

## Day One ~ Prayer Practices

Last week we dwelt and dove into the Lord's Prayer. We leaned in and listened to how the words that are woven so deeply into our memories create a world within us. I pray you are continuing to hold onto the Lord's Prayer this week as a daily ritual and rhythm. Saying these words slowly, savoring each syllable can help ground us amid the shifting sand of the world we inhabit today. This week, I want to add to the Lord's Prayer with other ways of grounding ourselves in God's guiding grace. As a bridge between where we were last week and where we are going this week, I turn to the New Zealand version of the Lord's Prayer.

I invite you to say these words aloud, say this prayer a few times. Say the words in a whisper. Take your laptop outside and say these words to the world around you. Say them now...later...before you go to bed.

How does the different tone of saying the words softly or loudly cause the sacred to stir within you? How does being in a different place cause one of the phrases to change? What was unique between saying these words now, compared to when you say them later? Please pray these words with me:

New Zealand Lord's Prayer:

*Eternal Spirit,  
Earth-maker, Pain-bearer, Life-giver,  
Source of all that is and that shall be,  
Father and Mother of us all,  
Loving God, in whom is heaven:*

*The hallowing of your name echo through the universe!  
The way of your justice be followed by the peoples of the world!  
Your heavenly will be done by all created beings!  
Your commonwealth of peace and freedom  
sustain our hope and come on earth.*

*With the bread we need for today, feed us.  
In the hurts we absorb from one another, forgive us.  
In times of temptation and testing, strengthen us.  
From trials too great to endure, spare us.  
From the grip of all that is evil, free us.*

*For you reign in the glory of the power that is love, now and for ever. Amen.*

Two of the most powerful parts, where I feel the surge of the sacred, is in the diverse and varied names of God at the beginning. The image of God as creator of all that is seen and felt. I sense that image will feel differently if you say the opening inside than if you go outside where the trees can

eavesdrop and overhear and join in your prayer. I find it reassuring to remember God is the One who suffers alongside us during this pandemic and dealing with racism and frustration and fear and all that overwhelms me in these days.

Then, to say, God is the One who gives life. My life. Your life. The One who breath fills my body with the oxygen needed right now. What images of God does this awaken within you?

Secondly, the line, “In the hurts we absorb from one another.” Those eight words capture 2020. We have absorbed so many hurts. Yet, rather than processing our pain we pass it along. We “other” people. We demand folks be created in our image with our understandings, rather than leaning into difference. We decree that our opinion is the only one that matters and we have social media platforms on which to share it. (Hoping that we get lots of likes and thumbs up emojis). As Rudy Sales says, “Where does it hurt”? Speak, say that aloud to the computer screen right now.

If you are inspired, I encourage you to share an image of God that is dwelling in you. Or a hurt you need to release so that you don’t push down the pain only to have it spring forth upon an unsuspecting friend or family member or at a church meeting! Or maybe the above has given you permission to create your own version of the Lord’s Prayer you’d like to share. I would love to have you email that to me – [pastor@uccsarasota.com](mailto:pastor@uccsarasota.com)

I pray the Lord’s Prayer continues to be a source of the Spirit stirring and supporting, God’s love embracing and enfolding, and the wisdom we need in such a time as this.

**Prayer: Let the words of my mouth, the meditations of my mind, the stirring of my heart, O God, be led by You every second of this day.**

## **Day Two – Prayer Practices**

On Thursday last week, we offered a sacred time of praying through art. Rev. Donna Papenhausen invited us to draw the outline our hands on a piece of paper. Then, using colored pencils or crayons, we made dots for people we were praying for in our hearts. As I prayed for my wife, kids, our church, our community, our country, racial injustice, discrimination, that my hands would be the hands of Christ. I prayed for the courage I need to pastor today; each of those prayers received several dots in the outline of hand.

I raise this because I invite EVERYONE reading this devotional today to adopt this as a prayer practice. Then, I want you to share your hand print with the church. You can either bring this to the church during the times below OR mail your hand print to the church.

Here are the step-by-step instruction:

1. Find a blank piece of paper and crayons/colored pencils.
2. Sketch your hand or draw a circle to represent God whose center is everyone and whose circumference is always expanding in our unfolding universe.
3. Place prayer dots using ALL the crayons and colored pencils you have. Each series of dots represents a person or place; a situation or something you are facing. There is an energy of openness as you make each dot. You are inviting our colorful Creator to hear your prayer.
4. Repeat this process everyone day for the next several weeks.
5. During the week of August 24th either mail your hand print to the church OR you can stop by during these times: On Tuesday, August 24 or Wednesday, August 26 between 1 and 3 pm. Or you can come on Sunday August 30 at 9:30 am. (If you come to church, please wear a mask and use social distancing from others who may be present.)
6. You are welcome to spend time sitting in a pew and praying. There will be painter's tape available for you to leave your hand print taped to the pew.
7. If you prefer to mail your hand print, I will sit in the sanctuary for you and tape your hand print to the pew.

I have this vision of looking out in our sanctuary covered in pieces of paper on which YOU have left your hand print, DNA, and presence. I have a prayer that seeing this will remind me that I am not preaching to an empty sanctuary, but that you are with me as we worship digitally. I have a prayer, most of all, that this shared practice will unite us through a Spirit we need in such a time as this. Our heartfelt thanks to Pastor Donna for awakening us to the power of this beautiful practice each of us can do everyday.

