

TEACH US TO PRAY

*Preached by Joshua Ashton Hill, Director of Children's and Youth Ministry
9 Pentecost, July 25, 2010, Luke 11:1-13*

The other day I was watching scenes from the movie "A Few Good Men."
And I came across what must be among the greatest courtroom scenes in cinema:
Tom Cruise as rookie Jag attorney Lt. Daniel Kaffee
In an intense moment of interrogation with Jack Nicholson as Col. Nathan Jessup at the witness stand.
--"Colonel Jessop, Did you order the code red?"
--"You want answers?"
--"I think I'm entitled to answers."
--"You want answers?"
--"I want the truth."
--"You can't handle the truth."

Handling the truth.
It's not an easy thing to do. It may actually be hazardous in the short term.
This is why people take mulligans in golf.
They don't want to know what their real score would be if they counted all their drops and penalties.
It takes maturity and bravery to handle the truth.
Because the truth is bound to tell us something that's hard to hear.
It could damage the ego. Force us out of our comfort zone.
Okay what does this have to do with the reading for the morning?
Well, we have a rare moment in the gospels.
The disciples take a deep breath and decide they want to handle the truth.

It's sort of like deciding to play golf by the actual rules.
The disciples are ready to find the truth in their souls
When they invite Jesus to teach them to pray.
The Lord's Prayer has impacted my own devotion in this way.
I've learned that the ultimate test of my spiritual health is whether or not I am capable of meaning what I'm praying in the Lord's prayer.
Thy will be done. Do I mean that?
Teach us to pray—On one hand no one needs to be taught to pray. Just say what you want to God, right?
Well sort of... but prayer has so much more to do with what we receive than what we send.
Authentic prayer implies a willingness to receive something from God we can't produce on our own.
Namely a heart that cares about the right things,
A heart that feels new and full despite our past.
That's the tone of "Lord teach us to pray"
This is much more than a nice collection of words we mutter together by memory each week.
It's an admission of our inadequacy.
The Declaration of *Dependence* on God for our salvation.

Later on this morning, I hope you'll take notice of the Lord's Prayer and its place in our liturgy.
We pray it immediately following the Eucharistic prayer.
After the elements are consecrated.

It's as if to say, the prayers and ritual actions of the Christian tradition are the pinnacle of human linguistic and liturgical achievement.
But even with these prayers said, we come to a screeching halt
When we handle the truth that our words fall short.
That the entire enterprise of human language is inadequate
When it comes to speaking of God.
When we handle this truth, we realize we cannot rely on our own words
We need better words.
We need the words of Jesus to help us see the world like Jesus. (repeat)

Learning to see the world like Jesus—that is the goal of this prayer and all prayer.
Martin Luther, the 16th century German Reformer famously wrote,
“I wish I could pray how my dog watches meat.”
That kind of transformation of heart is possible through faithful repetition of this prayer--
To say this prayer is to invite a change of heart.
A transformation of our desires.
But there's a warning that should be issued.
By meaning this prayer we risk the infiltration of irrational hope and love.
To say it faithfully is to set ourselves to embracing this worldview of Jesus as our own.
To ultimately risk dying to ourselves and rising as a new person
for the love of God, for the good of the world.
Jesus says ask and it is yours. Seek it and you'll find it.
I pray all of us find what it takes to handle the truth.
Amen.