

Psalm 103: 1-14

Genesis 2.19-3.419

2 Corinthians 6.13-18

Today will be the first of 5 sermons based on the Lord's Prayer. I had been planning on doing a sermon series on the Lord's Prayer since we took the poll so long ago based on what was the preference of the congregation as to what we should petition God to forgive us of – sins debts or debtors. In the meantime something very exciting happened. For those of you who don't know of my wonderful experience last April at Bethany College, allow me to share a bit.

I had gotten a flyer with an invitation to the Oreon E. Scott Lectures at Bethany College in West Virginia. I seemed to have totally overlooked the section where they put the title of the lecture series, so I was not fully aware of what the lecture was about. But I signed up for it anyway, because the speaker, Bonnie Thurston, wrote a book on *Merton and Loretto* – referring to the Monastery and Motherhouse in central Kentucky where I used to go regularly for spiritual retreats between 1976- 1992.

I had it in my head that the series was going to be on something related to that experience of Catholic spirituality and prayer. So I traveled there and discovered that the series was on preaching the Lord's Prayer. This brought back to my memory one of the lessons I had learned and had used all those years ago at Loretto, based on the Lord's Prayer. I recall the suggestion being made that we take the Lord's Prayer and contemplate upon it – let it float through our awareness and ruminate on it. And even to “pray it” one word at a time.

I know I often start to say the prayer and just get stopped on the first two words – or even the first – Our – who encompassed that “our”? Who is ‘in’ this word and who is out? And could that our mean also the earth that god gave us to care for? “Father” – what a loaded word Father is – we will come back to this - so let me move on quickly to the combination of the two words - “Our Father” – how those words echo throughout history uniting us personally with all those who came before and will come after who recognized the Father of Jesus as our Father as well – resulting in a radical siblinghood. So, in finding my way to Bethany for these lectures, I discovered God took care of me yet again, in spite of my lack of awareness.

Now, I would say, “let us stand for the Gospel, which is the Lord's Prayer” but what we say each week is not fully in any book of our bible. It is a conglomeration of sources in Luke and in Matthew – and some say in a variety of other resources, including the Didache, which is the common name of a brief early Christian treatise (dated by most scholars to the late first/early second century). It appears to give us some insight into how many of our early rituals came to be – moving from happenstance of the Jesus movement into rituals of new religion. Rabbi Aron Mendes Chumaceiro has said that nearly all the elements of the prayer have counterparts in the Jewish Bible and Deuterocanonical books. So what we repeat when we say the “Our Father” is not directly out of our scriptures as is, but have somewhere along the way become accepted as it is.

Some scholars say that it was never intended to be repeated in a ritualistic fashion – but that Jesus was just giving an example of how a typical prayer should be. And what he was offering was pretty amazing. It was so personal and real to the human experience.

So let us start with the beginning of the prayer, “Our Father which [is] in the heavens.” This is – the invocation – the address to God. The word “our” has also brought some discussion amongst scholars – in a way you may not have expected, because the word “our” connotes to some the emphasis on the profoundly communal nature of our faith. The question arose as a result of the awareness that being a Christian means being a part of a community – and calls us to greater radical connectedness with humanity and the earth – so much so, that in the 4th century there were some pretty heated debates about whether or not hermits should be allowed to say the prayer!

Now, we cannot forget that for some people, the word Father can be a painful word. Some Fathers have been extreme in their abuses and make it difficult for some to say the second word. Bonnie Thurston gave me a perspective at Bethany which helped me in helping those people. She suggested we imagine the Father being Jesus' Father rather than our own failed Father, and that we become blood kin to God through the blood of Christ.

There are three petitions that follow this address which focus on God – in fact, we are asking God to be God here. They are: Hallowed be *your* name; *Your* kingdom come, *your* will be done; on earth as it is in heaven. God’s name is holy – because to know a name of something is to know its essence – we are drawn in, made part of the making of the holy when we say these words. Our Father who art in heaven hallowed be your name – we are a part of making that holy with our respect and we are called into being a part of the holy-making when we enter into this relationship.

Thy Kingdom come – God’s kingdom is not to be only somewhere else – we are calling for God’s kingdom to be a part of our reality – a special place - a condition of life - to those who have put themselves under God’s rule – God’s holy kingdom is already and yet not yet.

Thy will be done. This is the perhaps the most dangerous of all the parts of this prayer because it calls us into awareness and action. We are praying this prayer together and when we say that Our Father’s Will is to be done – we aren’t saying, “you do it God,” or “you do it brother,” or “you do it sister,” we are saying it is ours to be done. It is our task on this earth to be aware *together* and serve our Father’s will together.

But the prayer offers the power and the protection and the love and compassion of God as we do this. Bonnie Thurston warned us at the beginning of this series that this prayer is very powerful and can be very dangerous, she said, “Don’t pray it if you aren’t ready to do it.”

Some of you may remember that on Mother’s Day I read a long prose writing by the woman who wrote the Battle Hymn of the Republic, so our of fairness, I am going to close this sermon with a poem which blends the Lords prayer and father’s Day into one wonderful mix.

**Father's Day Prayer, A 21st Century Africana Worship Resource, by
The Rev. Marilyn E. Thornton**

Our Father who art in heaven,
bless the fathers who are on earth;
Those who work hard every day
to light a path and show the way;
Those who forget and don't perceive
the devastation when they leave.

Hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come;
thy Will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Help the earthly fathers know
and praise your name in daily flow,
Making no difference between
the holy realm and worldly scene.

Give us this day our daily bread.
And for the dads without a job,
Strengthen their faith in Provider God.
Feed them with the bread of love
The wine of justice
The meat of determination
The fruit of the spirit;
That they will remember how Jesus gave himself for us
Demonstrating that there are many ways for a MAN TO
GIVE.

And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who
trespass against us.
Teach our men the ways of peace
Desiring that all violence shall cease
Whether husband/wife, parents/children
Black on black, nation to nation
Neither tongue, hand, gun, knife
No shock and awe, no fiery towers . . .
Help humanity learn HOW TO FORGIVE.

And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.
Guide all daddies to be wise.
Give them strength of soul to seek the prize
Of a world without racism or greed,
A world where no child is left in need,
A world where cheaters cannot win,
Salvation reigns, there is no sin.
For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory,
forever, Amen.