

Day One – Dwelling with the Lord’s Prayer

Amid the file drawers of memories in my mind, I can't seem to find one labeled, "Where I learned the Lord’s Prayer." I don't recall my Sunday School teacher ever formally teaching us the words with the now-famous flannel board cut-out characters. I am sure we uttered the words every single Sunday in worship. It must be that the repetition and ritual of returning to these words week after week left a lingering trace until I could utter the prayer with hardly thinking about the words.

Do you remember when, how, or who taught you the Lord’s Prayer?

Perhaps you had to memorize and recite the words to adults who stared at you with stoic and stern eyes before your confirmation.

Perhaps you learned the words through a song or at a summer camp.

Perhaps it was later in life when the words were sown into the synapses of your brain.

I do know that the version I am most familiar with goes something like this:

In this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father who art in Heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth, as it is in Heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the Kingdom, and the power and the glory for ever. Amen.

Sometimes our familiarity with something can be mistaken for understanding. This is certainly the case for me with the Lord’s Prayer. When was the last time I paused and reflected on what am I am saying? When I have let each sentence sit and simmer in my soul really soak in? When has saying the Lord's Prayer caused me to change my life?

Abraham Heschel once said, “That words create worlds.” What we say constructs the reality in which we dwell. When we pray the Lord’s Prayer, we are reminding ourselves and each other of the world we want to inhabit together. We are reciting God’s dream for the thriving of all creation. We are committing ourselves to collaborating and co-creating with God. Yet, how often do I switch to autopilot when I get to this point in the service? Does each word leap and leave my lips as if I was orienting my life toward what I am saying? Do the words reorient my heart toward how I want to live my life in the coming days? Or am I muttering, mumbling the words just because the pastor told me to do so? I realize that just because I know the words, does not mean that I really know what am I praying.

This week, I want to invite us to dwell with the Lord’s Prayer. Honestly, one week isn’t long enough. We will barely dip our pinkie toe into the depth of meaning these words can invoke and evoke within our souls. I start here because it is the prayer Jesus taught us. Even though Jesus often went off to pray or spent time alone, this is one of the few prayers of his we have in our scripture. We will dwell in these words, taking one phrase each day. We will dwell in these words by opening our hearts to three different translations. To be sure, there are many different Bible translations, I have chosen three that are distinctive versions so we can compare and contrast. I pray you will hear the world these words are creating.

But before we begin, I invite you today to pray aloud the Lord's Prayer saying it slowly. As you focus on forming the words, what is formed within you? Which words warm your heart? Which words confound or confuse you? What would it look like to embody and this prayer today?

Prayer: God of words well-worn in our hearts, awaken us to how the prayer Jesus taught might stir anew and afresh within us in such a time as this. Amen.

Day Two – Dwelling with the Lord's Prayer

With a God like this loving you, you can pray very simply. Like this: Our Father in heaven, Reveal who you are.

The Message

Our prayers, rather, should be simple, like this: Our Father in heaven, let Your name remain holy. The Voice

Therefore, you be praying as follows, 'Our Father in the heavens: let Your name be treated-as holy. Disciples
literal translation

Reading different translations of the same Bible verse can bring forth new insights and questions. Reading only one translation would be like walking the same path every day or eating the same exact food every day. To be sure, there are always subtle nuances when I walk around my neighborhood noticing how something has grown or someone has painted her house or put one up for sale. But, the familiar can lure us into complacency and being too comfortable. I selected the above three translations, not because they were the best, but because they are different and might even jar us into hearing the world the Lord's Prayer crafts and creates every time we say these words.

Two of the three translations above use the word, "Simple" as a way to describe the structure of the Lord's Prayer. I can sometimes make prayer too complicated, like an aerobics workout for my soul. I can force myself to make sure every word is heartfelt or honest. Or I can believe if I don't have the exact right amount of time to pray or am not in the right soul space, so I should just skip it for the day. Simplicity can often be seen in a negative light in our complex, complicated world. With the current pandemic, unrest, reckoning with centuries of racism, trying to sort out whether I should send my kids to school, continuing to construct how to pastor online, learning new things all the time, I wonder how can prayer be simple when the problems that plague us are so overwhelming?

Prayer starts by naming and noticing. Naming and noticing who God is and who I am in relationship to the Holy hovering around me. It is good to remember that any attempt to define God will confine God. If we think we understand the Divine, we probably are deceiving ourselves. Karl Barth called God, "Holy Other" as a reminder that God is God and we are not. Paul Tillich called God the ground of our being, which also has a mysteriousness woven into those words. Yet, how often when we hear the word, "God", thanks to Michelangelo's painting, do we envision an older white man with a long flowing white beard and robe. But, that is just one witness to the divine.

