

Gracious God, open our ears that we may hear your truth, open our eyes that we may see your kingdom, and open our hearts and minds that we might know the cries of our brothers and sisters who are hungry, and hurting, and sometimes even dying without the knowledge of your love for them. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts together be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Apparently, it will be on the market “soon.” Pampers brand disposable diapers just announced that a new “high tech” version of their product is about to be made public. Yes, you guessed it. You knew it was coming. You could feel it coming—a digital diaper.

This “digital diaper” features a sensor that will alert your smart phone, announcing that your baby’s diaper needs to be changed. Of course, to get that information you will need to pay for these new and more expensive diapers. Then you will need to download, and of course pay for, an “app” that will be linked to the diapers your baby is wearing. That’s right. You guessed it: a “nappie app.”

Let’s pause for a second. Really?!! Seriously?!! Anyone, anywhere, who has ever cared for a baby knows exactly when they need a change. The baby fusses, cries, screams—whether it is 3 p.m. or 3 a.m. Any child is perfectly, naturally capable of making its needs known in no uncertain terms. God gave every child all the technological gimmickry and gadgetry necessary to make its wishes known.

Good parents instinctively and immediately know how to respond. No matter how tired they are; no matter how late at night, or early in the morning it is, there is no way a loving parent is not going to rouse themselves and tend to their child’s needs. Parents do not need an “app” to tell them their child is in distress. They only need their love.

As silly as this proposed new product is, it does remind us of this week's gospel text, a text that is all about the presence of true parental love. Imagine for a moment that you are one of The Twelve, Jesus' first disciples. Think what it's like to be the only ones to hear and observe Jesus as he prays.

Jesus does not pray to a distant omnipotent deity. Jesus does not pray just the traditional "kaddish" or "Kedushat" that addressed God only as the sanctified "ha shem"—the sanctified, but respectfully unnamed, address to the Lord. Instead Jesus unabashedly and unashamedly addresses his prayers to his "abba," the intimately familiar term for one's parent—what we might have our small children call "daddy," or "papa."

In Luke's text this week the Latin term, more formal and stately sounding is used: "pater," "father." Still it is an address that is first and foremost about an intimate, emotional connection, the relationship between a beloved parent and a beloved child. Earlier in Luke's gospel, the apostle told of Jesus' response to the return of his seventy disciples he sent out to preach and teach. Jesus "rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said 'I thank you, Father. Lord of heaven and earth'" (10:21).

Let's just say it: Jesus knew he had the "cool dad." And so did everyone who was able to be a witness to their relationship. Every one of his disciples wanted to have a relationship with that same "cool dad" as well. Imagine, once again, you are one of Jesus's disciples and you get to actually see him praying. How different that attitude must have been from the prayer stances these first century Jews must have been familiar with. Jesus's connection and completion when he was in prayer with his "abba," his "father," was so engulfing and embracing that his closest followers and friends couldn't help but notice how

different, how special, his relationship was with the One to whom he was praying.

This week's text starts out with the disciples asking Jesus, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught *his* disciples." It was common for different teachers of the Torah to bequeath their students a prayer that would identify and unite them as a group. But when Jesus responds to their request to bless them uniquely with their own Jesus prayer, he offers a prayer that is utterly generic and non-proprietary.

There is nothing in what we call the "Lord's Prayer" that distinguishes any individual followers of any specific teacher. Luke's version is shorter and more succinct than Matthew's. But it presents a distilled version of Jesus' basic prayer. And both are prayers that don't set apart Jesus' disciples from other rabbis and give them a unique identity. Rather, the prayer sweeps all of us up into a prayer that all children of the Father can pray together as one or in common.

The first thing we should note is that this is NOT the "Lord's Prayer." It is the "Disciple's Prayer," a prayer towards God that persons of faith can repeat, with compassion and conviction, every day. And yes, the words can become familiar and rote. But it is in that rote familiarity that those words become a comfort to us just as they have been a comfort to the generations of Jesus followers that have gone before us.

