My brothers and sisters in Christ, let us pray. Our Lord God of our grateful hearts, minds, Spirits, and souls, may the words of my mouth and the meditation of all of our hearts always be acceptable in your sight, our strength and our redeemer, Amen.

Luke’s Gospel, more than any of the other three synoptic Gospels, find Jesus at prayer. So when the disciples see Jesus at prayer it seems only natural for them to ask their teacher the right way to do things. That’s what good students do, right? Ask their teacher for the method, imitate it, and then they must be able to get to the right answer. But that’s assuming we have mastered the question to begin with.

But what’s the point of prayer? How does God answer prayer? Why does God sometimes seem to ignore our prayers? Is prayer the way that I can change the mind of God? Are we negotiating with God in a time of crisis, need or want? Or are we knocking on a door that opens to things we never *thought* we needed but turns out we really, really do? Does prayer make things happen, or change our perception of what already is happening?

Whew. I don’t know about you. I’m not sure I’m prepared for any of these questions. Are you sure you want to talk about the method? OK…..

When we wonder about prayer, we also get jammed up on the structure of prayer, or the hows and whys and wherefores and whens. These things are important to know for our own racing minds and hurting hearts. But Jesus gives us a different frame to think about when he talks about prayer: Who. Jesus invites us into relationship with God through prayer. Now, Jesus is in a paternalistic society and invites us to address God as “Father”, just as if a child were asking a parent for something they want or desire. I like to think that God is more a mother when I pray. My father didn’t really respond to my requests. My mom listened and considered them. So whether we say father or mother, it’s all good.

Luke’s version of Jesus’ prayer to God is briefer and simpler than that found in Matthew. It emphasizes the more down-to-earth concerns of securing “bread for tomorrow” and tending a community formed by shared forgiveness. But prayer is not about getting things from God. Remember, it’s about the ***relationship*** we have with God. So despite being the son of God, and all the time he has prayed to God, and despite his divinity right here on earth, after a life and ministry of faithful service and prayer, Jesus prays again while hanging on the cross.

Similarly, we are invited to make all of our needs, wants, hurts, hopes, and desires known to God. Given all our day-to-day traumas and worries of daily life and acknowledging deeply felt and unmet needs we carry with us, I think our questions deserve a at least a hearing. And I know there’s other places in Scripture where we’re told that God knows our needs without being asked. But if relationship is the goal, then it’s hard to read the mind of the other person without articulating feelings. God needs to know where we’re at.

I think the hardest thing about prayer is the idea that if we pray long enough, hard enough, or often enough, that we can provoke God into action. Action that takes the form of the outcome that we long for, in the method in which we’ve specified, in the time frame that we want, and with the promised results that we expect. If we’re in a relationship, after all, isn’t that what friends do for each other once in a while, especially if it’s really important?

But Jesus says that we should prayer persistently. But it’s really difficult for us to know how to experience the outcomes of our prayers, and it’s way too easy for us to judge our prayers or the one to whom we have prayed as deficient. We want to know God is listening, but we are all too impatient to say that God is absent. So I can’t very well tell you what persistent means, or the form that takes, but what I can say is that there’s no magic formula here. Even Jesus prays to God for God’s will to be done, not his. In fact, Jesus’ entire birth, death, and resurrection are centered around God’s will be done.

What persistent prayer does entreat, though, is the promise of the presence of the Holy Spirit. I think we need to understand that prayer doesn’t offer outcomes. Prayer doesn’t meet our expectations, or prevent things from happening the way we would otherwise have them. But persistent prayer does invite us into a transformative relationship with God, and ultimately, with ourselves.

Persistent prayer means appealing to the heart of God in response to God’s heart appealing to us. It might seem as if prayer is this series of winding paradoxes that never resolve. But Jesus invites us nonetheless: name God as your God. Ask for that which sustains. Ask for hard stuff, impossible and big stuff. But expect to be challenged. And held. And blessed. And changed.

I’ll leave you with these final thoughts.

True prayer is mutuality. Silence is individualism. We know what we’re experiencing can only be held by God and others, and that makes us alone no more. We’re just grateful and thankful for us right here, right now. Not what we were, or will be. Just now, and the peace that no one else can take that away from us, not ever.

When we understand that mutuality, we begin to experience the fear of God, which means the awe of all that is encompassed in the visual and conceptual of God’s creation. We see The Promise that we’re never alone, the promise that is salvation. And we have the knowledge that we will always be blessed, sustained, and comforted. The comfort of the Paraclete, the Holy Spirit.

Now do you want to pray? Thanks be to God, Amen.