

August 9, 2020 – The Lord’s Prayer

Based on Matthew 6:5-15 (New Revised Standard Version and The Message Bible)

Prayer:

I hope that my reflections over the last two weeks have stimulated in at least a small way your thoughts about prayer. We considered what prayer was and hopefully you gained from that how broad a concept prayer can be. We are enmeshed in prayer, connecting with the Holy in so many ways and many times we don’t think of it as prayer. Many in the secular world would laugh at us if we said we could be in prayer even at times when we were washing the car or the dishes. Maybe you would want try that sometime? Approach your neighbour who is washing the car and say, “Hi neighbour, I see you are praying this afternoon!”

Last week we looked a little deeper into what might be happening when we pray, how it motivates us and encourages us in doubt, how comforting and assuring prayer can be. You might remember this quote I gave from author John Shelby Spong, ***“Prayer is the activity that enables each of us to be givers to and receivers from one another of the deepest meaning of life – a meaning I call God.”***¹ Prayer is a meaning I call God. I think that is incredible and profound.

Today I wanted to take a look at a specific prayer, the prayer just about everyone in the United States, the Americas, the United Kingdom and Canada knows or at least has heard, the Lord’s prayer. What is it about that prayer, first recited by Jesus, that makes it so important for us still today? There is no other prayer that I know of that is so embedded in our liturgy.

Do we just recite the Lord’s prayer because we are expected to, because we have always done that? Do we recite it because it is comfortable and familiar? Do we recite it because it offers us something to ground ourselves with, a place where we can feel or be assured of God’s presence? It is incredible isn’t it, when you think about how often we recite the Lord’s prayer given that is over 2,000 years old. Is this just a tradition? (Pause and

¹ Spong, p. 196

suggest a reflection) Take a few moments to consider why you pray the Lord's Prayer. What comes to your mind?

The Lord's prayer has been a critical part of the Christian Church for hundreds of years. I am told that *"In the early days of Christianity, this prayer was considered a treasure that people had to go through three years of training and preparation before they could be entrusted with the sacred words."*² Can you imagine that? Three years of study!

Yet while many hold on to this original sacred text passionately, finding it affirming and comforting, others suggest it has become so familiar and domesticated that we barely pay attention. The authors of *"Becoming Jesus' Prayer,"* assert that this, most renowned prayer has had its wings clipped.³

I expect this is why we now have so many variations of the original Lord's prayer. Numerous authors or individuals have offered different renditions, various interpretations. Many have penned variants of Jesus' original text (found incidentally in both Matthew and Luke). You heard one this morning from Eugene Peterson's "The Message" bible. How do you feel about some of the changes Peterson offers? **Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,** becomes, **Our Father in heaven, Reveal who you are. Your kingdom come, Your will be done, Set the world right; Do what's best -- As above, so below.** Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors, becomes, **Keep us alive with three square meals. Keep us forgiven with you and forgiving others.**

While some may find such changes as these inappropriate and even scandalous, I am in fact encouraged by the different approaches to the Lord's prayer. Nothing whatsoever can render the original as anything other than profound text. But like many other facets of our liturgies, we need to be open to look at interpretations that call us to a covenant relationship with God. That is unique to all of us and why being in prayer for you might be different from me, or from your neighbour in the pew (if we were in the pews)! To be meaningful and for the spirit to speak to us, we have different needs. That is OK.

² Reference, Lynn McGrath, June 28, 2020

³ Ibid.

Lets take a quick look at some of the other interpretations of Jesus' original prayer. For **“Our Father in Heaven, Hallowed be your name,”** we have things like

- **"Beloved, our Father and Mother, in whom is heaven**
- **Eternal Spirit Earth-Maker, Pain-bearer, Life-giver, source of all that is, Father and Mother of us all**
- **Heavenly Father, heavenly Mother, Holy and blessed is your true name; O Breathing Life, your Name shines everywhere.**

“Your kingdom come, Your will be done” appears as

- **followed be your royal way, done be your will and rule,**
- **Set the world right; Do what's best -- As above, so below.**
- **The way of your justice be followed by the peoples of the earth! Your heavenly will be done by all created beings!**
- **We pray that your good will be done, Let heaven and earth become one.**
- **Imagine your possibilities now. Embody your desire in every light and form**

There are many other renditions all shaped by the person whose time, place, and situation influenced what they felt or experienced. Of course, all of those interpretations came to light after reviewing and praying over the original prayer that Jesus gave to his disciples and to us. (I will circulate the interpretations I have mentioned this morning and a few others as well).

The thing with prayer is that there is no right or wrong way to pray. You are not out of touch or peculiar if you find the original Lord's prayer to be the words that bring God in clear sight, the words that resonate with you as Jesus' very soul and voice. Far from it. Similarly, if you find as I do, that variations are helpful, that different renditions speak to you and move your spirit, that is to be embraced. The experience is personal. What is important is that, in prayer, we connect with what is truly the divine presence, we connect with God who is Holy Love. We connect with God, Father, Mother, Creator of the Cosmos, Holy Presence, Nurturer, Comforter, Reconciler, or whatever images you find to be helpful. That is partly why there are so many variations of Jesus' original prayer.

Some of us might pray silently to ourselves in a reflective space. Some of us might close our eyes when we pray. Others might gaze out upon the sky, the ocean, a rainbow, flower bed or a favourite tree when they pray.

Some may find praying spontaneously very easy and fluid. Other may find that dreadfully hard. Many find praying something similar helpful to gain a focus. That is at least partly why the original Lord's prayer is so powerful for those of you that do that.

Regardless of what we like to pray, when we pray or how we pray, let the words or thoughts wrap around you, breathe them in, let them resonate in your heart and bring you to a place of peace and comfort. That is what prayer is supposed to do regardless of how and when we pray.

Thanks for listening to me this morning. Amen

