

Prayer-Challenged?
The Lord's Prayer & Our Prayer II
Reflection on Luke 11:2-4
Sunday February 20, 2011
Trinity United Ottawa
Rev. Ellie Barrington, M.Div.

“We do not know how to pray as we ought” Romans 8:26

Do you ever feel ‘prayer-challenged’? Seems a lot of honest people among us feel challenged in our ability to pray these days. Take heart. Prayer is a relationship-building practise, so it may just need to change as you change and grow. Are you still trying to pray to the God you knew when you were six, when ‘He’ was a distant man up in the sky? - Do you really expect a reply from Santa Claus?

Effective prayer, like any satisfying relationship, doesn't leave all the asking on one side and all the doing on the other. Our adult relationship with God must acknowledge that we need to contribute, to bring about the good that we pray for. The God who works through all Creation, can't do it all without our co-operation.

If God feels distant or unreal, then maybe you want to begin by spending some ‘adults only quality time’ with whatever you actually recognize as ‘the Sacred’ in your life? Get to know the God who is so close that She - or It - is no longer distant, but inside.

Perhaps its time for you and your God to do something different together? There are a million ways to pray - to actively relate with God. Anything you do with the conscious intention of sharing your self with God, and opening yourself up to pay attention to God's presence, can become your prayer. Remember the biblical suggestion to ‘pray always’? It doesn't mean not to live your everyday life - but to live it more fully, in God's sight. You can sing, draw, garden, hike, cook, make love, meditate, read to your children, stargaze, study, smell a flower, sit still in the

silence...whatever you do with God in mind, fully absorbed in the moment, can become a prayer. And the more time you spend with God being what you love, the more intimately God will show GodSelf anew to you. The truth is, we miss most of God's overtures to us. We're too busy not noticing what is Holy in us and all around us.

Whatever else you do, you probably need to talk with God too. To 'express yourself' and listen well. What intimate relationship can survive without communication? With his Abba prayer, Jesus models communicating with God. St. Paul, who both exhorts us to 'pray always' and declares that "we do not know how to pray," solves this dilemma with Jesus' Prayer, in its shortest version: "God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying 'Abba'." (Galatians 4:6-7)

If you are ready to embrace Christian prayer, again or anew, why not start here together with others, speaking Jesus' prayer? Jesus wants to introduce you to his Abba, with whom he has an open and energizing relationship. Biblical scholar Dominic Crossan, in his book 'The Greatest Prayer' suggests that The Lord's Prayer can help us to know "what the historical Jesus stood for...or knelt for."

Jesus wanted us to see that through community prayer, we can tap into the Creator's purpose and energy, and be empowered to co-operate, co-create and collaborate with God. With regular community prayer, we are reminded to plug into the vision and power and the glory, and we are enabled by the Spirit to do our part in making the Kingdom come.

Dominic Crossan likens the Lord's Prayer to plugging in his laptop, knowing that there is always electricity available, wherever he travels. It's true though, that he is always searching for elusive outlets in airport lounges! (He jokes that he has a Mac, because Ecclesiastes says that "those who look through 'windows' see dimly.")

Crossan notes that his MacBook is absolutely dependent on getting connected to

electricity, to recharge its battery. As we are dependent on God to recharge us with Spirit, through our connectivity in prayer. “We are all laptops,” says Crossan, “and prayer is about empowerment by participation in and collaboration with God-as-Electricity.”

Jesus gave us his ‘Abba prayer’ to help us connect with the very God power that shone through him. His prayer is like an adaptor or a plug, maybe? Don’t you want to take it apart and discover what makes it work? **SLIDES BEGIN:** On each screen, just the words inside the square brackets.

[**Abba!** hallowed be *thy* **name** 1
 thy **kingdom** come 2
 thy **will** be done 3
 on earth as it is in heaven
give *us* this day our daily **bread** 1
forgive *us* our **debts** 2
 as *we* forgive our debtors
and lead *us* not into **temptation** 3
 but deliver *us* from the evil one]

Let’s start with the literary structure to see how this ‘hymn of hope’ for all humanity is meant to work:

[hallowed be *thy* **name** 1
 thy **kingdom** come 2
 thy **will** be done 3]

First there are three recognitions of the Holy - by reputation, by vision, by power of intention.

