

The university I attended was larger than my hometown. None of my circle of friends from high school attended this university and I went away to school as far away as my parents would let me go. So, I knew no one and my first week or so of school was lonely. To combat my loneliness and homesickness, I chose to soothe myself by playing show tunes on the piano in the common room of our dormitory in the hour after dinner.

I play the piano well enough for the tunes to be recognizable and in a short time, a few people gathered to hear me play and to sing along with me. Over the course of a few weeks, the few people grew larger and we took turns playing the piano and singing our favorite Broadway hits together. We did this all of my freshman year and these people formed the core of my friendships for the entire four years of college. One of my fellow musicians later became my college roommate and a life long friend.

In the way of new friendships, we took the time to get to know one another, about our families and hobbies. We soon discovered that we both went to church, albeit different ones. Through Edith's circle of friends I was introduced to Campus Crusade for Christ. I quickly learned that evangelicals and fundamentalists had a different understanding of Scripture than I did and their way of worship was a new experience. With Edith's

help, I learned to pray extemporaneously, unselfconsciously and confidently.

This was a very different way to pray than the formal prayers contained in the Book of Common Prayer, or the running silent dialogue I had with God.

Thanks to Edith and Campus Crusade I was forced to articulate my faith and my - at that time limited - understanding of Christianity as expressed in a rural Episcopal Church. I was stretched and I grew. I trust I caused others to stretch and grow too. I am forever grateful for this experience.

I invited Edith to my church and she invited me to hers. We later compared notes and asked questions. Edith's church was American Baptist. What surprised me was no liturgy, no structure that I could readily figure out. Prayers and the sermon were long. But what caught my attention was that the Lord's Prayer was NOT included in the service.

When I later asked her why, my recollection of her reply was on the order of Baptists don't repeatedly say the Lord's Prayer so that it isn't robbed of its meaning.

Now that's something to think about. Our Book of Common Prayer and our repetition of our prayers are meant to form and shape us as Christians. Certainly in teaching us the Lord's Prayer, our Lord was

showing his disciples how to approach God and to pray in a manner that shapes us to desire what God wants for and from us. Yet, does saying it by rote each week or even every day rob it of its meaning for us?

In the event that some of us might answer “yes,” let’s look at Luke’s version of the prayer and see if we can restore meaning to the essentials of this prayer. Jesus starts out by saying, “Father, you are holy.” By calling God “Father,” Jesus uses a term that can be found in Deuteronomy and in Malachi.<sup>1</sup> Yet, he is introducing a concept that wasn’t particularly familiar to his disciples, who like we Episcopalians, were more accustomed to more formal prayer. Jesus is demonstrating his intimacy with God and showing us his relationship with God. We are invited into that intimate relationship with God.

In calling God holy, Jesus recognizes that God is the source of all things holy, Jesus shares in this holiness, he passes it down to the disciples and on into us. When we recognize that God’s name is hallowed, we let this holiness soak into us in such a way that God can feel right at home.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> ————, “Teach us to Pray,” *Synthesis Year C Proper 12 - Scripture July 24, 2016*.

<sup>2</sup> Meda Stamper, [www.workingpreacher.org](http://www.workingpreacher.org), “Commentary on Luke 11:1013 July 24, 2016”

Now we ask God to allow God's Kingdom to be made manifest. This is a request that God *wants* us to make. Let's think about this one for a minute. In God's Kingdom the poor, the oppressed, the widowed, the orphan, the dispossessed - the least among us find justice and peace. In our culture that means that every racial minority, every poor person, every disadvantaged person, anyone who is systemically oppressed has pride of place in God's Kingdom. Do we *really* want that? If we remind ourselves that we will have all we need and some of what we want in God's Kingdom, *can* we want and hope for that? I think we do.

Next, we ask for food each day. If you pardon the pun, this seems like small potatoes compared to asking for God's Kingdom to happen. Maybe Jesus suggests this as part of our prayer to show us that nothing is beneath God's notice or concern if we are concerned about it. Certainly Jesus is demonstrating that we can ask God for anything, that we can turn to God in trust. We ask God to fulfill our true needs, that which is essential to our well being - not an over abundance, not excess. Our collect this morning asks for our daily bread in another way, it asks that we avoid being consumed by material things - over abundance and excess and focus on eternal things. In praying for daily bread, for that which is essential, we are

expressing a desire to be aware of Jesus' presence in lives, to not be so distracted that we miss it.<sup>3</sup>

We are then instructed to ask for forgiveness of our sins - there's a dependent clause "as we forgive those indebted to us." I know that I am not as good at forgiveness as I hope God is. And this version of the prayer acknowledges that our human forgiveness is not as expansive as God's forgiveness. Both in asking for and in our limited ability to forgive, we express our desire to be in relationship. This request is essential for both our corporate and individual lives. In being forgiven, we hope to model our love on God's mercy toward US. We are also being given a signal that those who are indebted to us, that money is literally involved. So, how we use money is a spiritual issue.

In giving us this prayer, Jesus shows us an intimate connection with God. He shows us how to pray for what we pray. He demonstrates that we are asking God to take charge of our life. We acknowledge that not only is God the source of holiness, only God can bring justice and peace to the world.

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

In the short parables that follow the prayer, Jesus let's us know that it can feel to us like God is asleep, unmindful of our urgent need. Jesus himself, hanging on the cross, was met with God's seemingly deafening silence. Yet in persistence, God does respond. There's a certain amount of ambiguity about this unflattering picture of God.

Knowing that the Lord's Prayer is seeking to shape us to desire what God wants from us, then perhaps Jesus is assuring us that when we ask for and look for those abilities, attributes and things that God wants for us, we are sure to find it. The Lord's Prayer is the foundational prayer of our faith. Christians of every denomination know it and pray it. It is the one prayer that unites all of us. Yet as I learned in those long ago college days, there are many ways to pray. When we engage in prayer no matter how expressed, we build on our relationship with God. Through that relationship we are equipped to be in relationships with each other. For that, let us give thanks to God!

-Amen.