

Monday, June 25 - Read Hosea 11:1-4; Isaiah 49:14-16. There were powerful assumptions about the nature of life in our world behind Jesus' opening phrase in the Lord's Prayer. "Our Father" reminds us that, beyond all of our surface differences, we humans are all part of the same family. And, as today's readings show, the Hebrew Scriptures ascribed the very best parental qualities (father AND mother) to God. Throughout the Lord's Prayer, all of the pronouns are plural. All through the New Testament (cf. John 17:11, 21; Ephesians 4:1-6), we find reminders that following Christ is not a solitary voyage, but something we do with others in community. Where do you most find Christian friendship and support? Are there choices you need to make to make that a stronger part of your journey? "Who art in heaven" translates the Greek word *ouranōs*, which meant, not a place far away, but "air" or "sky." The idea was that God is, not far away, but everywhere—around us, above us, wherever we go. How, if at all, do you experience God's presence? What spiritual difference does that make for you? (cf. Psalm 139:7-12)

Tuesday, June 26 – Read Matthew 4:17-23, 1 Peter 2:9-10. Jesus launched his public ministry by announcing "the good news of the kingdom" (Matthew 4:23). The "present tense" character of Jesus' message is important for those of us who've tended to think of God's Kingdom solely in future terms. To pray for the coming of the Kingdom is not just a wispy, wistful dream of an idealized future. It is a claim of our true citizenship here and now, and a way of bowing to God as our true king. How does the Kingdom of God upend ways of thinking and living that you (or others close to you) take as "common sense"? Can you identify one or two ways that this "not of this world" kingdom has changed your life? Have you learned to discern God's will for your life, and if so, how? What spiritual disciplines and practices have you found helpful for understanding God's will? In Exodus 19:6, Moses received this message for Israel: "You will be a kingdom of priests for me and a holy nation." 1 Peter 2 (also Revelation 1:4-6) applied the same language to all of Christ's followers. God's Kingdom is not a set of lines on a map; it's people who love and follow God, including you. Are you up for the privilege and challenge of being a citizen, a representative, of God's Kingdom each day?

Wednesday, June 27 – Read Isaiah 55:1-7; Matthew 5:6. Jesus faced the temptation to turn stones into bread, to meet his immediate physical want no matter the spiritual cost. In answer, he quoted Deuteronomy 8:3, which was about Israel's wilderness experience with manna (cf. Exodus 16:14-21): "People don't live on bread alone. No, they live based on whatever the Lord says." That story clearly lay behind this part of the Lord's Prayer. We do not ask for a lifetime supply of bread—just what we need for this day. Jesus' prayer taught that we trust God daily. We don't wait for one of life's sporadic crises to pop up, nor do we think of ourselves as "spiritually stocked up." In what ways have you, or do you want to, make it a part of your daily routine to commit yourself and your concerns to God? What particular needs or concerns can you entrust to God's wise, caring provision this day? As we walk with God, we look beyond the limits of physical reality when we "hunger and thirst for righteousness." What are some of the actions or attitudes in your life that, over time, you have found "are not bread," that do not satisfy? What choices can you make that whet your spiritual appetite, and lead you to "hunger and thirst after righteousness"?

Thursday, June 28 – Read Luke 7:36-50, Colossians 3:12-14. Jesus told people that God forgave them, that they could really find a fresh start in life. Sadly, that outraged the religious leaders of his day. For Jesus, forgiveness was a fundamental Kingdom reality. If God did not forgive, no fallible human could have hope. But Jesus also knew that it's really not credible to claim God's forgiveness for ourselves if we aren't willing to forgive others. In what ways did you first learn about God? As you learned, did you see God as mainly angry about sins, as indifferent and indulgent in excusing sins, or as compassionate and forgiving when we miss the mark? What difference do you see between "excusing" and "forgiving"? What difference does it make, in our relationship with God and in our relationships with each other, that God forgives sins rather than excusing them? Is there anyone in your life you need to forgive (maybe even someone who has died, or whom you have no idea how to contact)? How can you open yourself to God's forgiveness in ways that will move you toward forgiving the person(s) who wronged you? In what ways can that bring you inward healing, as well as (if you can contact the person) outward relational healing?

Friday, June 29 – Read John 10:2-5, 11-15; Romans 8:12-14. The Lord's Prayer is a chance for us to look at who God is, and an invitation to follow him. The phrase "Lead us not into temptation" may seem as if we're asking God to not take us to where trouble dwells, to keep us away from the messes of life. But God wouldn't lead us into temptation (cf. James 1:13). This phrase serves as a promise that God will continually have our best interest in mind, and a reminder to always let God lead us. The gospel of John paints a beautiful image of a shepherd calling each of his sheep by name. Scripture says, "He goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice." Like the shepherd, God leads us by calling each of us by name. He leaves no one behind and calls all of us to follow him. When have you heard God calling you to follow him? How did you hear him? How does it comfort you to realize that God knows and calls you by name? The apostle Paul addressed readers as "brothers and sisters" in Romans 8:12. The use of these family terms reminded his readers that God, our Father, leads us and is ultimately in control. We have the chance to let the King lead us, to be part of his family. How does it make you feel to know God doesn't lead us into trouble, but away from temptation? Where is God leading you today?

Saturday, June 30 – Read Luke 11:1-4, Matthew 6:7-15. The fact that Luke and Matthew gave different settings for the Lord's Prayer suggests that Jesus taught this prayer to his followers often, not just on one dramatic occasion. (Many scholars believe that was the case with most of the material that we call "The Sermon on the Mount.") Jesus didn't mean the Lord's Prayer to be a museum piece, framed and placed on a mantel or in a display case. It was a prayer for God's people to weave into their lives. That makes it most fitting that at Covenant we pray this prayer every week during our 8:30 worship service. The existing manuscripts of Matthew and Luke seem to show that neither Jesus, Luke nor Matthew used the "doxology" ("For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever") with which we usually end the Lord's Prayer. Instead, it appears, one or more devout scribes added it later, probably based on the ending of David's prayer in 1 Chronicles 29:10-11. But it's a valuable addition. We often use the phrase "nothing is forever," but the Bible tells us that Someone is forever, and calls us to live our life in the light of that reality. What steps will you take to detach your life and affections from this seen but temporary world, and to not only pray but live out Jesus' prayer as a citizen of God's Kingdom?