

Summer Series on Prayer: July 2010 "JESUS: GIVE US A PRAYER"

Sermon #1 - Jesus: Give us a Prayer: Beginning with the Prayer Jesus Taught

Ladner United Church – Sunday June 27, 2010
Jim Short – Preacher

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Our first lesson is: Psalm 77

This psalm has a personal lament and a part which sounds more like a hymn alluding to the mighty acts of God throughout Israel's history.

This suggests that the psalmist (or the final editor) was more troubled by some unnamed community calamity than by a personal disaster.

A profound spiritual lesson can be learned from this psalm.

In times of crisis and the fragmentation of communal ethics and social upheaval, a review of our religious history can be a helpful antidote to the fear and despair that tend to overwhelm us.

When we call to God for help through our fear and despair, God leads us through mighty floods, though not necessarily into green pastures and quiet pools of fresh water. The double images speak of violent thunderstorms and Israel's experience of crossing of the Red Sea.

Despite that – the Psalmist is confident God will both lead and provide human leaders.

I cry aloud to God, aloud to God, that he may hear me.

²In the day of my trouble I seek the Lord; in the night my hand is stretched out without wearying; my soul refuses to be comforted.

³I think of God, and I moan; I meditate, and my spirit faints. Selah

⁴You keep my eyelids from closing; I am so troubled that I cannot speak.

⁵I consider the days of old, and remember the years of long ago.

⁶I commune with my heart in the night; I meditate and search my spirit:

⁷"Will the Lord spurn forever, and never again be favorable?"

⁸Has his steadfast love ceased forever? Are his promises at an end for all time?

⁹Has God forgotten to be gracious? Has he in anger shut up his compassion?" Selah

¹⁰And I say, "It is my grief that the right hand of the Most High has changed."

¹¹I will call to mind the deeds of the LORD; I will remember your wonders of old.

¹²I will meditate on all your work, and muse on your mighty deeds.

¹³Your way, O God, is holy. What god is so great as our God?

¹⁴You are the God who works wonders; you have displayed your might among the peoples.

¹⁵With your strong arm you redeemed your people, the descendants of Jacob and Joseph. Selah

¹⁶When the waters saw you, O God, when the waters saw you, they were afraid; the very deep trembled.

¹⁷The clouds poured out water; the skies thundered; your arrows flashed on every side.

¹⁸The crash of your thunder was in the whirlwind; your lightning's lit up the world; the earth trembled and shook.

¹⁹Your way was through the sea, your path, through the mighty waters; yet your footprints were unseen.

²⁰You led your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron.

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Religions have distinctive ways of praying. For Christians our is exemplified by the Lord's Prayer.

Luke records that the Pharisees and scribes have noted that followers of John the Baptist "frequently fast and pray"; in this passage Jesus gives his disciples (later known as Christians) their prayer.

Luke's version of the Lord's Prayer is shorter than Matthew's (which is the common one Christians use).

We approach God in a personal way. God's "name" is more than just a name: we pray that all may give respect due to God, so all may see God's love.

"Your kingdom come" looks forward to the Kingdom, where all barriers – of wealth, sex and ritual cleanness – will no longer exist.

Of the five petitions, the last two seek filling of our needs. "Bread" is what we need to live; it is God's gift to us.

We share it with all, especially in the Eucharist. "Daily" here means *day after day*.

The "time of trial" is the final onslaught of evil forces, before Christ comes again; it is also the temptations which assail us day-by-day.

In the final verses of this passage, Jesus encourages persistence in prayer as well as tells two short stories.

Reading from chapter 11: verses one through thirteen:

He was praying in a certain place, and after he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples." ²He said to them, "When you pray, say: Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. ³Give us each day our daily bread. ⁴And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us. And do not bring us to the time of trial." ⁵And he said to them, "Suppose one of you has a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; ⁶for a friend of mine has arrived, and I have nothing to set before him.' ⁷And he answers from within, 'Do not bother me; the door has already been locked, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.' ⁸I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, at least because of his persistence he will get up and give him whatever he needs. ⁹"So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. ¹⁰For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. ¹¹Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for a fish, will give a snake instead of a fish? ¹²Or if the child asks for an egg, will give a scorpion? ¹³If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

And lastly, we will say together the words of the "New Creed"

We are not alone, we live in God's world.

We believe in God: who has created and is creating, who has come in Jesus, the Word made flesh, to reconcile and make new, who works in us and others by the Spirit.

