

A Personal Version of the Lord's Prayer

Jeff Olson, May 28, 2017

Thank you...

A few weeks ago I decided I wanted to give a sermon this morning centered around my experience with The Lord's Prayer. I had a personal version of The Lord's prayer that I wanted to share with you and pray with you. However, the bombing of children and parents in Manchester, England earlier this week gave me pause. I had a real gut-check. In the face of this pain, is The Lord's Prayer really what is most relevant? Is this really what I want to talk about? Well... yes, it is. And I will come back to it, but I do want to put it into context here first.

I believe that the difficulties of the world, in Manchester and elsewhere, and the difficulties of our daily lives, invite us to decide who we want to be in relation to that. We have the opportunity to become a source of light and love in the midst of madness when it swirls around us. We have the opportunity to be a lighthouse in the storm – a source of re-assurance and comfort and direction to those blinded and tossed by the crashing waves.

We saw the light in Manchester when in a remembrance ceremony Thursday, the crowd spontaneously began singing “Don't look back in anger” from a popular song and a local poet, Tony Walsh, so eloquently reminded those gathered of their heritage and generosity. We especially saw it this week in New Orleans when the mayor Mitch Landrieu directed that four Confederate Monuments be removed. In response to the vitriolic resistance from some quarters, he gave a speech of such stunning moral clarity, so moving, so inspiring, so humble, it spread goodwill across the country and across the internet. We see the light every day in ourselves in those moments when a friend or loved one does something that triggers our irritation, and we take a step back from a fight and remember who we are and who we want to be.

The tired, old strategies of fight or flight don't work anymore. To be effective, to be clearly and observably effective, we need new ways of being, new ways of thinking.

So how do we get there? And how do we sustain it?

Jesus has said, “I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit.” If we stay connected with Source, stay connected with God, we are fed and life flows through us. To the extent that we cut ourselves off from the vine, we wither and die, or cease to grow. We burn out, or stagnate, and life loses it's meaning. Let us instead find ways to stay connected to God.

One of my favorite authors, Paul Ferrini, writes in *Return to the Garden*:

It doesn't matter what spiritual practice you do as long as it takes you into your heart and helps you connect with the Source of love. If it does that, then stay with it throughout all the twists and turns of your life. Hold on to your practice. It is your lifeline. When storms come up unexpectedly, it keeps you afloat. Ever so gradually, it brings you home.

So how do you stay connected with the Source of love? With spiritual practice. And what is your spiritual practice? For me, one part of my spiritual practice is prayer, and a part of that is The Lord's Prayer, which brings us back to the sermon topic for today.

I have had an off and on again, changing relationship with the Lord's Prayer. I figure I heard or said the Lord's Prayer about 700 times growing up. I do not recall it ever meaning anything to me. It was just words.

The first time I heard it translated from the Aramaic language, the language Jesus spoke, instead of the Greek, it was an eye-opener for me. It felt really good. Lake Street Church has a long history with the Aramaic version of The Lord's Prayer. The Abwoon group at 9:30 every Sunday morning is based in it, and in the music, it is a part of every communion service we have. The Aramaic and Lake Street Church touched me even 12 years ago when I lived in Oak Park. I met Marcia Heeter and Peter Slonek at a Dances of Universal Peace gathering in Oak Park, dancing the Lord's Prayer. A rhythmic, prayer-on-your-feet experience, I found a peace that was highly satisfying.

For a long time that version of the prayer worked for me. But Aramaic is a metaphorical language, so there are many possible translations, which I gradually discovered and began collecting. Neil Douglas Klotz, by himself has ten different translations. Dale Allen Hoffman and Angelica Shaffer wrote others, and in recent years you can find many other translations or interpretations on the internet. I wanted to find the "perfect" translation for me, but there was always some part of any version that didn't quite work for me. I was a little picky.

Rev Ron Roth put a twist on what I was looking for when he taught me that the Lord's Prayer was more powerful when it was spoken as an affirmation, a declaration of God's truth, rather than as a series of requests or pleadings. An example of this is the choir singing "Total Praise" which we heard a few minutes ago. I am still reverberating from the power of it. Listen to the lyrics: "Your peace you give me in time of the storm. You are the source of my strength. You are the strength of my life." It would be weaker to say "Give me peace in time of the storm. Be my strength." One is a request, as if you don't have it yet; the other has the power of a declaration of one's truth. The power of the singing was in perfect alignment with the lyrics.

