



**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 thinking about **prayer**.

Please pray with me as we open our time together.

**Opening Prayer:** Great and loving God, we ask your Holy Spirit to 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 that passes all understanding. Amen.

**Opening Hymn: Doxology**

**Statement of Faith:** Let us affirm our statement of faith by reciting Psalm 23, "The Lord is My Shepherd," together:

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

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

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

<sup>4</sup>Yea, 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.

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

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

**Hymns:**

**When Morning Gilds the Skies  
For the Beauty of the Earth  
Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee**

**First Reading:** Psalm 86:1-7

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>6</sup>Give ear, O Lord, to my prayer;  
listen to my plea for grace.

<sup>7</sup>In the day of my trouble I call upon you,  
because you answer me.

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

**Hymns:**

**Jesus Loves Me  
Oh, How I love Jesus  
Holy, Holy, Holy**

**Second reading:** Matthew 6:5-8 (NLT). This is part of Jesus' famous Sermon on the Mount:

<sup>7</sup>"When you pray, don't babble on and on as the Gentiles do. They think their prayers are answered merely by repeating their words again and again. <sup>8</sup>Don't be

like them, for your Father knows exactly what you need even before you ask him.”

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

### Hymns:

**His Eye is on the Sparrow**

**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.
  - In a conversation, what do we do in addition to talking?
    - Listen! Prayer involves not just talking to God but also *listening* to God. God speaks into our specific situation and needs.
- (optional:) Jesus tells his followers not to “babble on and on” when we pray, thinking we will be heard by our many words. In a conversation, what’s the problem when one person babbles on and on?
  - The conversation is one-sided; the other person never gets to speak or be heard.
  - The conversation is boring! Repetition doesn’t move the conversation along; it stays in one place and on one topic.
  - The conversation is disrespectful: assumes that the listener isn’t going to understand or respond unless you say the same thing over and over.
- Jesus tells his followers that God the Father knows what we need even before we ask. So why do we ask?
  - God wants the connection with us! He wants to be asked because asking connects us with him. His presence is the main gift that we receive through prayer.
- Immediately after this teaching (“don’t pray this way”), Jesus says, “Pray then like *this*” — and teaches his followers the Lord’s Prayer, or Our Father. What are the first words of the Lord’s Prayer?
  - “Our Father, who art in heaven.” Jesus starts by telling his disciples: When you pray, first identify who you’re talking and listening to.
- What does it mean that God is *our ... Father*? Look at each word:

- Ours, not someone else's. Not a random father – but a father who is personal and connected *to us*.
- Father: God is *family*. God is not anonymous, not detached, not a disinterested stranger.
- What sorts of things might a good father say to his beloved children?
  - Love: “I love you no matter what.”
  - Reassurance: “I will take care of you.”
  - Guidance and correction: “Here’s what to do to be happy and healthy.”
- As God’s children, what sorts of things can we talk to God about? What do children talk about with their fathers?
  - Requests for help! Like children with their father, we ask God to meet our needs for anything challenging, the worries and cares of life.
  - Gratitude – for anything! We tell God “thank you” for something simple or beautiful or relieving, getting what we need in any situation.
  - What they’re excited about! Children will talk endlessly about bugs, dinosaurs, princesses, cooking ... and God *delights* in our praise and wonder and awe in him and his creation.
- How often do children talk with their father?
  - All day long! That’s how prayer can be. You can approach God anytime at all – not just at church.
- Prayer is connecting with our Good Father through conversation: talking *and* listening. God wants to hear from you and has things to tell you, right now, every day.

Especially because we are in the season of Lent, a time of reflection and repentance, let us pray that God would help us to strengthen our daily union with him through prayer.

**(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.

**Hymns:**

**Sweet Hour of Prayer**

**He's Got the Whole World in His Hands**

**Third Reading: Quotes on Prayer<sup>1</sup>**

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

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

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

**Hymns:**

**What a Friend We Have in Jesus**

**Amazing Grace**

**Fourth Reading: A Lighthearted Story about Prayer<sup>2</sup> ☺**

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.

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

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

“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?”

#### **Hymns:**

**When the Saints Go Marching In**

**How Great Thou Art**

**[sing more or fewer songs to fill out the time]**

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

The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his to face shine upon you, and be gracious unto you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and grant you peace. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

**Closing Hymn: Doxology, Reprise**