

Prayer: Luke 11: 1-13

In today's gospel reading, after Jesus had finished praying according to Luke, he was asked by one of his disciples, " Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples."

We might wonder how they know about John's teaching about prayer but on second thought, however some of Jesus' disciples were once followers of John so it is a small world even then.

There is another version of what we have come to call *The Lord's Prayer*, in the gospel of Matthew. It is very similar but there are differences that scholars note. Where both are the same, experts agree that Matthew and Luke use the same source, called "Q" a lost original gospel and no doubt written earlier and therefore regarded as the closest record of Jesus' sayings and activities.

For today, I have chosen to use the most basic prayer that the Jesus Seminar came up with in 1985. These 75 scholars voted on quotes from Matthew, Mark, Luke, John and the Book of Thomas and where there was strong agreement that Jesus spoke the words the text was in red...

Red: That's Jesus(3)

Pink: Sounds like Jesus(2)

Gray: Well Maybe(1)

Black: There's been some mistake (0)

They believe that the prayer that was probably found in the source book of "Q" was used by both writers of Luke and Mathew and where they agreed it was most likely the words Jesus used:

Father,

Your name be revered.

Impose your imperial rule..

Provide us with the bread we need for the day.

Forgive our debts to the extent we have forgiven those in debt to us.

And please don't subject us to test after test.

Further, it is felt that Jesus did not say this whole prayer at once but over time employed the basic four petitions as individual prayers. But their source being "Q" is lost and cannot be doubled checked.

That is not to say that whatever prayer we use today is not a valid prayer. In fact it is and for many of us the only prayer that we depend on to start or end our day or to use when our own words fail us. And whether we were taught with the “thy’s and thou’s” of the King James version, or we ask for forgiveness of “trespasses or debts” is not an issue. At the same time, whether you kneel, prostrate yourself flat on the floor (not sure about getting up these days) or sit or stand is also not at stake. **PRAYING FREQUENTLY AND HONESTLY AND HOPEFULLY IS CRITICAL!**

There is something absolutely wonderful about this prayer that is worth revisiting today. So, let me just use the basic prayer for now and explore with you the key elements that you know but are worth remembering or at least reinforcing.

It starts with the address: **Father, or Our father.** Jesus was recorded often as using the familiar word Abba to address God. That would come close to addressing God as Daddy rather than Father. However, the bottom line is that Jesus regarded God as a dear parent, not some far off deity that we/he were not related too!

Now a psychologist might want to explore the issues that many of us may have had with our real-life fathers but for Jesus, this was a positive and loving relationship. If you didn’t have a good relationship to your parent, change the term to Mother or try on some term that makes this a positive relationship that has both love, respect and awe involved. Jesus, I believe saw us all as sons and daughters of the Divine not chattel nor aliens to God, but children of God!

Your name be revered: Today we use the term “hallowed” to mean honoured and admired profoundly with deference and tenderness. This essentially encompasses the First Commandment and brings to the forefront that we honour with devotion, God. (see Deuteronomy 6 for starters).

Impose your imperial rule: Later renditions of this line have turned into “your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” In this simplified version is a call to bring God’s way to all of humanity, including all races religions and sexual orientations.

Provide us with the bread we need for the day: Matthew, it was felt by the scholars was closer to how Jesus would ask. For as an itinerate, with complete trust in God's providence, he would have asked for bread only for the day. Given the times and the way he and Jesus' disciples lived, they would not be stock piling food in any freezer nor drying it to keep. That is not to say we don't need to be concerned for the next day or take advantage of the seasons but I suspect hoarding would not be acceptable! Bottom line only ask for what is needed for today..each day.

Forgive our debts to the extent we have forgiven those in debt to us. We know that Jesus cared about the poor and financial indebtedness was a primary focus of many of his parables. In what ways do you and I consider those who may be in debt to us...???

And please don't subject us to test after test. Perhaps what is being asked is for protection for things yet to come??

The two stories following our lesson today were thought to be out of context. In the Mediterranean culture, hospitality is caught up in an honour/shame dichotomy. If someone visits you it is critical you offer hospitality, whether or not you invited them and no matter the hour. Getting assistance for this from your neighbour requires him/her to oblige for the same reason—honour/shame. Luke uses this rather as the idea of persistence in prayer counts. Not sure, what to do you think??

When I was a young teenager I saw a picture in the paper (Vancouver Sun) of a young and handsome Duke (Kent?) I decided then and there I wanted to marry him one day. I got into my head that I would add that to my prayers. Well, a sidewise thought came to me that IF this was really important I had to pray for this every night for a year. After three days I forgot to include this request in my prayers. Clearly that was a lesson I learned all on my own that I never forgot!!

One book I like about prayer is titled "Prayer Shapes Believing" and I agree, for prayer often shapes our lives and moves us to act, not depending on God to be our intercessor for everything. The best prayers at least the most honest, are those we ourselves say, write or think. These ones that come from our heart.

A light but powerful book on prayer and one many you have used perhaps is called: *Help, Thanks, Wow: The Three Essential Prayers*, by Anne Lamott. Oh, by the way she is a member of St. Andrew, Presbyterian Church in California.

There is much in this little book to recommend—honesty, humour and hope! She writes that many prayers like the Psalms and in many prayers books (Book of Commons Prayer) that are like fine china and we need bring them out and use them.

However, the best prayers remind us that we are NOT in charge. We learn that sometimes we can't seem to fix anything and we need to open ourselves to being helped by some force, some friends or SOMETHING. That, Anne Lamott writes, is when she opens up to a prayer that might sound like this:

*Dear Some-Something: I don't know what I am doing. I can't see where I am going. I am getting more lost. I'm getting more and more afraid more clenched. **Help. Amen***

This prayer acknowledges, she writes "... that I am clueless: but something else isn't. While I am not going to go limp, I am asking for the willingness to step into the truth. It. Is like the old riddle: what is the difference between God and you? God never thinks she/he's you!"

Her closing sums it up for me:

It is a good response to making contact with God through prayer, and to praying *with* people who share the journey, and to most things that are good, which much of life can be. So it is, when we do the best we can, and we leave the results in God's good hands. Amen

Amen translates into, *And so it is!*

Rev.Dr. Linda A. St.Clair
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