

Second Sunday of Easter  
April 15, 2012

## **The Lord's Prayer – Cry for the Kingdom**

The late theologian Stanley Grenz expressed that prayer is a *cry for the kingdom*

- a longing for God's presence
- a longing for God's will to be the normal state of affairs in human life
- a longing for peace, for justice, for love, for wholeness, for no divisions, to be the mark of a re-created humanity, of re-created community in the world.

That is why we pray

- we are crying out for God's reign to be more than a wish
- but for it to be a realized reality!
- right here, right now!

### **But why do we struggle with prayer?**

Often when we pray – praying a long shopping list of requests – it seems it is a one way conversation.

Could it be, we are no longer adept at the art of praying

- knowing what praying is
- grasping why we pray

Praying is an art

- just as communicating clearly is an art.

The disciples asked Jesus, in Luke 11, “Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples.”

### **Why did they ask this question?**

Jesus' disciples, who were raised in a Jewish culture, surely knew how to pray

- their book of prayer was the Psalter,

There must have been something about Jesus' way of praying that amazed them

- something so different from what they were used to doing in worship that they asked: “Lord, teach us to pray.”

It is clear that Jesus' actions and speech amazed people

- he was so different from other religious leaders in the culture
- so clearly his praying must have been different as well.

In Mark 1 for example, people observing Jesus were often so amazed that all they could say was: “What is this? A new teaching – and with authority! He even gives orders to evil spirits and they obey him.”

In Mark 4, even his disciples, who lived with him, walked with him, ate with him, were left without words after Jesus calmed the storm: “They were terrified [by Jesus, not the storm] and asked each other, ‘Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!’”

And so now, observing Jesus praying – his disciples ask: “Lord, teach us to pray [as you pray].”

In some ways what Jesus taught them to pray – in terms of the words being used – reflects a prayer common in Aramaic usage – the Kaddish.

The Kaddish was prayed at the end of the synagogue worship service – something the disciples must have often done.

“The opening petitions of the Lord’s Prayer are startlingly similar to the Kaddish: ‘Magnified and hallowed be his great name in the world which he created according to his will; and may he make his kingship sovereign in your lifetime and in your days’ (Guelich, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 285).

The Kaddish has 18 benedictions that are similar to five of the seven petitions that appear in Matthew and also reflect “a similar two-part construction centering on the petition for bread [and] similar rhyme and rhythm patterns” (Guelich, 285).

But there are dissimilarities, which would be a deviation from the normal praying of the Kaddish – something the disciples must have caught when Jesus was praying.

**There was something deeply relational about the way Jesus prayed to God.**

**And here discover what the disciples must have discovered - praying the way Jesus prayed was deeply intimate – it was a family conversation**

In naming God as Father, Jesus was not advocating a patriarchal understanding of God, rather, **Jesus was expressing an intimate relationship with God**

Yet, God being referred to as *Father* was not unique to Jesus.

In the OT, about 15x’s the term *Father* is used to refer to God – however, in context it usually referred to God as the *Father of Israel* – a title – just as the nation Israel saw themselves as “the son” of God or God’s chosen people (cf. Guelich, 285).

In later Judaism, God was also referred to as *Father*, but usually as “our father,” or “my father,” or “your father” with the same kind of connotation – God being the *Father of Israel*.

But Jesus in praying would often address God, in the Aramaic – *Abba* (a term of endearment, the way children speak to their parents – imma/mama or abba/daddy).

And that is what made Jesus praying so radically different – he did not address God merely as the *Father of Israel*,

**He addressed God personally, relationally, intimately.**

The best conversations that I have with Lynne, or with my daughters, or even my parents – are not just conversations where we relate the events of the day, or needs in our lives

– but are conversations where we are open, relational, personal, with one another – bearing our souls, our lives with one another – those are the best conversations, those are the ones we remember.

**Jesus' praying was such a family moment, such a family conversation!**

And so, the disciples noticing that Jesus' praying was personal, relational, that his praying was a **family conversation**

– just like the conversation that might take place around the Thanksgiving table, or for a Jewish family, around the Seder table.

Asking to pray like Jesus prayed, was expressive of the disciples wanting to be in relationship with God, the way Jesus related to God.

The disciples wanted to pray in a way that was more than a *cry for the kingdom*,

They wanted to pray that was a *cry for God*, a cry for God who engages each one of us, engages all humanity, in deeply personal ways

For prayer to be not merely words we offer up to God, **but for prayer to be an intimate, family-oriented conversation with God,**

This is the way the disciples wanted to pray – just like Jesus

– and so, Jesus invites them into relationship with God, by praying the Lord's Prayer in a deeply relational manner.

That is how we are to pray The Lord's Prayer

– in a deep personal way

Praying in this manner is not praying for something outside of ourselves,

It is a way of praying that grasps hold of us and deeply engages us

I am still learning to pray this way.

It involves me sitting down with God so that I can have such an intimate conversation with God.

It involves me being myself before God, keeping nothing hidden from God.

It involves me being open to receive whatever the Spirit may bring to my consciousness.

It involves me in a conversation with God.

**In our asking Jesus to teach us to pray, we are not merely asking for the "right words,"**

**We are asking Jesus to lead us into the right relationship with God, for Jesus to invite us into his family relationship with God.**

And in being invited into God's presence, sitting with God at the kitchen table:

We pray for God's will and presence to be manifest on earth as it is in heaven – as only a daughter or son could ask,

We pray for our lives to trust God to supply all of our needs – day to day,

We pray for God to display God's reconciling and healing work through us,

We pray for God to be with us and walk with us in dark times, when we might be tempted to stray from this family relationship.

We pray personally, because God invites us to be a daughter or son of God – through Christ Jesus.

As Alan and Eleanor Kreider have expressed, we pray this prayer with Jesus:

“Jesus’ prayer helps us yearn for peace, justice and joy – hallmarks of God’s kingdom. We never need to feel hypocritical or apologetic about praying such a big prayer. We are praying God’s vision into reality. We are singing our own dreams for creation to be healed, relationships restored, sins forgiven, crops harvested, enemies reconciled, houses built, tears dried and banquets laid.

Where else in modern life do we find a glimpse into heaven? Where else do people sing and dream for justice, peace and joy – right here on our own earth? Listen to this impassioned description of prayer for God’s kingdom to come, [expressed by Eleanor]:

We sing with God’s own tears on our faces, because we, along with our God, yearn for a ‘heavenly’ earth which doesn’t yet exist. In worship we feed our imaginations for peace. In prayer we keep shocked silence or we shout in protest at the human systems which block reconciliation. We plead, we weep to God on behalf of the outcast and immigrant. In worship we determine to empty our pockets of money and reschedule our diaries so we can support and stand with the weak and the prisoner. In worship we lay plans to plant trees, to protect sources of clean water, to make our urban deserts bloom.

. . . (T)he Lord’s Prayer leads us precisely into that kind of impassioned engagement of emotion, heart and dreams – [as we converse with God]. It propels us into the kind of determination of the will and decisive action that bring into being ‘signs of the kingdom’ (Kreider, *Becoming a Peace Church*).

And so, in watching Jesus praying,

The disciples wanted to share in the such a deep personal conversation with God – for God’s reality to be their reality!

May we hunger pray the Lord’s Prayer in the same manner  
– hungering after such intimacy with God

May we in noticing the way Jesus prays – also be prompted to ask, “Lord, teach us to pray!”  
“Lord, invite us into relationship with God, and to know God just as you do!”