I pray this practice inspires your heart and you are already searching for paper and colored pencils.

**Prayer: Creative and colorful God, move our hands to pray what is in our hearts this day and for countless days to come. Amen.**

### **Day Three – Prayer Practices**

**Last week, I wrote that one image of God that is meaningful to me is the conductor and composer of my life. God is the one who is writing the melody and music upon my soul. God is the one who calls me to tune the instrument of my life in harmony with God's justice, love, and humility/vulnerability. God is the one who moves all of us to join in the symphony. God is the music-maker, and we all have a part in the movement of God's masterpiece.**

**Music plays an important part in my life. Music causes my soul to surge more than any words. Music is what grounds me. Music gives voice to my emotions. Recently, I have found the way tears well up in my eyes when I listen to certain songs. I love all things instrumental. I love musicals. I love gospel music and hymns. The beat of a drum echoes in my heart. The melody moves my soul deeply.**

**St. Augustine was right, "To sing is to pray twice." Music is what our most heartfelt prayers sound like.**

**You can go to YouTube and find several songs that can move your heart and life today. Here are a couple for me.**

**Carrie Newcomer's - You Can Do this Hard Thing**

**Sam Cooke - A Change Is Gonna Come**

**Brian Enos – Ascend**

**Peter Gabriel – In Your Eyes as God's prayer for each of us**

**Musicals like Les Mes or Hamilton**

**Instrumentalists like Brooklyn Duo performing contemporary music**

**Add your suggestions in the comments, please!!**

**For the past few Mondays on my blog I have been reflecting on music. I have linked that my blog below.**

**I pray today the music stirs and swirls within you in life-giving ways.**

**Prayer: Conductor and composer of life, move within me, keeping me on the same page of music with You and in beat with Your love.**

#### **Day Four – Prayer practices**

Quiet

Silent

Listen (which is 'silent' with the letters re-arranged)

Still

Tranquil

No longer awash and adrift in the endless cacophony of sound that chaotically surrounds us.

Or maybe silence evokes another list in your heart with words like:

Uneasy

Unnerving

Restlessness to do something/say something

Voices in our heads that start shouting which is why we keep moving

Disheartening

Lonely

Practicing silence, quiet contemplation, has this monk-like image in our minds. We picture holy men and women practically levitating as they commune with God and we think, "I could never do that." Silence involves not only quieting the running commentary in our minds which love to replay conversations, silence can make us aware of where the ache is in our body. Suddenly, our feet are restless or our back begins to protest where moments ago we felt no pain.

On the one hand, silence is God's first language. On the other hand, we are not native speakers and need a Rosetta Stone like program to help us understand.

I invite you today into a simple breath prayer. Set a timer for five minutes...or three minutes if you just broke out in a cold sweat thinking about five minutes of quiet.

Then in a seated standing position – a posture where you are comfortable in a chair but your back is straight and relaxed. Roll your shoulders gently forward a few times to release the stress and strain. Gently roll your head in a circle, imagine the thoughts leaking out your ears. Your feet touching the tile or carpet.

Now, breathe in to the count of four. Exhale to the count of six or seven. Breathe in imagining you are breathing in God’s love. Exhale the carbon dioxide of a world that is broken and has sharp shards of illness, discrimination, wounds and wants that keep harming all of life (human and nature).

Start the timer, close your eyes, and keep repeating the breathing in for four counts and exhaling for six or seven.

*Silence*

**Prayer: As I move from the quiet silence of this moment into the world, let those traces of grace which felt like peace washing over me center me in You, O God.**

## **Day Five – Prayer Practices**

Prayer isn’t only moments when we bow our heads and close our eyes. Prayer isn’t only those times we set aside, as if we could compartmentalized and categorize our life. Prayer, the Apostle Paul said, is to be done without ceasing. Brother Lawrence said that washing dishes was prayer, which because I like this particular choir, appeals to me. Barbara Brown Taylor talks about altars in the world when we get lost as prayer and paying attention to the person/situation right in front of us as prayer.

Your life is a prayer. By that I mean that your life is saturated with prayers for others and yourself and our world. Your actions are also prayers. Your words are prayers. Your presence, each breath, is a living/moving/growing/yearning prayer.

Pause for a moment – what reactions and responses do you have to that? Where does your life sing, “Yes” in response to the above two paragraphs? Where does your life want to object and suggest that this place...this person...this situation...this experience could never be prayer?

Part of the mystery of prayer is that we never fully understand what it means to pray without ceasing. We will never have a degree to hang on our walls declaring that we have a “Masters in Prayer”. Like the universe itself, prayer expands and evolves and enfolds that which was once a formless void.

I love the following poem prayer:

## Praying by Mary Oliver

It doesn't have to be  
the blue iris, it could be  
weeds in a vacant lot, or a few  
small stones, just  
pay attention, then patch

a few words together and don't try  
to make them elaborate, this isn't  
a contest but the doorway

into thanks, and a silence in which  
another voice may speak.

I pray that the practices from silence to songs; from colors to poems; from words I have written to the more important ideas and images God has awoken within you this week will continue to be a doorway to the divine in such a time as this.

**Prayer: Still speaking and singing and creating God, write upon my life – my whole life – Your holy prayer/dream/vision for me this day. Amen.**