

It's comical isn't?

For almost two years,  
while we were prerecording our worship services,  
Whit and I would obviously share  
the load of preaching and liturgy.

And usually,

I would write down the Prayers of the People  
but once I didn't write the Lord's Prayer,  
because you know,  
I have it memorized!

I know it by heart!

I didn't need to write it down.

I've been saying that prayer for forever...

Until...until...until

I had to say it by myself,  
with no church,  
no congregation helping me through it,  
no band or choir behind me,  
no pastor standing beside me at the communion table  
...it was just me.

And when it was just me,

I slipped up.

I reworked lines.

I skipped over a petition.

I gummed up the blessing.

Without the community of the faithful

to say it with me,

I could not get through the prayer.

Carol Anne and Matt

can attest to the several failed attempts;

I befuddled it—and now you've seen the proof.



That says something significant  
about this prayer.

    About the nature of its  
        communal petitions and addresses.  
About how being instructed  
to say it with the community;  
    it's *our* Father, give *us our* daily bread,  
        forgive *us our debts*  
        —none of this prayer  
        is about individuality for the sake of wants,  
    but rather this prayer is the flesh and blood,  
    the sinews that literally ties us together  
as members of one body—  
    this is a prayer that goes beyond  
    what is on the page.

What we refer to  
as the Lord's Prayer  
    appears in slightly different versions  
    in two of the gospels.  
    Most of us know Matthew's version by heart  
    —Luke's version changes some words  
        and phrases things a tad differently.  
    People who have studied  
    Greek and early 1<sup>st</sup> century culture  
    more than you and I have,  
say that both Matthew and Luke  
likely got this prayer from another source  
we have since lost.<sup>1</sup>

    It's likely that Luke's version of this prayer  
    is closer to what Jesus might have actually said

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<sup>1</sup> H. Gregory Synder, *Feasting on the Gospels: Luke, Vol. 1* (Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, KY 2014) Luke 11:1-13 pg. 309

and at the same time,  
it is also likely that the author of Luke  
changed the prayer  
for his readers as well.<sup>2</sup>

It might sound like blasphemy  
to change a prayer,  
change something Jesus said.  
“Is the gospel what is written on the page,  
in the words themselves,  
or behind the page,  
in the events to which Scripture bears witness?”<sup>3</sup>  
That’s a hard to pin down.

Sometimes I might argue  
that the gospel can’t be limited to  
only what is on the page,  
can’t be limited only the words themselves—  
there are so many translations of scripture  
that we hold close to our hearts.

My seminary now uses  
the Common English translation of scripture,  
and I haven’t yet made the full switch,  
I can’t quite let go of NRSV.  
The RSV still sits in our pews in the sanctuary.  
Is the gospel the words themselves  
or what is behind the page  
...there is not a simple answer  
to that question.

But we know Luke and Matthew  
both likely changed around  
the words of Jesus’s prayer.  
And while we are not gospel writers,  
per say,  
I don’t think anyone will get struck by lightning  
for saying the prayer

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid. pg.309

<sup>3</sup> Ibid pg.309

that Jesus taught,  
with changes.

Many of us grew up  
saying prayers at bedtime, didn't we?  
Reciting the familiar words,  
*Now I lay me down to sleep...*  
but some of the words to that prayer  
we now find troubling  
—*if I die before I wake*—yikes.

So, the words get edited, changed.

My bedtime prayers as a child  
went like this,  
*Now I lay me down to sleep,  
I pray the Lord my soul to keep,  
through the darkness of the night,  
till the morning,  
sunshine bright.*

Nothing wrong  
with changing to the words  
to a well know prayer.

The Common English Bible translation  
and even The Message translation  
have Luke sounding different  
than what we just read,  
what we are familiar with.  
Listen to it this way:

“Father, uphold the holiness of your name.  
Bring in your kingdom.  
Give us the bread we need for today.  
Forgive our sins, for we also forgive everyone who has wronged us.  
And don't lead us into temptation.”

“Father, reveal who you are.  
Set the world right.  
Keep us alive with three square meals.  
Keep us forgiven with you and forgiving others.

Keep us safe from ourselves and the Devil.”



Our Father who art in heaven...

Father, uphold the holiness of your name...

Father, reveal who you are...

The meaning behind these various revisions  
remains the same.

Though this is a familiar prayer,

we ought not assume

that by asking Jesus to teach them to pray,  
that the disciples didn't already know  
how to pray.

They did.

Judaism is full of wonderful prayers.

But there are elements of surprise

that Jesus uses in this prayer,  
and they are there,

just behind the words on the page.

The first one being,  
the use of the word *Father*.

Now, we have used Father

and male gendered language for God  
throughout our faith's history.

So long in fact,

that this doesn't sound shocking to us at all.

But calling God, Father,

and not just Father,

but more intimate than that

would have been surprising

to the disciples.