Within Scripture God is Creator, Shepherd, Commissioner to prophets, Listener, Strength, Rock, Wrestler with Jacob, Liberator, Judge, and Vineyard Owner. Jesus calls God a Mother Hen (Matthew 23:37). Moses in his last sermon calls God a Mother Eagle spreading her wings to lift us up (Deuteronomy 32:11). Unfortunately, just as we can get stuck in a rut with how we say the Lord's Prayer, our images of God can be stuck, stymied in the words we have been given from the past.

How would you describe God right now? God as warm like the cup of coffee in my hand. God as hopeful like the promise of a new day. God as hand-holder amid the uncertainty. God as the conductor and composer of the symphony of life ~ which is one of my favorite images for God right now.

I love that The Message invites God to reveal God's self, right now to you. Stop. Look. Listen. Where is the holy hovering and hanging around you? What words would you borrow to point toward God in this moment? How do you hold the images of God lightly so that two hours or two days or two weeks from now, the still revealing God might uncover the sacred in beautiful new ways?

Hold those questions and may they help awaken all of us to God's presence woven into this day.

Prayer: God, help me to keep it simple, especially when I realize that I will never fully understand the marvel and mystery of You, even as I experience Your love and grace every day. Let me smile at the beautiful unfolding relationship with You. Amen.

Day Three - Dwelling with the Lord's Prayer

Set the world right; Do what's best— as above, so below. The Message

Bring about Your kingdom. Manifest Your will here on earth, as it is manifest in heaven. The Voice

Let Your kingdom come. Let Your will be done— as in heaven, also on earth. Disciples literal translation

Recently, I have found myself emphasizing this part of the Lord's Prayer. These words are essentially saying, "God, set this world right, because the apple cart of life keeps tipping over, and I can't seem to clean up the messiness of life today." We are asking, "God, bring about Your realm, because the place and space I am inhabiting right now feels so out-of-whack and in a kerfuffle." God, let your will be done in me, because my will, my understandings, my way isn't all it is cracked up to be!

It is one thing to pray these words.
It is another thing to live them.

Because when I move from praying to be in concert with the great Conductor and Composer of the symphony of life, into actually living, that is where I get off-beat and in the wrong key. When I

interact with people who push my buttons, when I wonder how to order my days, when I get frustrated with myself and others, when I turn on the news...suddenly these words seem so distant.

Perhaps this is why Paul encouraged us to pray without ceasing, because I can easily go astray. God is the tether that lets me know how to get through the storms of life. I am reminded of the image of a rope that people in the Midwest would tie from the backdoor to the barn door when a blizzard was coming. That way, when the driving snow blinded the eye and caused you to be disoriented, you held onto the rope to help you navigate between the two places. The problem is that often we forget that we are in a blizzard – especially in August in Florida where the humidity hangs so heavy in the air it is like I am walking through thick soupiness out there.

Perhaps what 2020 has taught me again and again, even though I knew this from before, is that I am not as in control or in charge as I think I am. I don't have a magic wand to make life better. I can't heal the hearts broken by grief with just a few words. I can't explain away the bad things that happen to good people. I can't solve the systemic problems that plague us alone.

Part of what is so powerful in these words is an acknowledgment that the world isn't alright. God's will isn't being done. God's realm isn't right here. And I am stuck between throwing up my hands in exasperation or exhaustion and rolling up my sleeves to do what I can praying my words and actions will make a difference. It is a "both and" (as Richard Rohr would say) reality. I can support causes that work toward justice, but realize that work will never be finished in my lifetime. I can pray that God will give me strength, and then try to live Micah 6:8 (to do justice, to show loving kindness, and to walk humbly with God). I can participate in the symphony of life, realizing that the orchestra contains more than me...and I may not even be the featured soloist. And I am not the conductor or composer of this masterwork either. It is my prayer that the last two sentences would be the reality of my life every day.

Prayer: God turn my willfulness into a willingness to be a part of what You are up to this day bringing about Your realm within and around me. Amen.

Day Four – Dwelling with the Lord's Prayer

Keep us alive with three square meals. Keep us forgiven with you and forgiving others. Keep us safe from ourselves and the Devil. The Message

Give us each day that day's bread—no more, no less— And forgive us our debts as we forgive those who owe us something. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. The Voice

Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also forgave our debtors. And do not bring us into a temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. Disciples literal translation

The Lord's Prayer turns at this point from talking to God or about God, the words now invite God to work in our lives toward what we need to survive. The above part of the Lord's Prayer is a hinge going from theology (words about God) to practical parts of daily living. We need bread. We need

to work on the wounds and wants that we all carry in the backpacks of our lives. We need to watch out for what is feeding and fueling our lives.

