving God is summed in the word, "Daddy." By that word, Jesus wants us to know how close and available God is to us. Jesus preaches and teaches a radical accessibility, for of course that is what he demonstrates by his life and death—God walking around, in the flesh, among us. There are no barriers between us and God. God has an open-door policy—**anybody** can have a relationship to God at **any time**—there are no hoops to jump, no feats of heroism or goodness to perform, not even any moral codes to uphold before you can come in the door. Nothing. God is as close as saying, "Daddy."

How do we love God? By spending time with God, listening and learning from God. A powerful picture that illustrates this is that of Mary sitting near Jesus, being fed by his words and presence. Question: Do you think Martha is now there too? We're not told, but I like to think that she put down her tray and plopped herself down near Jesus as well, and **she too** is in the picture, being filled and fed by Jesus. This is a very intimate picture of life with God.

But we also love God **by participating in the conversation**, by speaking to God and asking questions. The Lord's Prayer suggests what we might say to God, to continue and life-giving relationship with him

or her. We are to ask God to fill our life, rule over the world, and take care of our physical and spiritual needs—all addressed to a loving “Daddy”—close and comforting. These days, we have more openness about gender and sexuality these days, even about women priests unless you’re the Pope. If Jesus were living among us today, I suspect that he would be a radical again, and invite us call on God as “Mommy.” Whether you use “Mommy” or “Daddy,” Jesus invites you into this incredibly intimate relationship with God.

Since I have come to Good Shepherd, I have alternated using the traditional Lord’s Prayer with the Contemporary version—using each for 4 to 6 weeks at a time. For many of you, I’m sure that the “new” version seems awkward to you—the older language is familiar and comforting. Indeed, the “thees, thys, and thous” of King James English are using the familiar forms with God—Daddy—not the distant and formal address, which would be “you and your.”

The problem is that we don’t speak King James English today, and for most of us, addressing people with “thee, thou, and thy” sounds foreign and formal—the exact opposite of the original intent. To recapture that sense of intimacy with God, especially for younger persons and people who have never grown up in the church, it’s important to use more modern language. Frankly, the “our Father in heaven” really doesn’t go far enough to show intimacy, does it? “Father” sounds awfully formal!

Nevertheless, here is what I propose: we will continue to use the traditional Lord’s Prayer sometimes and the contemporary version sometimes. But if you want to say the traditional when we say the contemporary or vice versa, feel free. In fact, if you’d rather say the prayer in your native language—Spanish or Creole or whatever, please do! I want you to speak to Daddy/Mommy God in whatever language is most familiar and comfortable to you.

To emphasize this intimate relationship to God, Jesus tells us to be persistent, because if we ask, search, knock, we will receive what our good parent wants to give us. And he asks, “Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for a fish, will give a snake instead of a fish? Or if the child asks for an egg, will give a scorpion?” The answer is, Of course not, or Only if the parent is a sadistic sicko. “If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”

We want to do what is best for our children; God wants to do so much more for us, his children. And the best thing God could possibly give to us is the Holy Spirit, a piece of God that directs us, comforts us, encourages us speak and act in ways that increase life.

At the 10:00 service today, we will baptize Teagan Rose Downey. She has an older brother Colin. Her parents Nick and Marianne have a huge, generous love for their children. In the ways that Nick prepares breakfast for the children on his days off and wants to share his love of sports and the outdoors with them, in the ways Marianne is putting employment on hold so that she can focus on her kids, introducing them to everything and modeling service to others, they are building their intimate relationship with these two small and wonderful beings. They love them when they are easy and love them when they are challenging. They love them when they, the parents have lots of energy, and when they are bone tired. Their children will know that they can ask their parents anything; Nick and Marianne won’t give them everything they ask for, but they will always answer them, and give them everything they feel is best for their children. That’s what parents do.

The best thing parents can do for their children is to encourage them to know God intimately. As Daddy-God or Mommy-God. Kids are smart. They figure out pretty quick that we don't know everything, and we make mistakes, and at some point they will know what is better for them than we will. That's all part of growing up, and it's helpful to your kids to be honest and modest about our limits. But God is a power and a love and a wisdom that far surpasses ours. We want our children to know God, to love God, to be able to call on God at any moment. To be able to ask the Holy Spirit and have that Holy Spirit be there to answer, guide, and comfort.

So this is what we are doing in baptism. The parents, godparents, and congregation are making promises for Teagan. We're saying, We want her to know her parent God, to have an intimate relationship with Mommy/Daddy God, to grow up loving God and calling on the Holy Spirit. What could be better for the children we love?

Let us pray. Amen.