

## REFLECTIONS

Sunday, July 24, 2016

Shepherdstown Presbyterian Church

### Barbara Hartman

Like preparing for Sunday Studio, working on this reflection has been an adventure. It has included receiving direction from Ethel and Randy on how to do a reflection, reading the lectionary scripture for this week, re-reading the verses several times, reflecting on what I'd read, waiting to see what spoke to me, and then zeroing in and doing a deep dive. I zeroed in on the Lord's Prayer in Luke chapter 11:1-4. The deep dive has been a lot of fun, it included practicing the prayer in my morning daily routine, googling the Lord's prayer to see what I could learn, looking at on line images of art work on the Lord's prayer, and listening to a YouTube video of the 1973 #4 pop hit rendition by sister Janet Mead.

A few interesting things about the Lord's Prayer:

First of all, I realized it wasn't written in English... imagine that! It was originally recorded in a form greek.

The first half of the prayer addresses God, and the second half addresses human needs and concerns.

On Easter Sunday 2007, about two billion Roman Catholic, Anglican, Protestant and Eastern Orthodox Christians from around the globe read, recited, or sang the prayer in hundreds of languages. Fuller Seminary professor, Clayton Schmit, stated that although theological differences and various modes of worship divided these Christians, "there was a sense of solidarity in knowing that Christians around the globe were praying together..., and that these words always unite us."

As you probably know, Two times in the Bible Jesus taught the disciples how to pray, the version in the sermon on the Mount from the book of Matthew and is the longer, more traditional prayer, the description in Luke is a shorter version.

### Luke 11:1-13

1 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 He said to them, "When you pray, say: Father, hallowed be your name. 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."

We've heard Randy preach on the Lord's prayer and have learned that it can be used as a template / framework / guide for our prayers. We have seen and recited different versions and interpretations including the beautiful poetic version on the front of today's bulletin.

In my reflection adventure, I realized that even though I had known the Lord's Prayer is a guide, I had never tired it. So for the past few weeks, in my daily morning prayers, I have recited each line, reflected on it, and then put it in my own words. I'm calling it the "Do it Yourself Lord's Prayer". It has been interesting to watch how each morning my interpretation has changed.

To conclude my reflection, I'll share with you my latest version of my Do It Yourself Lord's Prayer:

Our Father who art in heaven = Creative mystery who is within us and surrounds us all.

Hallowed be thy name = How awesome you are for your amazing love and creation. I feel reverent when I pause to think of you.

Thy Kingdom come = please help me to be constantly aware of your presence and infuse your love and teachings into each day.

Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven = help me to surrender to what is and have trust that you know what is best and are in control.

Give us this day our daily bread = give me today what I need, not only physically but also mentally, help me to make good decisions all day long so that when I get into bed to review the day, I will feel content that I'd lived my life the best I could,

And forgive us our debts = help me to realize when I have missed the mark (or sinned) and ask for forgiveness from you and from those I have wronged.

As we forgive our debtors = help me to focus on the facts, not exaggerate, when appropriate, constructively hold people accountable and also forgive them

And lead me not into temptation = please keep me out of trouble, this is a really important one for me

But deliver me from evil = keep me safe too, physically and mentally

For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory. = for you are love, and love is all there is and all there ever will be. Amen.

**Jeff Groff**

**Nan Merrill's Psalm 85**

O Beloved, how gracious You are to your people;  
You restore their souls time and time again.  
You forgive their iniquity when they wander far from You;  
You give them new Life.  
Yes, You bless them and raise up new hope;  
You awaken their hearts to love.

Restore us again, O Spirit of Truth;  
burn us with the refining Fire of Love!  
We cannot live separated from You;  
cast out the demons of fear, doubt, and illusion.  
Revive us again, we pray, that your people may rejoice in You!  
Have compassion on your people, O Holy One,  
and grant us your salvation.

Listen, O people, in the silent chapel of your heart;  
and the Beloved will speak of peace to you,  
to the hidden saints, to all who turn their hearts to Love.  
Surely new life is at hand for those who reverence Love;  
O, that harmony might dwell among the nations.

Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet;  
righteousness and peace will embrace one another.  
Wisdom will spring up from the ground  
and truth will look down from the sky.

Two weeks ago, both of my children were baptized in this church, and I am very proud of them and thankful to this congregation for welcoming them. In part, the happiness their baptism brings me reflects the spiritual restoration I've experienced in this church over the past several years.

Prior to discovering this congregation, I doubted I would find spiritually fulfilling Christian fellowship again. This isn't because it was something I felt I didn't need, didn't want, and didn't seek. In fact, when I was in college I decided to work as a counselor at a church camp in PA because I hoped full immersion (baptism) would help repair my frayed spirituality and restore the decaying relationship between me and my church friends, including my best friend. But, that summer ended with me feeling even more alienated and alone, and in a state of spiritual crisis that lingered for many years. I guess you could say my immersion at camp that summer was sort of a reverse baptism.

So, why has spiritually fulfilling fellowship been so elusive for me during my adult life? I suppose there have been many factors but a significant one has been cognitive dissonance. I've been repeatedly presented with overt and covert signals from peers and church leaders that walking with God required acceptance of his righteousness, and righteousness was being defined by ideas I found repugnant. Homosexuality is a sin. The Earth is young. Evolution is a myth. I didn't believe in such things. And I couldn't simply decide to unbelieve physical facts and evidence and my own spiritual truths even if these things led to alienation from friends and isolation from church.

The psalmist says restoration and new life will come when righteousness and peace embrace. Reflecting on my journey, this will never happen if we allow righteousness to be synonymous with being right. Because, being right about everything at all times is impossible. I'm not even sure it is possible to be completely right about anything any of the time. And, a righteousness founded on the need to be *in the right* can only lead to group think and conflict. Such righteousness can never embrace peace and it can't be God's righteousness.

God's righteousness is one of inclusion, not exclusion; of physical diversity and diversity of thought, not homogeneity and dogma. God's righteousness embraces curiosity, hard questioning, and the lifelong pursuit of truth, not submission to a static worldview. But most importantly, it is a righteousness defined by love and empathy. This kind of righteousness can embrace peace. And I believe it is this kind of righteousness that this church community is seeking out together. So I am glad to be a part of it and happy my children have the chance to be immersed in it as they grow.