

Summerland United Church
 July 27 Stepping Out: Stepping Stones

Threshold and Christ Candle

We continue to engage in the stories of Jesus that take place beyond the walls this week. Knowing that most of Jesus' ministry took place outside in the fields and hillsides, or in peoples homes and as he and his friends walked through towns, villages and countrysides. The followers of Jesus, one day, ask him to teach them to pray. What follow's is known as "The Lords Prayer" or "The Prayer of Jesus" many of us know it by rote – and knowing it by rote can lead, sometimes, to it losing all meaning. Yet contained with this seemingly simplicit prayer is all we need to be in relationship with God and with each other.

Throughout service today we will experience a number of different versions, translations and paraphrases of this prayer that has been an essential piece of our faith for so long.

As we light our candle this morning, I share a version written by Bruce Sanguin:

*Loving Presence, luminous in all creation, hallowed be your name.
 Thy kin-dom come.*

*May we reflect on earth the yielding perfection of the heavens.
 Help us to receive an illumed measure from the earth this day.*

Forgive us when we trespass against others, human and other than human, as we forgive others who trespass against us. Keep us on the path of wisdom when we are tempted to take the selfish path.

*May it be your rule we follow, your power we exercise, and your radiance that allures.
 May this be the truth that guides our lives, the ground from which our future will grow,
 until we meet again.*

Opening Prayer

Heavenly Father, heavenly Mother, Holy and blessed is your true name.
 We pray for your reign of peace to come, We pray that your good will be done,
 Let heaven and earth become one.
 Give us this day the bread we need, Give it to those who have none.
 Let forgiveness flow like a river between us, From each one to each one.
 Lead us to holy innocence Beyond the evil of our days —
 Come swiftly Mother, Father, come.
 For yours is the power and the glory and the mercy:
 Forever your name is All in One.

~ written by Parker Palmer

We Gather Together

Praise you, God.

You are very great in every way!

Please give us the things we need to today.

For You will give us what we need.

We're sorry that we do wrong things and disobey. For You forgive us when we say we are truly sorry.

God, help us in everything we do.

Please help us to live for you all through each day.

For You always listen when we talk – help us to listen when You Talk, Amen.

~Big Bible Storybook

Scripture Reading: Luke 11:1-10

Whether you take what is written in the bible as fact, myth, metaphor or story, listen for the meaning it has for you on this day.

He was praying in a certain place, and after he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, “Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.” ² So he said to them, “When you pray, say:

Abba may your name be revered as holy.

May your kingdom come.

³ Give us each day our daily bread.

⁴ And forgive us our sins,
for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us.
And do not bring us to the time of trial.”

⁵ And he said to them, “Suppose one of you has a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say to him, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves of bread, ⁶ for a friend of mine has arrived, and I have nothing to set before him.’ ⁷ And he answers from within, ‘Do not bother me; the door has already been locked, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.’ ⁸ I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything out of friendship, at least because of his persistence he will get up and give him whatever he needs.

⁹ “So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. ¹⁰ For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened.

Reader: May God bless our understanding of these sacred words.

All: Thanks be to God.

Reflection

When I was a little girl, and maybe I've mentioned this before, when I was scared in the dark I would recite the Prayer of Jesus over and over in my head, until I felt better or fell asleep. For me the 'traditional lords prayer' as it's known, is a source of comfort and peace. However, I am well aware that for some this version does not provide the same comfort. Many don't like the term Lord – it's hierarchical and along with Father – patriarchal. If people don't have a good relationship (or any relationship) with their dad, then referring to God in such terms is challenging. There are other loaded words in this prayer as well – Kingdom, Power, Glory. All of which can call to mind images of oppression and injustice because that is our human experience of these things throughout all of history.

And because I know this about this prayer, it's the reason I offer us different versions and translations on Sundays. I know that some of these versions don't sit well with everyone either. The language of some of them 'just doesn't work' for some.

I would like to believe and hope that if on a Sunday the Prayer of Jesus we use is not your cup of tea, you can recall in your head a version that is. You can use those words in place of the one's on screen or in the bulletin, because the reality is – regardless of language – the intention behind all of these versions is the same – to connect us with God and connect us with what truly matters in our lives.

The pray begins by calling on the holy one, God, Creator, Divine presence, that which is more than all of us. Jesus used the term Abba – which is more *dad* than *father* – it was shockingly causal and informal – a pretty big no no in the Jewish faith. God, the Holy one was (and is) beyond all human comprehension and outside the realm of the mundane world. God is so transcendent that the Jewish will not insult this deity with human name or label. Yahweh or YHWH or Adonai – words we see in some texts are placeholders for something unknowable and unspeakable.

So imagine how confounding it would have been to have Jesus address this unknowable transcendent heavenly entity as – hey dad.

And if dad doesn't work for you – mom, buddy, pal, friend, or if you grew up gen X – hey dude. Right? It's weird, but makes God so much more approachable, so much more present in the room. And maybe not as beyond all understanding as more formal language implies.

Yet the intention of Jesus was not to diminish God, the very next line tells us the name of God is holy. We are to treat the name of God with respect and honour.

Not because God is better than us, but because when we respect acquaintances, friends and family: one of the ways we do that is by how we address them. For example – my dad and my cousin are both named David. My Dad, doesn't like being called Dave – he prefers David, while my cousin uses Dave. Some Kathryns like Kathy, some Margarets like Maggie, some Christophers like Chris or Topher. My legal name is Andrea, I like to use Anne, though a few people call me Andrea and I like that too.

Names matter, they are key aspects of our identity. We show our respect to others by using their name and the way they like to be addressed. Transgender and non-binary people know this at a level deeper than most of us will ever understand. Imagine telling someone your name and them refusing to use it. And then calling you by a name that you do not identify with at all in any way. Just hold that in your mind a moment. What's your name? Say it in your head or out loud. That's who you are right?

You tell me your name is Bart. Well, I'm going to call you Marcia. Oh, your name is Kendra? I'm going to call you Matthew.

What Jesus does by using the name Abba for God is he gives us permission to speak to God in a way that is comfortable and comforting. So, use the language that is comfortable and comforting to you. Because this is a prayer about relationship.

And then knock on the door of prayer and say hi. The story that follows the prayer of Jesus is about a person in need of some nourishment late at night. (I say nourishment because bread can and is often a symbol of wisdom in the bible. So daily bread can mean both physical and spiritual nourishment)

This person visits a friend and asks for help. The friend, at first doesn't want to get up, but the person is persistent and with that persistence the friend gets up and provides for the person.

Its easy enough think we're the person seeking nourishment and if this is an allegory about God (spoiler alert: it is) then God is the friend. So then does this mean God would rather stay tucked into bed then get up when we're in need? And we need to be persistent and just keep on knocking until we wear God down, God gives up and is all – fine, here take this bread and go away?

No because, we know that Jesus always wants us to turn the stories around. What if we're the friend tucked into bed, cozy and warm and God is the one knocking? What if turn this story so far around that it is about God knocking on our door with the bread – with the nourishment, with the wisdom we for our daily needs and we're the ones reluctant to get up, open the door, step out and meet God?

This prayer is a way that we can do that. It's almost a blueprint of how we can be in relationship with God. I called our theme today Stepping Stones because as we consider Stepping Out, being Church beyond the walls; we need a path to follow, we need the solid foundation of rocks beneath our feet so that each step we take is firm and grounded. This prayer can be those stones, if we're ready to open the door when we hear the knock. May it be so.