

Commentary on the Gospel for Tue, Feb 24th 2015

I am currently in Australia on sabbatical doing research on rural health. I am seeking new ways to energize the way we train health professionals to provide equitable and quality health to rural residents.

Reading the lessons today in a different place strikes quite a different reflection on them, especially the familiar Lord's Prayer. I'm using my sabbatical to think about everything I know in new ways and it is spilling out into my faith experiences as well. I hope I can translate that experience into something meaningful to my readers today.

It is amazing to me that I saw so much of the Lord's Prayer in the book of Isaiah and in the Psalm for today. I began to think about all of those faith tradition messages and how they are embedded in the prayer that Jesus taught us. I started to wonder whether Jesus was in fact drawing on all of them when he came up with that prayer just out of the blue. I think he was thinking about scriptures, of course, because not only did he know them very well, he was the fulfillment of them. It was from that perspective that I made the connections today between the petitions in the prayer and the words of Isaiah and the Psalmist. I invite you to make your own connections following my method....go deeper into Jesus' rich scriptural background. Below each connection, I add my reflection of some of the sentiments I think Jesus was sharing when he invited us to pray the Lord's Prayer.

“Our Father” -- “So shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth”

This is about who God is. We are invited to speak directly to our father, who establishes his authority in everything he says. Sounds like the authority our earthly fathers often held over us, but unlike our earthly fathers, our heavenly father always has time to listen.

“who art in heaven” --“Thus says the Lord; Just as from the heavens the rain and snow come down and do not return there.”

Our Father is the source of all good things and the blessings we receive. We need not think of heaven as some far off place where God holds our long awaited rewards in trust for us. Our heavenly father showers us with blessings come down to earth for our benefit now.

“hallowed be thy name” -- “Glorify the Lord with me, let us together extol his name.”

When we pray the Lord's Prayer with others, we are not just paying lip service respect, we are joining with others to glorify God. I think that is why we always pray this prayer together in church....our faith is even more powerful when we pray respectfully together as a community.

“thy Kingdom come” -- “they have watered the earth, making it fertile and fruitful”

The Kingdom of God comes to us in ordinary experiences, such as the falling rain. God works with us when we are open to the extraordinary in the ordinary.

“thy will be done,” -- “It shall not return to be void, but shall do my will, achieving the end for which I sent it.”

This petition is about trust. God has a plan. We have a big part in it. Something good is happening at all times. We can trust that.

“on earth as it is in heaven.” -- “The Lord is close to the brokenhearted: and those who are crushed in spirit he saves.”

It seems to me that is Jesus’ main message to us. The Lord is close to us on this earth!

“Give us this day our daily bread;” -- giving seed to the one who sows and bread to the one who eats.”

Again and again, Jesus invites us to ask God for what we need.

“and forgive us our trespasses,” -- “Look to him that you may be radiant with joy,”

And, we are invited to ask for forgiveness, which is our need and our greatest joy!

“as we forgive those who trespass against us;” -- “and your faces may not blush with shame.”

There are some strings attached to this one.

“and lead us not into temptation,” -- “When the just cry out, the Lord hears them, and from all their distress he rescues them.”

God rescues us in so many ways every day. We do make mistakes, God expects that, but we do so much better when we seek guidance. Jesus invites us to make calling on God a real habit, just like we would ask our earthly fathers to help us make the right decisions while still respecting our autonomy.

“but deliver us from evil.” -- “The Lord has eyes for the just, and ears for their cry.”

Over and over again the Bible reminds us that we are not lost, no matter what happens to us. Not only can we cry out, we will be heard. Jesus assures us of that.

My final reflection today on this beautiful prayer that gives us so much comfort is that it really helps to continually experience new contexts in which to pray it to make it more powerful in our lives. Just like a sabbatical away from our regular work experience revitalizes the way we think about our callings, we can give our faith sabbatical renewal experiences by praying familiar prayers in new ways. I hope this was helpful and liberating.

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