We trust in God. We are called to be the Church: to celebrate God's presence, to live with respect in Creation, to love and serve others, to seek justice and resist evil, to proclaim Jesus, crucified and risen, our judge and our hope.

In life, in death, in life beyond death, God is with us. We are not alone Thanks be to God.

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I got to thinking this week – that I'd like to use these next Summers Sunday's of preaching for a sermon series...

So I started making up lists in my mind – went on to the internet – looked up suggested sermon series...that other's had done...there were lots of ideas...nothing really felt right until someone suggested why not a series on prayer...and not on the theory of prayer – but on ways to pray...

Simple and brilliant I thought...it can follow right on after last week's Spiritual Fitness inventory – we each had the chance to assess our own spiritual fitness using an inventory – which I shared with you last week – there's copies of last week's sermon on the table and it will be posted on the website this week...

Using an inventory that the US Army Chaplains use with their soldiers – a kind of simple yet effective picture of your spiritual fitness and a list of suggestions of activities and practices they can engage in to become spiritually fit...

I started doing some reading and thinking and praying...it felt right for me because one of the roads I've taken in my post deployment Afghanistan time is to re-look at my own spiritual practices including prayer...with the intention of increasing my times of prayer – which are often brief and being open more to silence...

I came across this quote: which further strengthened my resolve:

By a Christian writer – Richard Rohr – "...When the church is no longer teaching people how to pray, we could almost say it will have lost its reason for existence."

(p. 118 – Christianity for the Rest of Us – Diana Butler Bass)

So I want this series to be not only about prayer – but to use it to teach some different ways of praying – we'll do some practicing...and hopefully by end July – you will have some sense of a renewed prayer journey – or perhaps have found some ways to pray that are helpful because they are suited particularly to your temperament or lifestyle...

A good thought to hold onto as we journey to re-build our physical building – on a side bar – you can expect in the next week – a letter from the Church Council about a new development we are following around our building which holds out some exciting possibilities...look for it (that's a bit of a teaser)

This is what this series is looking like: remembering that like any good journey, trip or holiday – you can make a plan by looking at the travel guides and websites – but it could change because when

you get to the first stop – something may happen, some encounter, discovery, need – not covered by the books – that opens up new possibilities...

Jesus: Give us a Prayer:

June 27 – Jesus: Give us a Prayer: Beginning with the Prayer Jesus Taught

July 4 – Jesus: Give us a Prayer: Let's start with Silence...listening, not speaking...

July 11 – Jesus: Give us a Prayer: Praying as an Individual – Centering Prayer, the Breath Prayer and the Examen

July 18 – Jesus: Give us a Prayer: Praying the Scriptures: Lectio Divina, Ignatian Prayer and the Psalms

July 25th – Jesus: Give us a Prayer: Praying with and for others...

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Jesus was about prayer... (Quoting the Empty Bell Website – Christian Prayer: Silence and Dancing between Knowing and Unknowing)

His life was mapped with geography of prayer

- All four gospels tell us Jesus prayed
- He prayed along on mountains and in the wilderness
- He prayed on roads, in people's homes and in temples
- He prayed along with God and he prayed with and for others
- He prayed out loud and he prayed silently
- The prayers that we hear in the words of the gospel often reflect or even repeat prayers found in Jewish scriptures
- Most often his prayers assume God is a consistent loving presence not an arbitrary wrathful jealous or vindictive one – who will always protect and guide him and never abandon him
- Jesus prayers assume that he is, in a way in love with God and that he himself is beloved by God

- His prayers also suggest he knows himself to be simultaneously at one with God and also distinct with God
- He never provided us with a detailed developmental program of prayer – in gave one specific prayer – The Lord’s Prayer

Introducing the Lord’s Prayer

I though let’s start by looking at the one prayer Jesus taught his disciples...

The disciples come to Jesus according to Luke and say: Jesus teach us to pray – just like John taught his disciples...

A more accurate translation of that verse is not that they were asking Jesus to teach them how to pray...

But rather...they were asking – Jesus give us a prayer...

Give us the words...

They are not asking for magic hocus pocus formulas or words...rather they want

A language that they can use for prayer which will help form them as Jesus disciples...

Jesus gives them what we call the Lord’s Prayers – a summary – Martin Luther, the great 16th Century Reformer called this prayer - “ a summary of the whole gospel:

And since we’re in World Cup Soccer Season – we could say that Jesus was giving them the boundaries of the playing field...here’s the field that you play the game of being my disciples...

Why did they want that...?

They had not forgotten how to pray – as religious and devout Jewish men and women they would have known how to pray through their home lives and in and through the temple and synagogue.