We got Tripp a can koozie  
for on Easter for his Topo Chicos  
that says,  
Daddio of the Patio  
—so now the girls will sometimes call him Daddio.

It is with that kind of intimacy,  
that kind of familiarity  
that we hear Jesus  
teaching his disciples to pray,  
*Father hallowed be your name.*

It might be as shocking  
as us reminding ourselves  
that God can be called Mother too.  
Now I'm not making this  
a gendered issue.

To call God Father  
was to personalize God  
in way that Jews  
were not used to doing.  
To call God Mother  
is to personalize God  
in a way that Christians  
are not used to doing.



Is the gospel in the words on the page?

Or is it behind the page?

Is it in the meaning

of God as parent, male or female,

one who will protect and provide?

One who beckons you again and again

to come to the home

prayer can make in you.

Stay with me for one more moment on this.

If we allow ourselves

to explore the meaning behind the page,

or some people say,

read between the lines,

can we see the gospel,

the message of this prayer,

open up

because God is now as close as a parent?

Or God is now as close as the friend

whose door you would knock on

in the middle of the night

because you suddenly

have a guest

and need 3 loaves of bread?!

Lots of bibles

use the word persistence

when they translate

what Jesus is saying about prayer.

Which would mean,

if we take just what is on the page,

it seems that if you are persistent,

you will get what you want

when you ask for it in prayer.

But we know that isn't true.

We know that the truth behind that

is, there are too many times,

the request we make to God

goes unanswered.

Children know all too well  
that persistence is a good tactic  
for trying to get what they want.  
And certainly, God is a good parent.  
Jesus says, “who if your child asks for a fish,  
will give a snake  
instead of a fish?”  
But a good parent also knows  
that giving into persistence  
isn’t healthy good at all.  
So as a good parent,  
surely, we don’t win God over  
by being annoying children...

Scholar Sarah H. Jay asks,  
“If God is such a good Father,  
why [do I sometimes feel like I am]  
holding a snake?”

No, this can’t be a simple lesson  
on persistence in prayer.  
Let’s change the word,  
because there is a better way  
to translate the word for persistence;  
the better translation  
is shamelessness.<sup>4</sup>

Middle Eastern culture  
was steeped in shame/honor culture.  
Hospitality, we know,  
is extremely important for this culture.  
So, if by chance,  
an unexpected guest  
did arrive at your house  
and caught you empty-handed,  
this shame would not be yours,  
but your household’s,  
your whole town,

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<sup>4</sup> H. Gregory Synder



your whole village  
—how could you refuse hospitality?  
You wouldn't!  
—you would put on your big girl, Martha pants  
and do something!  
You would go next door,  
even if it is midnight!

Jesus is brilliant to use the example  
of the middle of the night  
in this short parable,  
because when you wake up your friend  
or your neighbor,  
you know you will be waking up  
the whole family.

They all slept in one room.

So, if you come knocking on the door  
then everyone, parents, kids and even animals  
are going now be awake.  
You, you must disregard your own shame  
at having nothing,  
at being a bother,  
you must be shameless  
in going to your neighbor,  
your friend,  
so that you can ask for help  
to offer another welcome.

Just behind the page.

This isn't a lesson  
to keep on trying.  
But rather instruction  
to, "presume on God,  
as a young child might impose on a parent,  
without regard for convention  
or giving offense."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid. pg.313

These parables of prayer  
invite us to dig deeper  
and recognize that Christ is teaching his disciples  
something extraordinary  
about who God is.

And at the end,  
he reminds the whole community,  
that God's gift to us  
in prayer  
is God's very self.

When we pray,  
we can pray  
approaching God as we would  
a beloved father or mother,  
as a good parent,  
as a friend who with whom we are willing  
to risk our own shame  
or as a parent who we know  
has our best interest at heart  
—if we approach God that way,  
then Luke tells us  
we are given the gift of the Holy Spirit  
—which is God in us.

There is no trick  
about reciting the prayer  
exactly right.

And just on the page,  
this prayer is powerful.  
But behind the page  
this prayer, given to us as a guide  
for our collective faith,  
reminds us,  
that God  
knit us together as the body,  
and we are urged by Christ himself  
to approach God in prayer  
as a good parent and a good friend

with whom there is no  
shame or offense.

This is not holier  
than other prayers.

There is not one version  
that is better than others.

But in this prayer,  
we are given a glimpse of something happening  
beyond just words.  
Just behind the pages of scripture.

In Luke, Jesus says,  
if you know how to give good gifts,  
then how much more  
will the heavenly Father  
give the Holy Spirit  
to those who ask him!"

We are promised that the gift of this prayer  
is the Holy Spirit,  
which means the gift of this prayer isn't just  
communication with God,  
as much as  
communion with God.<sup>6</sup>

That's something you can't really mess up.  
Thanks, be.

Through the power of the Christ, and the abiding presence of the Holy  
Spirit...let us pray...

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<sup>6</sup> Lewis F. Galloway, pg.313