Then comes the mid-line of the prayer:

[on earth as it is in heaven]

This mid-line is like a mirror, reflecting ‘as above, so below.’ God is mirrored in us. God’ vision is manifest in our action.

Then below the midline, we open ourselves up to God power, to align ourselves with God in three ways, so that we reflect God's reputation, vision and intention on earth:

[give *us* this day our daily **bread** 1
forgive *us* our **debts** 2
 as *we* forgive our debtors
and lead *us* not into **temptation** 3
 but deliver *us* from the evil one]

We express our full intention to collaborate with God

- 1) by trusting that God provides - and therefore sharing Creation's resources;
- 2) by dissolving all debt slavery - and therefore bringing about justice for all;
- 3) by resisting the temptation to resort to violence - and therefore living out peace on earth.

The structure of this prayer is built upon the collaborative relationship between God and us - note the plural. The prayer contains the promise that 'God's will-power' will be channelled through us. There is no 'I' or 'me', but rather 'us' - and that pointed 'as *we* forgive' which holds us co-responsible for bringing about God's reign of forgiveness.

The Lord's Prayer was always a collective or 'corporate' prayer. When Jesus taught his followers, he used the plural 'you'. And remember how he wanted them to stay awake - be conscious - and pray with him?

It usually takes 2 or 3 gathered together to get properly plugged into God and experience that Spirit power. At least at first. Trying to pray or meditate alone, we often feel like a plug with just one prong. And doesn't it take a three pronged plug to be safely grounded?

For those who are curious, I'll just touch on Crossan's interpretations of some of the bold keywords of our prayer. You don't need to remember all this. Just pay

attention to the word or phrase that sticks for you...and stay with it...and pray with it this week?.

[**Our Father**]You've heard about **Abba**, a personal metaphor for the Householder of the Universe, male and female.

[**Hallowed be thy name**] We'll meditate on the meanings in this line and sing about it with Pat Mayberry next week. Lot's packed in there!

[**Thy Kingdom come**] Jesus whole ministry was expressed by his **Kingdom** vision. This prayer is his manifesto for God's order of peaceful interdependence of all in Creation - which depends on justice for all. We are all kin.

[**Thy will be done.**] Tricky words. This is not about God's power over us, but rather about the flow of God's vision happening here. For those who associate these words with Jesus' cry to God in the Garden of Gethemane, please be reassured that the best biblical scholarship today demonstrates that it was **not** 'God's will' that Jesus die on the cross as a blood substitute, to pay God back for our punishable sins.

[**On earth as it is in heaven**], this metaphor is meant to evoke the order and harmony of the stars, moving in the firmament.

[**Give us this day our daily bread**] We'll get to this vital line, with Communion on March 6th. Warning: there may be daily fish too.

[**Forgive us our debts**] Originally the word was '**debts**'.

Economic justice was key to Jesus' Kingdom vision.' It was later expanded to include a generalized sense of sin.

This prayer asserts that we need to take part in debt forgiveness:

[**as we forgive our debtors.**] Remember the parable Jesus told about the man whose master graciously forgave him great sums, then he turned around and prosecuted someone who owed him much less? The outcome was not good for the unforgiving one! That truth, is what this line in our prayer is meant to remind us of.

[**Lead us not into temptation.**] Not about sex, food, money or fame. Following the biblical uses of the word temptation, Crossan retraces Jesus' steps to when he faced three temptations in the desert.

[But deliver us from the evil one.] Remember the voices Jesus heard in the desert? His 'dark side' or ego personified as 'the evil one' 'satan' or 'devil'? The third and ultimate temptation that Jesus faced, was to take up the sword the devil offered him, to defend his Kingdom vision. So Jesus' creed for us ends with a clear call to non-violence. No matter what. The devil offers the sword as the easy solution.

[Amen] by the way, means, 'make it so.' Together with God, empowered through our prayer relationship, we enact God's intended order, with all humanity and Creation.

That's a lot of information. When we pray today, we'll approach it more meditatively, singing just one line, till we feel empowered to do our Kingdom-making part.

And as we sing this new hymn, let it be a unison prayer. Perhaps we will plug into the electric power of Spirit, making God's dream come true?

Amen.

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