The content of what they had prayed for and how it had developed their own consciousness of God as reflected in their society was not cutting it as they walked and learned with Jesus...they needed a new language to help them see the mission he was calling them to and how Jesus understood God.

...a prayer that would transform their hearts, minds and bodies into Jesus’ disciples....

Cynthia Bourgeault – teacher of contemplative prayer in her book – [The Wisdom of Jesus p. 27](#)

Challenges us to really engage in prayer so that we might understand that Jesus

Did not come

To get us into heaven and guarantee the afterlife

To give us a set of quaint proverbs for daily living

To make us good or virtuous or moral

She reminds us that the over familiarity and domestication of Jesus has bred contempt in western culture

Jesus is nice and he wants us to be nice too"

But rather...he came

"Proposing a total meltdown and recasting of human consciousness, bursting through the tiny accord-selfhood that we arrived on the planet with into the oak of our fully realized personhood. He pushes us towards it, teases us, taunts us, encourages us and ultimately walks us there."

Breaking down the Lord's Prayer

"Our Father..."

Roberta C Bondi – Learning to Pray (Internet)

As soon as we begin to pray or think about praying – we stumble upon some obstacles

- Prayer is kind of embarrassing, personal and touchy feely – something that's not easy to talk about or do with others
- We get hung up on the right words, right theology – think we need to know so much and we often use terms of duty – ought or should when we talk about our relationship to God

That's pretty deadly killer

Theresa Of Avila – point of the Jesus giving the prayer words to the disciples...Prayer is nothing more than a conversation with God who loves me.

- We carry around images of God which govern our hearts that are often judgmental, terrifying, distant, frightening negative and we often form them from our own human experience and relationships that if they are negative – they become destructive

Our Father...

Jesus knew full well in his life and the life of the world he lived in the reality of abusive and violent fathers, rulers, kings and tyrants...

And he engaged that critically...and took on that tradition to proclaim that God was something different and did not reflect that reality...

The word we translate as Father is "Abba" – some commentators suggest it translates best as Daddy...

Think about it for a moment – I can tell you the difference in tone, relationship, distance and closeness when my daughter addresses me as "Father" – which is stiff, formal and distancing or "Daddy" which is close and intimate...

Now the point of this term is not that God is male or that God can only be addressed in male pronouns as there are many images and metaphors of God that are female...

The point is – whether you address your prayers to God as Our Father or Our Mother – either are wholly appropriate...

Is that Jesus was saying – that we address God beginning in prayer with a term that reflects intimacy and relationship with God...

Not the famous Monty Python Prayer – O God you are so very very big and we are so very very small – though humorous suggest a huge power differential and hierarchy

This is addressing God – who is not remote, violent or overbearing...as some dominant violent parent

But as one who is interested in relationship, supportive and caring...someone who in Jesus has come closer – incarnation...

And not as my father – but as ours...all of ours – all of the people of the world....

Internet:

"God is not a father and a king. God is not male. God is not a claimer of privilege. God is like the mum or dad who really cares (and confronts us with reality) who is holy and makes you feel holy. So prayer is an activity of intimacy and awe and thus a model for all relationships. It is the language of the kingdom; it brings the gift of the Spirit."

Hallowed be your name!

Your name is sacred, respected, holy, sanctified

So holy that Jewish people don't even utter the name of God – in Hebrew scripture the term YHWH without vowels is used...

Because the reality is we constantly profane the name of God...

- Used in swearing and cursing – God damn you – not what God desires
- Favorite – reality shows or when things are given away on TV – on my God, oh my God – seems so superficial
- Or the God is on my side...over and against your side...

Mark Twain's War Prayer....dictated by Mark Twain [Samuel Clemens] in 1904 in advance of his death in 1910.

O Lord our Father, our young patriots, idols of our hearts, go forth to battle -- be Thou near them! With them -- in spirit -- we also go forth from the sweet peace of our beloved firesides to smite the foe. O Lord our God, help us to tear their soldiers to bloody shreds with our shells; help us to cover their smiling fields with the pale forms of their patriot dead; help us to drown the thunder of the guns with the shrieks of their wounded, writhing in pain; help us to lay waste their humble homes with a hurricane of fire; help us to wring the hearts of their unoffending widows with unavailing grief; help us to turn them out roofless with little children to wander unfriended the wastes of their desolated land in rags and hunger and thirst, sports of the sun flames of summer and the icy winds of winter, broken in spirit, worn with travail, imploring Thee for the refuge of the grave and denied it -- for our sakes who adore Thee, Lord, blast their hopes, blight their lives, protract their bitter pilgrimage, make heavy their steps, water their way with their tears, stain the white snow with the blood of their wounded feet! We ask it, in the spirit of love, of Him Who is the Source of Love, and who is the ever-faithful refuge and friend of all that are sore beset and seek His aid with humble and contrite hearts. Amen.