First, notice that this is plural. It isn't just a prayer for the modern-day trinity of "me, myself, and I". This is about everyone having bread. Every person having food on the table. Every person offering what we have so that all may have enough. This is communal work done on an individual level. And it is work I do as part of the wider community I am a part of.

To ask for bread is to ask for what sustains me most. I need food to survive and thrive. I am aware of how many people are forced to go to food pantries right now to survive. The daily bread for many has dried up as unemployment benefits dried up. Yet, I have more than enough. That tension challenges me to do something in order to live this prayer. To donate to food pantries. To share some of the abundance that I have. To resist the urge to cling or get mine while the getting is good. There is a connection to communion here ~ where everyone is welcome and everyone is given the same portion because it is enough. At the heart of communion is community ~ where "I" become and belong to a "we".

To ask for forgiveness is to realize that I make more mistakes that I would ever want publicized. I know when I say words that I instantly regret and want a rewind button to take back. I know when I do something I wish I had not done. This is called life. Yet, we inhabit a world where we love to point out other's mistakes. We have this modern-day phenomenon known as, "whatabout". This is when someone says something that was wrong or a mistake, the person deflects or defends by trying to point out something that is worse than his/her apparent flaw. We hear this all the time from politicians. Someone says something that is hurtful and rather than admit the wrong, the person says, "Well what about this mistake the person on the other side did!" To try to hide or cover your wrong by comparison doesn't help with forgiveness.

This leads us toward the final part about being aware of the forces that feed and fuel our lives. So often, I am nourished only with negative cynicism. I can get pulled down by all the brokenness and think that everything is going to you-know-where in a hand basket. To counter-balance the reality of pain, we need strength from a source beyond what I can consume. To counter-balance the difficulties, I need the holy to break through the wounds and wants within me and around all of us. What forces do you feel tugging and nudging you?

Perhaps at each meal this day as you break bread, you can break open your heart to a place you need healing. As you fuel and feed your body, prayerfully ask for God to nourish and nurture your soul.

Prayer: Help me God live the above invitation every time I eat today.

Day Five – Dwelling with the Lord's Prayer

You're in charge! You can do anything you want! You're ablaze in beauty! Yes. Yes. Yes. The Message

But let Your kingdom be, and let it be powerful and glorious forever. Amen. The Voice

Because Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever, Amen Disciples literal translation

This final part wraps up our dwelling with the Lord's Prayer. I love how The Message ends with saying, God is ablaze in beauty. The words invite us to say, "Yes" to life. I realize that sometimes it is easier to say, "Yes" to life than at other times. Perhaps, 2020 hasn't offered an abundance of such moments when you felt ablaze and alive...but I know there have been moments, even now, when the spirit was stirred and I have been able to affirm the goodness - the God-ness- of daily life.

I hope you have been able to say, "Amen", to that last sentence. The phrase, "Amen", means, "May it be so." Amen isn't a period, it is a comma. The word is less an ending, then it is a beginning. To say, "Amen" at the end of the Lord's Prayer is an opening that every word we spoke might create a world within us. That each phrase of this prayer might start to take root and form shoots in the tree of my life. That the seeds of the Lord's Prayer would continue to germinate, grow, and generate life within and around me.

Over the last few days, we have opened our hearts and lives to these words we have said countless times. I wonder, what was something you learned over the last week? What new insight stirred and swirled within you? What questions still persist with this prayer? Questions are a great resource in faith. The root of the word, "question" is "quest". A question points us in a direction to explore. Are there phrases or words that still puzzle you? Is there a place you want to explore more, realizing that one week with Lord's Prayer would never exhaust all that we might encounter in these words.

When Abraham Heschel said that, "Words create worlds," I believe words are constantly, continually re-building. A word that might have meant one thing at one point in my life, can shift in new directions. A word that I thought as solid as a wall, can suddenly be torn down. My understandings, I pray, continually evolve and expand as I explore the words I speak and hear.

Maybe this is why we say the Lord's Prayer every week. We need the weekly engagement with these words because every week, even when the days blend together, is different and distinctive. How does the Lord's Prayer sound different? What if, every week, after saying the prayer, we paused and asked that question? What felt different? What sounded different? What was new? What was the same? What is confusing and tripping you up right now in what you just prayed?

To keep coming back to these words of life Jesus offered centuries ago as a truth can ground us and guide us especially in such a time as this.

Prayer: God, let these familiar words continue to invoke and provoke my soul to dance with You. Amen.