“What’s New In the Prayer?” For the first sermon I had mimeographed these questions for discussion:

—Why do you think there are two versions of the Prayer?
—Which one do you think is earlier?
—Matthew sets the prayer as part of the Sermon on the Mount; Luke says that the prayer was a result of the disciples’ watching Jesus pray. Does this tell us anything about the purpose of each Gospel?
—Underline words that appear in one version that are not in the other version.

For the second sermon I gave these questions for pew-discussion:

—Why do you think Matthew adds to “Our Father” the words “in heaven?”
—Does the prayer mean that God forgives as (in the same manner) we forgive (if we forgive, God forgives?)
—Does God lead us into temptation, or “bring us to hard testing?”

One must remember, of course, that the sermon is not a lecture, a handing out of information. It is, hopefully, proclamation and revelation. But with this kind of preparation (before or during the service), I found that the sermons themselves became a form of prayer.

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I have spoken above, in connection with the Exodus, about the nature of miracles. They are not to be thought of as interventions of natural law, but the use of natural law and divine power for love’s sake. When I transplant a tree in my garden, I break no laws of nature: I use them. Yet it is a miracle; for the balance of nature is changed, yet I do nothing to veto its purposes. Paul Tillich has been helpful for me when he said that providence does not mean a divine plan by which everything is predetermined as in an efficient machine. Rather, providence means that there is a creative and saving possibility implied in every situation which cannot be destroyed by any event.

That, I take it, is what the miracles of Jesus mean. They are signs, say the Gospels, which foretell what God will some day do universally. They are parables of the new creation. They say, “Not yet . . . but as sure as heaven. . . .” God, for instance, raised Jesus from the dead as promise (or warning, depending on your point of view) of a time when He will raise all of us from the dead. Jesus walking on the water is symbolic of an era when all who walk with God will have effortless power over matter, sustained by a new force driving through and beyond the natural. The man born blind has his eyesight restored to demonstrate that some day all people will see the world in its pristine glory, restored to what it was before evil marred and scarred it. In a computerized age we think everything can be predicted and plotted. But