And so then we pray:

Your Kingdom (realm, community, vision of the world, shalom) come on earth...As it is in heaven

So notice the movement is not us up and away to God...but rather God's realm down to us and among us...

And it's your Kingdom...not mine...not someone else's...not like it is now...because we are still praying it...

Impose your imperial rule – usurp in Jesus' time – the realm of Rome and Caesar

With that heavenly banquet and feasting table that everyone can be a part of

In that world where swords are beaten into ploughshares and spears into pruning hooks and we will not lift up sword against our neighbor and neither shall we study war any more...the military industrial complex...

The reign of compassion and pray it Jesus said – till it comes in yourself and flows out into the world and the G8 and the G 20 leaders here it to

And then day by day...work with us God on the really hard stuff...

Our daily bread – what does that mean in a world where 20% of the world uses 80% of its resources?

In a world where being confused between what we need and what we think we need has led the world to the brink of disaster with an still gushing oil spill, with global warming, a global economic crisis and a world made of up failed or failing nation states...

Forgive us as we forgive those who trespass against us

Lead us not into temptation or hard times

In other word in those three huge areas – move us forward... (Bill Long – Internet – Commentary on Luke 11:1-12)

We have to pray for those things because our lives are like hard, hard ground that needs a lot of cultivation before the seeds can be planted...

Life makes "the earth of our hearts" become parched, weed infested and hard as flint...

The hard lumps have to be broken

The ground turned

The weeds pulled out

The ground watered

And only then...we affirm inclosing...

Because it's your world – not mine, not yours – even though we act like it is...

Your Kingdom

The power, the glory – they are yours forever because after all you created it and everything in it including us...

Amen...so be it...

And then the passage concludes with those two parable/stories underlining the friendship of God...Jesus lived in a culture where hospitality was a requirement – like many Semitic cultures...It was expected to be given and if it wasn't – a person was shamed

So understanding that – the story makes sense...

A friend knocks upon another friend's door in the middle of the night and needs help

And even though his friend is in bed, he's sleeping, his children are sleeping, the place is locked down for the night and he's a bit annoyed...of course he will get up and help his friend...it is what is expected...

And if that is like it between us humans – so much more will it be so between God and us...

In closing:

From Coretta Scott King:

Prayer was a wellspring of strength and inspiration during the Civil Rights Movement. Throughout the movement, we prayed for greater human understanding. We prayed for

The safety of our compatriots in the freedom struggle. We prayed for victory in our nonviolent protests, for brotherhood and sisterhood among people of all races, for reconciliation and the fulfillment of the Beloved Community.

For my husband, Martin Luther King, Jr. prayer was a daily source of courage and strength that gave him the ability to carry on in even the darkest hours of our struggle.

I remember one very difficult day when he came home bone-weary from the stress that came with his leadership of the Montgomery Bus Boycott. In the middle of that night, he was awakened by a threatening and abusive phone call, one of many we received throughout the movement. On this particular occasion, however, Martin had had enough.

After the call, he got up from bed and made himself some coffee. He began to worry about his family, and all of the burdens that came with our movement weighed heavily on his soul. With his head in his hands, Martin bowed over the kitchen table and prayed aloud to God: "Lord, I am taking a stand for what I believe is right. The people are looking to me for leadership, and if I stand before them without strength and courage, they will falter. I am at the end of my powers. I have nothing left. I have nothing left. I have come to the point where I can't face it alone.

Later he told me, "At that moment, I experienced the presence of the Divine as I had never experienced Him before. It seemed as though I could hear a voice saying: 'Stand up for righteousness; stand up for truth; and God will be at our side forever.'" When Martin stood up from the table, he was imbued with a new sense of confidence, and he was ready to face anything.

--Coretta Scott King from "Standing in the Need of Prayer" as published by The Free Press, a division of Simon & Schuster.

NB – the invitation through the week was to take some time each day and pray the Lord's Prayer slowly – eating it slowly like one would a good meal which you would want to savor – instead of rushing through it – noting on a piece of paper what you heard while doing that – what came to your mind, what you thought of, what images did you see or think of...