The words we use in The Lord's Prayer are important, but far more important is our attitude towards it. If we want a deeper connection with God, we have to be open to feeling it, to hearing it. If we want a clear channel to our intuition, to our creativity, to Source itself, we have to decide to listen.

A couple months ago, I opened to it in a new way. I was looking for my prayer sheet and couldn't find it. That finally pushed me out of the confining box of having to find the perfect prayer and I just surrendered my perceived notions, and began praying. I began praying The Lord's Prayer and followed whatever came to mind, a complete mash-up, freely borrowing from anything or everything I had read, including however I was led, or from whatever I was dealing with that day.

It was a great feeling of freedom. On some days I did this, I would elaborate on one piece of the prayer and end up taking off so that it turned out to be a different prayer altogether. It didn't matter if my words were clumsy or redundant, it didn't matter if I shifted from "we" to "I" and back again. It didn't matter if I finished the prayer or not. It didn't matter if the prayer turned out in part to be a

pleading “help me” prayer or not. But each time I did this, I was open to feeling whatever came through.

And so now I would like to share with you, to pray with you one version of The Lord’s prayer, as it came to me a few weeks ago.

We will start with a piano piece called “Beyond Space and Time” by a California friend of mine, Ryan Rigoli. It’s so beautiful, you may find yourself communing with God just by the music, not even needing a Prayer.

Our Father

Our Father, Abwoon D'Bashmaya, Oh Holy One, Oh Thou, from whom the breath of life comes, who moves in us and through us, who nurtures us and cares for us...

You of many names, who art in heaven, who is everywhere, in all the stars and galaxies, and still beyond this physical world, beyond all space and time, beyond all fear in a place of joy and radiance.

Hallowed be thy name, holy is your presence, sacred is your spirit.

--

Thy Kingdom come. Your Kingdom comes now, into our hearts. into this church. In the words of the song, “Your Holy Spirit is welcome here. Come flood this place and fill the atmosphere.” I open this morning to feel the Kingdom of God within me.

Thy will be done. Now for this moment, I let go of my ego driven will. I let go of my worries about health, shelter, and my place in the family. I let go of any fears that would block me from being my true self. I open myself to your guidance, to your essence within me so that your will is my will, so that I can serve you and others through you.

On earth as it is in heaven. Heaven come down... Can you hear it?-- the sound of heaven touching earth. I open myself today to be a channel of your spirit, not just in a time of prayer, not just in the heavenly realm, but in my day-to-day routines, in all my relationships, in my work, in the practical decisions of life... on earth as it is in heaven.

--

You give us this day our daily bread. You give us this day the bread of life and wisdom. You bless us with enough. We put aside any worries about sustenance, and accept the abundance of your love.

You give us all that we are willing to allow. You give us all we desire when we are in alignment with You. Help me God to soften my resistance, to remind me of my worthiness, so that I may receive your many blessings.

You forgive us our trespasses. You forgive us our mistakes, our complaining. You forgive me when I sink into shame for not measuring up to whom I feel I should be. You know there are times when we are hurtful to someone else, perhaps because we ourselves have also been hurt.

And you forgive us because you see us from a higher plane, you see a larger version of us, you see us learning in this illusion of a lifetime, knowing we will join you in a larger reality.

As we forgive those who trespass against us. We can see others even in their pain and attack and still see their essence, whole and complete, moving toward a higher realization. Help us O God to see all those we have a complaint with, to see them as You see them.

Let us not be lost in superficial temptations. Temptations to defend ourselves, to grasp at more money, at more recognition, more control, more love. Today I claim for myself the peace of being enough, having enough, doing enough.

You deliver us from all that keep us from our true purpose. We accept your help and declare ourselves ready to become closer to whom we are meant to be.

For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory.
From you comes the astonishing fire, the strength to act, the song that beautifies all and renews itself from age to age. For ever and ever.

And so it is. Amen.

Thank you especially to Neil Douglas-Klotz, whose books, and music and dances first brought me to The Lord's Prayer.