

July 25, 2010
Lectionary 17
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Sometimes change is good. It can even be great. That's what being smack-dab in the middle of summer reminds us—we get a break from routine by going on vacations, we enjoy different kinds of exercise than during much of the rest of the year because we're able to be outside: we walk, bike, run, swim. We dig out the shorts and sandals and wear an entirely different wardrobe. It's freeing to change things up a bit...

But then in mid-summer, this most familiar Lord's Prayer presents itself in our weekly lectionary—this prayer that has remained with us through time and translations. And it reminds us again of routine. Are there any other words spoken to God that we say as much as these? As a community we sing or say this prayer during worship, at weddings and funerals, in Sunday school, and church meetings. I often say it with one or two others when I make a pastoral visit. It is foundational to our life of faith.

But it is more than that. It is a reminder that we, too, are disciples, hungry for a connection with God and a way to communicate with God. We come here, and we go about our days and nights, asking, knocking and seeking that God would give us what we need. And more than that, that our lives would be centered in God.

When we say something we've said all our lives, the words can lose their meaning, or we mutter them without thinking what we're praying. That's one reason why the Lord's Prayer from the New Zealand Prayer book has become a popular one used in retreats or spiritual direction. Maybe you've even used it yourself to change up your own prayer routine or shed new light on your relationship with the Holy. Listen to the poetic prayer which finds its inspiration from the beloved Lord's Prayer Christians have prayed for centuries.

Eternal Spirit,
Earth-maker, Pain bearer, Life-giver,
Source of all that is and that shall be,
Father and Mother of us all,
Loving God, in whom is heaven:

The hallowing of your name echo through the universe!
The way of your justice be followed by the peoples of the world!
Your heavenly will be done by all created beings!
Your commonwealth of peace and freedom
sustain our hope and come on earth!

With the bread we need for today,
feed us.
In the hurts we absorb from one another,
forgive us.
In times of temptation and test,
strengthen us.
From trial too great to endure,
spare us.
From the grip of all that is evil,
free us.
For you reign in the glory of the power that is love,
now and forever. *Amen.*

I like using this prayer occasionally. It's similar enough to the Lord's Prayer that the pray-er can recognize the themes that Jesus uses as he teaches us to pray. But it's different enough to make us pause and reflect on exactly what it is we are praying for when we say the Lord's Prayer. We are praying to be part of God's realm and sacredness, to have our daily needs (not wants) met, and that relationships be restored.

The Lord's Prayer lays out the practical basics of what God's will looks like.
Enough bread for everyone (and clean drinking water, health care, shelter and clothing.)
Forgiveness is practiced and grace is received.
God will accompany us in the face suffering and evil.

When we pray the Lord's Prayer we're praying more than simple petitions to be recited. Jesus gives us a model for a prayerful life. Instead of reciting a laundry list of requests to heal the sick, or giving our wish list for all the things we want, as if we were talking to Santa Claus, Jesus invites us into relationship with God through prayer. He offers us the opportunity to approach God whose name is too holy to speak, with the familiarity, boldness, and the trust of a young child running to her parent for both provision and protection.

Jesus teaches us to pray for the coming of God's kingdom—filled with peace and mercy for all. He teaches us to pray for an end to hunger and that all may have the daily bread they need. Jesus teaches us to pray seeking forgiveness, but in the same breath to grant forgiveness to those in need.

There would be no way for us to pray faithfully in Jesus name if it weren't for Jesus' persistent coaching and prodding every Sunday, saying, "when you pray, say this..." You see, God knows what we need before we even say it, but by saying it we begin to act like Christ who suffered and lifted up the poor and needy. When we pray we need to stand ready to become part of the answer to our prayers.

For we can't ask God to feed the hungry if we aren't willing to share from our tables. We can't ask God to bring justice to those who are oppressed without standing alongside them in the struggle. We can't ask God to heal the sick without wanting to be God's instruments of healing and care.

When we pray as Jesus taught us, we open ourselves up to the intimacy that Christ shared with God whom he called daddy; and we open ourselves up to being changed by God's spirit too. Because as we know, change can be good. It can even be great.