

Meditation

We just heard about Grandpa's wisdom –the wisdom of our elders. In the church we speak of the host of witnesses of those who have gone before us that reveals the evolving story and life of our faith. Their witness reveals **the way we speak of what we have traditionally called 'God'** and how we have understood the activity of the Holy in our lives. It **is in fact an ongoing, evolving, ever renewing process. This ongoing story particularly known in our understanding of prayer.**

Often **the season of lent turns us inward as we reflect on our humanity** and as we seek to connect this with our faith journey. Acknowledging this, we included the prayers of **our humanity, and the Disciples' prayer** through these Lenten Sundays.

About a month ago in our conversations the question *What is prayer?* Came up and I began to do some reflection on this that has led to today's focus on prayer... and I wonder, **what are the gifts and challenges of prayer for you along your faith journey?** Take a moment to **share with your neighbor** beside you.

For me the gift lies in the Spirit's unique, creative address; each one of us can tell a unique story of our connection with prayer. The challenges lie somewhere in the nudges, the persistent disciplined call and the ongoing growth that springs from prayer.

Prayer – a pile of books – points to the diversity, **the comprehensive authorship available** – there are many practices of prayer, many understandings of prayer, and this ever-growing creative gift is guided and blessed by the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Christ.

Sometimes it feels much easier to list what prayer is not. For me, that might be like a list of requests, like fix this because I can't see my way through it anymore. I do not see God is not a super power Fix-it source, more as accompanying presence, guiding, opening presence as I work my way through the challenges of living. ([Help](#), [Thanks](#), [Wow](#))

Richard Rohr: **In prayer as we experience the Absolute- the Essence of our Being – whatever name you use to address this – then life is radically good, then life courses through us and that life is the presence of God.** He lifts up the healing power of prayer – “Prayer heals our split from life itself. It heals our disconnectedness from the deepest stream itself. Thus prayer affirms us at our core”

As our awareness of the supportive presence grows in and through prayer, the challenge to describe this experience in word or even thought is outside and

beyond our power and here, lies the gift of contemplative prayer (silence) that many mystics will witness to. Rohr speaks of prayer as that place where we meet God and our humanity as one and we know deep down that we are children of God.

Tom Harpur: speaks of the daily practice of silence as **a gift of beauty that heightens our awareness of every moment of the day, and of new ways of being in our lives.** Such a silence grows out of breathe – the universal foundation for meditative practice, known in many faiths.

For me, prayer speaks to the reality of our spiritual nature - that our very being comes from and seeks to return to the Wellspring of all Life. Jesus sometimes spent whole nights in prayer, never mind the 40 days in the wilderness before the onset of his ministry, a story we heard at the beginning of our Lenten journey. Biblical scholars will say that the apostle Paul, when he spent three years in Arabia just after his conversion and before his missionary journey, likely spend time simply meditating. Prayer was a defining core of the spirituality of a host of witnesses to the Christian life before us.

Some speak of prayer as a sanctuary, place where we can be alone. Like “ home is the heart’s resting place” on a pillow beside my fireplace, prayer is a time when we can be at one with the Source of Life. Prayer may be an intimate path with the One who is Beloved, private and personal, the *when you pray, Jesus said, go into...* that was also part of the Jesus’ sayings of prayer. Some have come to know prayer as that which fills all their living, embracing the scriptural instruction to *pray without ceasing* where prayer happens along walks in nature, as we work together in our kitchens, doing dishes, as we engage in Holy Conversations. (Brother Lawrence)

Prayer is also communal, expressed in the diverse gatherings of communities of faith throughout history and globally today. Maybe the communal call of prayer is what calls some of here in worship Sunday after Sunday. For some of us it is expressed in our hymns as well as the prayers of the people. For me, and maybe for you too, worship is from beginning to end the prayer of the Creator’s children called together connecting with the Source of Life, Source of love and with each other, one in Christ, called together in hope, love and then sent out to do the work of the people of God, making that prayer and love that grows out of it visible all week. Prayer realized(made real) in our activity in the world.

One of our traditional communal prayers in the Christian church has been The Lord’s Prayer. On our Lenten we (the worship team and I) have included several variations of the prayer Jesus taught the disciples – a prayer that has developed and passed on through the centuries with all the gifts and challenges that implies.