The words Jesus gives to his disciples are a gift, a gift of an entryway into "abba's" presence. They are not words that exclaim any special place for themselves. They are simple words that thank God for the continual, nurturing presence all humanity has received for a common parent and creator.

What is most telling about this week's text, however, is not the "Lord's Prayer" itself. It is what Jesus does next after he gifts his disciples with their

prayer. Instead of giving a PowerPoint theological exposition of “this clause means this” and “that word means that” — Jesus immediately shifts into story mode. He gives a prayer which he attaches to a tale and then another tale. The Disciples’ Prayer comes with a tale tail.

His first story is of a neighbor nobody wants. This neighbor has the audacity to come pounding on the door of his next-door neighbor at midnight. He comes asking for bread for an unexpected visitor. Nobody in the twenty-first century would ever dream of doing such a thing. It is highly doubtful that anyone in the twenty-first century even knows who their next-door neighbor is, much less to ask them for anything, much less in the middle of the night.

But in first century Palestine, community connections were everything, community connections meant everything. Neighbors were lifelines. Traditions of hospitality were sacrosanct. To not be able to offer a visitor bread was a huge embarrassment, a terrible social, and religious failure—a fatal “faux pas.”

But the action of the “caught short” neighbor is remarkable. Not only does he pound on the door of his neighbor for a solution to his problem, but he keeps on pounding. He bangs and bangs without hesitation in order to make something right in his own life. He is relentless and keeps on pounding. He is free to importune so fearlessly because he has a living relationship with his neighbor. They are connected—bound by geography, by family, by theology, by heritage and by honor.

That is what Jesus teaches to his disciples when they pray. People who pray in the way of Jesus’ disciples don’t so much offer up words as offer up themselves. We lift up all our relationship—relationships to God, to ourselves, to others, to creation, to the God to whom we are praying. Relationships don’t have “rules.” Real relationships break all the rules. Real relationships convict you to make connections you never thought you would make. Real relationships

change you and cause you to do things you never thought you would do. Prayer produces feats of almost lunatic daring.

That is the prayer Jesus taught his disciples: The Disciples' Prayer. It was a prayer with a story addendum, an "add on," a tale tail. The tale tail made the prayer more personal, more profound, more present every day for every disciple. The Lord's prayer and the stories that follow it are Jesus' way of showing us that God is present all the time and everywhere. God wants to know what we want, what we desire, what is hurting us, all the time.

God wants our questions. Any question you have God can handle, no matter how big, how small, how often. Jesus told us to pray to our "abba," to ask our "daddy" for whatever we think we need, whatever that is, whenever we need it.

No, we might not get it, a good parent does not always give a child what they ask for when they ask for it. But a good parent always hears the child, responds to the child (without a smart phone app), and then that parent takes action to comfort that child.

And the next time you think something is too small for you to bother God with, remember your own children or nieces and nephews. There is no scratch, no "hurt," no question that is off-limits to them if you are in the family.

Sisters and brothers, you are in God's family. God cares for you. "Casting all your cares on him, because God cares for you" (1Peter5:7). Day or night, God cares for you. Little or big, God cares for you.

Or this is how our ancestors put it, in the words of Civilla Martin:

1 Be not dismayed whate'er betide,

God will take care of you;

Beneath his wings of love abide,

God will take care of you.

Refrain:

God will take care of you,

Through ev'ry day,

O'er all the way;

He will take care of you,

God will take care of you.

We are children of the heavenly Father... a father who loves us enough that "while we were yet sinners" God proved his love for us in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus wanted to lead us back to our Abba, our papa. This prayer calls us to a depth of relationship that puts us fully into the game of life... not as spectators, but as full participants in God's powerful love and grace as we seek to be part of what God is doing in the world today.

Thanks be to God.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

**Closing hymn change to God Will Take Care of You, UMH 130**