We call it The Lord's Prayer. Yet some could argue that **it really was and is a Jewish prayer** and not just a Christian prayer. Scholars who have studied the prayers of other faiths, will speak of **the universality of this prayer**. Historically it has been identified with the Christian faith. Millions down the ages have found that praying this prayer is a deep, satisfying spiritual experiences.

The first phrase "**Our Father who art in heaven**" in the past has referred to the presence of the One who is intimate father-mother-friend. Jesus and the earliest disciples called 'God' by the most intimate of names – such as ABBA – a word from the Aramaic, the language Jesus spoke. Some of us today understand this address more as the utterly transcendent Source of all being.

This imagery of God as "Father", controversial as it is points to the universality of this prayer. Many other faiths – such as Shinto, ancient Jewish prayers, as well as key Hindu prayers speak of God as Providence and Father, caring for the humble. An Aboriginal prayer begins simply with "Great Spirit, Grandfather, you have made everything and are in everything". Whatever words we use to speak of this vast Mystery we speak metaphorically of that which is indescribable. Last week,, we used the ecumenical church's address as Father-Mother. The week before a more contemporary paraphrase began with *Eternal Spirit, Earth-maker, Pain-bearer, Life-giver*. Some begin with Divine Light and Ultimate Reality. *What works well for you? and can we embrace the diversity of Holy Mystery in Love?*

'**Who art in heaven**' may be confusing for some of us. It this does not mean that God is off in some distant, galactic space or place but that the One who is 'closer than our own breathe simultaneously transcends the whole of reality. God is everywhere, within us and without – the very Ground of our Being – we are always in divine presence and so one could say, heaven – translated ' the kin-dom of God' - is now and all around us. As Paul says *"For in God we live and move, and have our being. And we too are God's children!*

Hallowed be thy name. Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done on earth

Here is where the Jewish roots of this prayer are once again observed. The ancient Jewish prayer begins like this: "May his great name be magnified and sanctified in the world which he has created according to his will. May he cause his kingdom to rule and his redemption to shoot forth...

We invite the name of the Divine Mystery to be held and kept sacred in and through us and for many centuries to come - in our thoughts, life and work today; in our home, in our neighborhood, in our nation; in the way we treat others, especially the poor or outcasts of society; in the way we relate to the Earth. Here is transformation of not only our praying but also of our living too. As a Christian I long for the

presence and power of Holy Mystery, Wholly Love to be active in all our lives, in our nation and society as we seek together a more just and healing world.

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

These petitions challenge us to consider deeply God's relevance/ activity in our immediate concerns of day-to-day living. The first phrase is more accurately translated as "give us today *sufficient* bread for the day." refers not only to physical concerns but also the matters of the heart, soul-nurturing concerns we all need to live well our true humanity. *Give us wisdom(understanding, assistance) for our daily lives* is another translation.

Forgiving debts/trespasses reminds many of us of the deep connection between our own readiness to forgive others and our experience of true forgiveness for ourselves. God's grace here invites a letting go of the resentments and wrongs within our own lives, the resentment and hostility towards others – whether groups or individuals – that have injured us and as we do, we come to know a deep inner joy that spoiled relationships had denied us. Such grace is like the 'water of life' bubbling up within us once more.

The last petition here *and do not bring us to a time of trial* seems to address the reality of the early disciples – the fiery testing so many of the early Christians endured. Today, maybe it is more about power of the Spirit to strengthen us in our daily challenges. In the context of global realities today, we as people of the Creator seek divine protection for all from the negative realities in today's world, the violence or hatred – often beyond our control. Even as we pray this, we know that we are called to participate as co-creators together to make a world a safer place for all.

For Thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory...

This final doxology as it is often called, was not a part of the original prayer. It is not present in Luke or Matthew but is found in many copies of the early Christian Scriptures probably around the 5th Century.

Its power lies in its affirmation and invites us into a life of gratitude, of thanksgiving and praise for the Creator who gives us life. What are the things you are most thankful for (last week's focus with the SNT). Such a spirit of gratitude and praise is beautifully expressed in the Disciple's Prayer from Zion UC that I understand some of you are familiar with: *For Yours is the intertwing universe, surrounding us with melody, filling us with courage, now and through the ages.* May it be so among us!